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**Shame and Virtue in Plato and Aristotle**

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In Memoriam

Charles Fulenwider Cecil  
1917–2010

and

Alice Harkless Cecil  
1920–2009



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# Shame and Virtue in Plato and Aristotle

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In this dissertation, I examine Plato and Aristotle's reasons for denying that *aidôs*, or a sense of shame, is a virtue. The bulk of my study is devoted to the interpretation of two key texts: Plato's *Charmides* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Although both philosophers see an important role for shame in moral education, they share the view that a fully virtuous person's actions are guided not by *aidôs*, but by practical wisdom. In the opening chapter, I provide an overview of their conception of shame as an essentially social emotion that expresses our concern for the opinions of others. I present and give a critique of a recent theory of shame that challenges this conception. The starting point of the second chapter is a brief passage in the *Charmides* where Socrates examines Charmides' claim that *aidôs* is the same as *sôphrosunê* ("temperance" or "moderation"). Socrates refutes the definition by citing a single verse from Homer's *Odyssey*: "*aidôs* is no good in a needy man." In order to make sense of his dubious appeal to poetic authority, I provide a close reading of Socrates' opening narration, in which he describes his initial encounter with the beautiful young Charmides. I show that the ambivalence about *aidôs* expressed in the quotation is justified through Socrates' portrait of Charmides. Though

admirable at this early stage of his life, Charmides' *aidôs* is the very thing that prevents him from challenging Socrates' argument and gaining a deeper understanding of virtue. In the third chapter, I turn to the discussion of shame in Book 4 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle explicitly argues that *aidôs* is not a virtue. The two arguments of *NE* 4.9 have puzzled commentators. My aim is to reconstruct Aristotle's view of *aidôs* and show that he does in fact have good grounds for excluding it from his list of virtues.

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## Introduction

Few concepts can claim a greater importance to ancient Greek morality than *aidôs*, or a sense of honor and shame. In Hesiod's myth of the races, the collapse of human society is marked by the flight of the goddesses *Aidôs* and *Nemesis* ("moral indignation") from the earth to Olympus.<sup>1</sup> At the conclusion of the *Iliad*, Achilles regains his humanity when he is moved, by pity for Priam and by *aidôs* before the gods, to release Hector's body. And in the collection of didactic verses ascribed to the sixth-century poet Theognis, we find the lines: "There is no better treasure that you can lay in store for your children than *aidôs*, which attends good men."<sup>2</sup>

It is within this context that Plato and Aristotle conduct their philosophical investigations into the nature of the virtues, or the qualities that are essential to living a good human life. But *aidôs* conspicuously fails to make the cut. It is absent from the list of virtues recognized in Plato's *Republic*—wisdom, courage, justice, and *sôphrosunê* ("temperance" or "moderation"). Aristotle adds several other virtues into the mix, but he considers the case of *aidôs* only to reject it. On what grounds do Plato and Aristotle deny that a sense of shame is a virtue? That is the principal question which this dissertation

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<sup>1</sup> *Works and Days*, 197–200.

<sup>2</sup> Theognis, 409–10.

aims to address. I shall focus on two key texts: Plato's *Charmides*, and Aristotle's brief discussion of *aidôs* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

The topic has received scant attention in the vast secondary literature on Plato and Aristotle.<sup>3</sup> One reason for this neglect may be that the answer has seemed obvious. If a person acts from a sense of shame, or for the sake of honor, he is concerned with the way *others* regard him. He is concerned with the *appearance* of his actions, not their intrinsic worth. But that is not the right sort of motivation for a morally admirable person to have. Plato and Aristotle would therefore seem justified in not giving shame much consideration in their accounts of virtue.

In his seminal work, *Shame and Necessity*, however, Bernard Williams showed that the above view of the psychology of shame and honor is untenable.<sup>4</sup> The heroes of Greek poetry characteristically strive to earn the esteem not just of any audience, but of one whose values and judgments they respect and endorse. Their "shame culture" depends on a *shared* system of norms and expectations, which individuals internalize and make their own. In an important sense, according to Williams, a person who is motivated by shame is concerned for how he appears in his *own* eyes. It is therefore not so obvious what distinguishes the motivations of the Homeric heroes from those of a virtuous person, as conceived by Plato and Aristotle.

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<sup>3</sup> Studies of Plato's view of shame have focused almost exclusively on the *Gorgias*. See Race 1979; Kahn 1983; McKim 1988; Moss 2005; and Tarnopolsky 2010. Woodruff (2000) brings out the complexities in the Platonic Socrates' attitude towards shame. On Aristotle's treatment of shame, see the discussions in Cairns 1993 and Konstan 2006. Burnyeat (1980) and Curzer (2002) focus on the role of shame in moral education.

<sup>4</sup> Williams 1993. Cairns (1993) independently arrives at a similar view. See also Gill 1996.



Although Williams thinks that the audience of shame reflects the agent's own ideals, he insists that shame cannot operate wholly independently of social influence. A person's sense of shame is responsive to "real social expectations" and depends on a community with the power to praise and condemn.<sup>5</sup> According to Williams, the early Greek poets present a more realistic picture of moral motivation than we find in the philosophical tradition, with its emphasis on reason, universal principles, and transcendent norms.<sup>6</sup> He denies the existence of a kind of practical wisdom that has access to objective moral truths. A sense of shame that integrates the standards we have for ourselves with the expectations of our community is ultimately the best we can do.

If Williams is right that we should pay attention to how the poets represent shame, then we should also examine the responses of the philosophers who are closest to them. Plato and Aristotle, as we shall see, share Williams' basic analysis of the psychology of shame, but would reject his conclusion about its ethical status. Their attitude towards shame is deeply ambivalent, and expresses doubts about shame that are already present in the poetic tradition. In their view, a sense of shame plays an important role in moral education, because it makes us responsive to norms that are independent of our own needs and inclinations. But it can also distort our perception of value, and is therefore ultimately unreliable as a guide to action, and potentially destructive. The fully virtuous

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<sup>5</sup> Williams 1993, 84.

<sup>6</sup> One could argue that Williams pays insufficient attention to the differences within the broadly rationalist tradition of moral philosophy, especially between Platonic-Aristotelian and Kantian ethics.

agent, as Plato and Aristotle conceive him, possesses a practical wisdom that looks beyond considerations of honor and shame.

Although the central aim of this study is exegetical, the texts on which I focus provide valuable material for reflection on the nature and ethical significance of shame. In my opening chapter (“The Nature and Value of Shame: Ancient and Modern Perspectives”), I situate Plato and Aristotle’s views within the context both of the representation of shame in Greek poetry and of modern accounts of the emotion. Towards the end of the chapter I discuss a recent book in which it is argued that shame is not a social emotion at all.<sup>7</sup> If the authors are right, then the concerns of Plato and Aristotle about the limitations of shame would seem to be misplaced. After presenting its main argument I raise some problems for the new account and offer reasons why the social conception of shame is to be favored.

The subsequent chapters are devoted to the interpretation of two main texts, one Platonic and one Aristotelian, that directly address the question of whether a sense of shame is a virtue. The arguments presented by both authors are highly problematic, but careful scrutiny reveals their substance. The starting point of the second chapter (“*Aidôs* in Plato’s *Charmides*”) is a brief passage in Plato’s *Charmides* where Socrates examines Charmides’ claim that *aidôs* is the same as *sôphrosunê* (“temperance” or “moderation”). Socrates refutes the definition by citing a single verse from Homer’s *Odyssey*: “*aidôs* is no good in a needy man.” In order to make sense of this dubious appeal to poetic authority, I provide a close reading of the dialogue’s opening narration, in which Socrates

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<sup>7</sup> Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni 2012.

describes his initial encounter with the beautiful young Charmides. I show that the ambivalence about *aidôs* expressed in the Homer quotation is justified through Socrates' portrait of Charmides, who is characterized above all by his sense of shame. Though admirable at this early stage of his life, Charmides' *aidôs* is the very thing that prevents him from challenging Socrates' argument and gaining a deeper understanding of virtue. Towards the end of the chapter I explore the intertextual relationship between the *Charmides* and the story of Telemachus' journey to manhood in the *Odyssey*. I show how Plato adapts and transforms the poetic tradition's ambivalence towards shame for his own philosophical end.

In the third chapter ("Shame and Virtue in Aristotle"), I turn to Aristotle's discussion of shame in Book 4 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where it is explicitly argued that *aidôs* is not a virtue. The two main arguments of *NE* 4.9 have puzzled commentators (e.g. Taylor 2006, Irwin 1999): both passages seem to conflict with things that Aristotle says elsewhere in the treatise, and neither is fully persuasive in its own right. My primary aim in the chapter is to reconstruct Aristotle's view of *aidôs* and argue that he does in fact have good grounds for excluding it from his list of virtues. A key text for my purposes is the discussion of "civic" courage in *NE* 3.8, which I analyze in the light of two passages from the *Iliad*. On my reading, Aristotle makes a clear distinction between the desire to win honor and avoid shame, and what motivates the virtuous person to act. Although *aidôs* plays an important role in moral education, it is eclipsed by practical wisdom (*phronêsis*) in the fully virtuous agent.

In a coda, I consider a further objection to Aristotle's position raised by Alexander of Aphrodisias in his *Ethical Problems*. Alexander claims that since honor is held to be the greatest of external goods, then by his own lights Aristotle should see a role for *aidôs* in the virtuous person's psychology. I suggest how his theory can be modified to meet this objection, while preserving the claim that *aidôs* is not itself a virtue. The dissertation concludes with a brief epilogue, in which I offer further reflections on the previous chapters, and suggest some directions for future research on the role of shame and honor in ancient Greek virtue ethics.

## Chapter One

### The Nature and Value of Shame: Ancient and Modern Perspectives

#### 1. Introduction

The aim of this opening chapter is to provide some of the necessary contextual and theoretical background for the two studies that follow. After a sketch of the ethical role of shame in early Greek literature, with a focus on Bernard Williams' analysis in *Shame and Necessity*, I provide an overview of Plato and Aristotle's accounts of the psychology of shame. I then turn to the contemporary debate about the nature and value of shame, and consider a recent theory that challenges the broad conception of the emotion shared by Plato and Aristotle.<sup>1</sup> To conclude the chapter I shall argue that this new account is unpersuasive, and that the view of the ancient philosophers remains in good standing.

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<sup>1</sup> Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni 2012.

## 2. Shame in ancient Greek ethics: A sketch

In the ancient Greek language there are two words that are frequently rendered “shame”: *aidôs* and *aischunê*.<sup>2</sup> The term *aidôs* is the more archaic of the two, and in Homer it denotes a prospective, often inhibitory emotion. Roughly put, it is the emotion that prevents a person from acting in ways that will diminish his honor (*timê*) in his own and others’ eyes.<sup>3</sup> But *aidôs* can also be expressed in positive displays of respect for the honor of others.<sup>4</sup> Hence the verb *aideomai* plus a personal object is sometimes better translated “I respect” as opposed to “I feel shame before”. The word *aidôs* may refer to an occurrent feeling of shame or respect, as well as to an emotional disposition or character trait. Another moral emotion that is often found paired with *aidôs* is *nemesis* (“moral indignation”), the reaction one has when a person fails to show a proper sense of shame or respect.<sup>5</sup>

The verb *aischunomai*, derived from the noun *aischos* (“shame”, “disgrace”; cf. the adjective *aischros*: “shameful”, “disreputable”<sup>6</sup>), is a later formation and occurs only

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<sup>2</sup> For a helpful overview of the history of the two concepts, see Konstan 2006, 93–98.

<sup>3</sup> Cairns (1993, 2) offers an initial characterization of *aidôs* as “an inhibitory emotion based on sensitivity to and protectiveness of one’s self-image”.

<sup>4</sup> See Lloyd-Jones 1990, 256: “Αἰδώς is [...] the feeling which leads one to resent an offence against one’s own τιμή or to avoid an action of one’s own which might do it harm. But it is also the feeling which leads one to respect a god, a parent, a stranger, or a suppliant, so that it is linked not only with honour but with justice.”

<sup>5</sup> See Cairns 1993, 51–54; Williams 1993, 80; Redfield 1994, 115–18. A person can also feel *nemesis* towards himself; see Cairns 1993, 84–85.

<sup>6</sup> On the use of *aischros* in fourth-century texts, see Dover 1974, 69–73.

three times in Homer's *Odyssey*, where it appears to be synonymous with *aideomai*.<sup>7</sup> In later Greek, the noun *aischunê* becomes the common word for shame, and often denotes a *retrospective* feeling of disgrace.<sup>8</sup> The verb *aischunomai* takes on both prospective and retrospective uses, and by the fourth century *aideomai* is virtually obsolete.<sup>9</sup> Plato and Aristotle, as we shall see, sometimes treat *aidôs* and *aischunê* as synonymous, although the more poetic term *aidôs* is apt to be used for the praiseworthy feeling (or disposition) that prevents one from acting in a dishonorable way.

The ancient Greeks recognized shame as fundamental to morality, both within the *polis* and on the battlefield.<sup>10</sup> In archaic and classical Greek poetry, Douglas Cairns writes, *aidôs* is “the social virtue *par excellence* and an ally, if not an element, of [heroic] *aretê*”.<sup>11</sup> At times, however, modern scholars have taken the importance of shame and honor in ancient Greek society to be a sign of a primitive moral consciousness, since the motivation to act virtuously depends on fear of external sanctions and the desire to be exalted in others' eyes.<sup>12</sup> In contrast to the “shame culture” depicted by the early poets,

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<sup>7</sup> See Cairns 1993, 138–39. He suggests that *aideomai* is also derived from *aischos*, but that is far from certain.

<sup>8</sup> It can also refer to the shame or disgrace that attaches to someone as a result of some shameful trait or action.

<sup>9</sup> For *aischunomai* as “I respect”, see Cairns 1993, 372, n. 84 (with references).

<sup>10</sup> See Protagoras' myth in the *Protagoras* and Phaedrus' speech in the *Symposium*, which reflect traditional views of the value of shame.

<sup>11</sup> Cairns 1993, 356.

<sup>12</sup> See Dodds 1951 and Adkins 1960.

the “guilt culture” of the modern Western world emphasizes the intrinsic value of a person’s character and actions over his public reputation.<sup>13</sup>

In the fourth chapter of *Shame and Necessity* (“Shame and Autonomy”), Bernard Williams rejects this “progressivist” picture, which he associates with a broadly Kantian and Christian ethical outlook, in favor of a more nuanced understanding of early Greek morality. In Williams’ view, modern critics have not only misread the motivations of the Homeric heroes; they have failed to grasp the psychological complexity of shame itself. His goal in the chapter is to defend shame against “the familiar criticism that an ethical life shaped by it is unacceptably heteronomous, crudely dependent on public opinion.”<sup>14</sup> Williams argues that this criticism derives its force from a failure to appreciate that shame is a response to internalized norms and expectations. He takes the basic experience of shame to be the awareness of being looked at negatively by an audience.<sup>15</sup> In his view, the progressivist critique involves two mistaken assumptions about the role of the audience or “other” in shame. The first mistake is to suppose that the motivational force of shame depends on the actual presence of an audience, or at least the threat of being exposed and condemned in the eyes of one’s community (81). Although, for Williams, a sense of being seen is essential to the phenomenology of shame, the prospect of public disgrace is by no means required for shame to be effective. He writes: “Even if shame and its motivations always involve in some way or other an idea of the gaze of another, it

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<sup>13</sup> For a classic discussion of the distinction between “shame” and “guilt” cultures, with a focus on Japanese society, see Benedict 1974 [1946], 222 ff.

<sup>14</sup> Williams 1993, 97. On Kant’s distinction between autonomy and heteronomy, which differs in important respects from that found in the shame literature, see Allison 1990, 94–106.

<sup>15</sup> Williams 1993, 78. See also Taylor 1985; Darwall 2006, 71–72.



is important that for many of its operations the imagined gaze of an imagined other will do” (82). This shows one sense in which the motivations of shame are internalized: shame can often guide a person’s actions in the absence of any threat of exposure.

In their recent book, Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni (2012, 137–39) deny that the presence of an audience (real or imagined) is necessary for a subject to feel shame, citing recent empirical studies.<sup>16</sup> Still, even if thoughts about an audience are not *required* for shame, one could argue (following Williams) that the experience of being seen is involved in paradigm scenarios of the emotion, which ought to be the starting points when constructing a theory. Of course, it is hard to see how circularity can be avoided here, since it is doubtful that there is a theory-neutral way to decide *which* scenarios ought to be treated as “central” or “basic” to the concept of shame.<sup>17</sup>

The second mistaken assumption of the progressivist view, according to Williams, concerns the identity of the audience, real or imagined, and the relationship between its judgments and the perspective of the subject. One might suppose that even if the gaze of an imagined other is sufficient to trigger shame, this does not make the agent’s motivations any less heteronomous. It might only show that his psyche has been colonized by the expectations of his community. He is still acting in response to the evaluations of someone else (perhaps the imagined gaze of his father, or his neighbors), rather than to the ethically relevant features of the situation, or out of his autonomous

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<sup>16</sup> Tangney et al. 1996; Smith et al. 2002. They claim these studies support their view that there is no “constitutive connection” between shame and the loss of reputation (137). (I discuss their account of shame further in §4 below.)

<sup>17</sup> This issue deserves a more extensive discussion than it is possible to provide here.

respect for the moral law. He therefore lacks the type of agency one should consider truly worthy of praise. The morality of the ancient Greeks would still be open to the charge that it is “immaturely heteronomous, in the sense that it [...] pins the individual’s sense of what should be done merely on to expectations of what others will think of him or her” (81).

According to Williams, such a criticism relies on a further mistake about the function of the audience. The internalized other need not represent the evaluative perspective of a specific individual or group. “The other may be identified in ethical terms. He [...] is conceived as one whose reactions I would respect; equally, he is conceived as someone who would respect those same reactions if they were appropriately directed to him” (84). In other words, the perspective of the other who plays a central role in the psychology of shame is shaped by the subject’s own values and expectations, both for himself and for others. This is the further sense in which the motivations of shame are internalized, on Williams’ view, and it shows why shame is not “crudely heteronomous” as its critics have thought. When a person is motivated by shame, this reflects not just his fear of what others might say, but his own ethical outlook and conception of who he ought to be. This is equally true of shame before a real audience. A person will not be afraid of losing his standing in the eyes of any public, but one whose values he shares and with whom he identifies. In either case—whether before a real or an imagined audience—the basic psychological mechanism is the same.

As Williams shows, this more subtle analysis of shame (as a response to an internalized audience who shares the subject’s evaluative perspective) is needed to make

sense of the motivations of the Homeric heroes. Consider Hector's monologue in Book 22 of the *Iliad*, when he makes the fateful decision to face Achilles in battle. His parents implore him to retreat through the gates of Troy, but his sense of shame precludes this possibility.

“Ah me! If I go now inside the wall and the gateway,  
Polydamas will be first to put a reproach upon me,  
since he tried to make me lead the Trojans inside the city  
on that accursed night when brilliant Achilles rose up,  
and I would not obey him, but that would have been far better.  
Now, since by my own recklessness I have ruined my people,  
I feel *aidôs* before [αἰδέομαι] the Trojans and the Trojan women with trailing  
robes, that someone who is less of a man than I will say of me:  
‘Hector believed in his own strength and ruined his people.’  
Thus they will speak; and as for me, it would be much better  
at that time, to go against Achilles, and slay him, and come back,  
or else be killed by him in glory in front of the city.”<sup>18</sup>

Having refused his brother's sound advice, and having brought his city to the brink of ruin, Hector feels shame at the thought of seeking refuge within its walls. For him there are now only two options: to slay Achilles or to die a noble death. Hector expresses his

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<sup>18</sup> *Il.* 9–110. Trans. Lattimore (I have altered the names to their more common spellings). I return to this passage in my discussion of Aristotle in Chapter 3.

motive in terms of the prospect of facing the Trojans and hearing their reproaches. But his *aidôs* depends on his own recognition that he has failed in his role as protector of Troy (“since by my own recklessness [ἄτασθαλίησιν ἐμῇσιν] I have ruined my people”). As Williams remarks: “Hector was indeed afraid that someone inferior to him would be able to criticise him, but that was because he thought the criticism would be true, and the fact that such a person could make it would only make things worse. The mere fact that such a person had something hostile to say would not in itself necessarily concern him.”<sup>19</sup> Hector has dishonored himself through his folly, and sees no other way to restore his honor—both in his own eyes and in the eyes of his community—than to risk his life in battle with Achilles.<sup>20</sup>

Hector’s *aidôs* is not only a response to his former recklessness. His sense of honor also compels him to stand and face Achilles rather than retreat. The monologue echoes an earlier passage in Book 6, where Hector replies to Andromache’s pleas for him to lead the Trojans from within the safety of the citadel, out of pity for herself and his son:

Then tall Hector of the shining helm answered her: “All these  
things are in my mind also, lady; yet I would feel deep shame [αἰδέομαι]  
before the Trojans, and the Trojan women with trailing garments,

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<sup>19</sup> Williams 1993, 82. See also Cairns 2011, 38: “[Hector’s] projection of the fantasy audience is an aspect of the way that he now views his own conduct – he knows he has failed, by his own standards.”

<sup>20</sup> For further discussion of Hector’s monologue, see Cairns 1993, 81–82; Redfield 1994, 157–59); and especially Gill 1996, 81–93. See also the recent commentary by De Jong (2012, 83–92).

if like a coward I were to shrink aside from the fighting;  
and the spirit will not let me, since I have learned to be valiant  
and to fight always among the foremost ranks of the Trojans,  
winning for my own self great glory, and for my father.” (440–41)

Here, too, Hector imagines the gaze of an audience, but it is an audience that shares the expectations he has for himself. He is afraid not merely of being *thought* a coward, but of *being* a coward, since he has “learned” (μάθων) to put his life on the line for the sake of glory, and his spirit (θυμός) will not let him do otherwise.<sup>21</sup> His internalized standard of bravery explains why, in Book 22, he believes that he can recover his honor through fighting Achilles no matter the outcome.

The traditional criticism of Homeric morality fails because it assumes that an agent’s sense of shame and honor is wholly determined by the opinions of his community. But the picture we find in the poets is far more complex. Perhaps one could say that Hector’s *aidôs* rather determines what audience is capable of making him feel shame. According to Williams, however, that would also be misleading. Although the identity of the other is shaped by the agent’s self-conception, the audience does not simply mirror his own perspective. Here is how Williams makes the point:

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<sup>21</sup> See Cairns 2011, 36: “Hector is explicitly concerned with what people will say of his conduct, but the imagined judgement of others wholly coincides with his own choice – his spirit will not let him contemplate any other course; he has learned to be brave. Bravery, winning glory for himself and his father, has become an end in itself, part of what it is to be Hector.” See also Cairns 1993, 80–81.

But if the other is identified in ethical terms, is he any longer playing any real role in these mental processes? Has he any independent part in my psychology if he is constructed out of my own local materials? If he is imagined to react simply in terms of what I think is the right thing to do, surely he must cancel out: he is not an *other* at all.

It is a mistake to take that reductive step and to suppose that there are only two options: that the other in ethical thought must be an identifiable individual or a representative of the neighbours, on the one hand, or else be nothing at all except an echo chamber for my solitary moral voice. Those alternatives leave out much of the substance of actual ethical life. The internalised other is indeed abstracted and generalised and idealised, but he is potentially somebody rather than nobody, and somebody other than me. He can provide the focus of real social expectations, of how I shall live if I act in one way rather than another, of how my actions and reactions will alter my relations to the world about me.<sup>22</sup>

Williams' line of thought becomes somewhat obscure, but there appear to be two main ideas. First, it is essential to the phenomenology of shame that the subject experiences himself as being seen from another point of view. Although Hector regards it as shameful for him to retreat inside the walls of Troy, he is not reacting merely to his *own* judgment. His *aidôs* depends on the thought that others should find it shameful too. The perspective of the internalized other transcends that of any particular individual or social group,

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<sup>22</sup> Williams 1993, 84.

including the agent's own. It is experienced as having *objectivity*. Second, the effectiveness of shame requires the existence of a community whose opinions really do matter to the subject. The gaze of the internalized other, Williams says, “embodies intimations of a genuine social reality—in particular, of how it will be for one's life with others if one acts in one way rather than another” (102). The standards to which the sense of shame responds derive from an actual community, and our commitment to those standards depends on the existence of others whose respect we will lose if we fail to live up to them.<sup>23</sup>

According to Williams, then, the essentially social nature of shame entails a degree of heteronomy, though “at a much deeper level” than has often been thought.<sup>24</sup> But in his view this is to the credit of a morality based in shame. Through shame we remain attuned to the demands of those with whom we share our lives.<sup>25</sup> An ethical outlook that aspires to grasp moral truths that are independent of all social points of view may blind us to the claims of those around us, and may in any case turn out to be an illusion.

Later in this chapter we shall consider an alternative account of shame, which argues that it is not a social emotion at all, and therefore never heteronomous. But first I want to give an overview of how Plato and Aristotle understand the psychology of shame.

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<sup>23</sup> See Cairns 2011, 32: “Achilles’ view of himself is most certainly not dependent on the view that others have of him; but he does need others to endorse the view that he takes of himself, and this is what he attempts to coerce the Achaeans to do. In this situation, both the individual and the group are powerful, and there is no question either of an autonomy that excludes all notion of others’ approval or a heteronomy that wholly determines the individual’s view of himself.”

<sup>24</sup> Williams 1993, 98.

<sup>25</sup> See also Calhoun 2004.

Like Williams, they conceive of shame in social terms, as a concern for one's standing in the eyes of a community with which one identifies. This discussion will provide us with the necessary materials for making sense of their claim that a sense of shame is not a virtue, which I turn to in the subsequent chapters.

### 3. Plato and Aristotle on the nature of shame

The earliest surviving theoretical definition of shame appears in a passage from Plato's *Euthyphro*, where Socrates illustrates the genus-species distinction by exploiting a verse from the post-Homeric *Cypria*.

Socrates: You see, what I'm saying is just the opposite of what the poet said, who wrote:

“With Zeus the maker, who caused all these things to come about,  
You will not quarrel, since where there's dread [δέος] there's *aidôs* too.”

I disagree with this poet. Shall I tell you where?

Euthyphro: Of course.

Socrates: It doesn't seem to me that “where there's dread there's *aidôs* too.” For many people seem to me to dread disease and poverty and many other things of



that sort, but though they dread them, they feel no *aidôs* [αἰδεῖσθαι] at what they dread. Or don't you agree?

Euthyphro: Of course.

Socrates: But where there's *aidôs*, there is also dread. For if anyone feels *aidôs* at a certain action [αἰδούμενός τι πράγμα]—if he's ashamed of it [καὶ αἰσχυνόμενος]—doesn't he fear, doesn't he dread, a reputation for baseness [δόξαν πονηρίας] at the same time?

Euthyphro: He certainly does dread it.

Socrates: Then it isn't right to say that “where there's dread, there's *aidôs* too.”

But where there's *aidôs* there's also dread, even though *aidôs* isn't found everywhere there's dread. You see, dread is broader than *aidôs*, I think. For *aidôs* is a part of dread, just as odd is of number.<sup>26</sup> (12a7–c6)

Socrates defines *aidôs*, which he appears to treat as identical with *aischunê*, as a species of fear or dread (φόβος or δέος).<sup>27</sup> When a person is ashamed, he fears “a reputation for baseness” (δόξαν πονηρίας) at the same time (ἄμα); but it is not true that fear always implies shame.<sup>28</sup> If we take the generic object of fear to be what is bad or harmful, then

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<sup>26</sup> Trans. Reeve, with revisions.

<sup>27</sup> The example is not chosen at random. See 15d4–8.

<sup>28</sup> Although the context of the quotation is lost, it seems likely that *aidôs* had the sense of “respect” rather than “shame” (perhaps the thought was “fear commands respect”). Cairns (1993, 372, n. 83) notes Socrates' shift from a personal object (Zeus) to a non-personal object (“a certain action”). He says Socrates is “clearly equivocating” on the two senses of *aidôs*. (It is odd that Socrates suggests that sickness and poverty cannot be objects of shame. This might make more sense if αἰδεῖσθαι at 12b6 has the sense of “respect”.) On the association of *aidôs* and *deos/phobos*, see Cairns 1993, 372 ff. (with reference to *Rep.* 465a–b; *Ep.* 7.337a).

shame can be understood as the fear of a particular sort of bad thing: a reputation for baseness.

The *Euthyphro*'s account of shame is echoed in the *Laws*. In the Book 1 discussion of the educational benefit of drinking parties, the Athenian distinguishes between two roughly opposite kinds of fears (φόβων). One is the kind that we experience when we expect bad things (τὰ κακά) to happen. On the other hand, he says, “we often fear for our reputation [δόξαν], when we imagine we are going to get a bad name for doing or saying something disgraceful [ἡγούμενοι δοξάζεσθαι κακοί, πράττοντες ἢ λέγοντές τι τῶν μὴ καλῶν]” (646e10–11).<sup>29</sup> This second kind of fear is commonly called “shame” (αἰσχύνην). In contrast to the first, it opposes pains and other objects of fear, “as well as our keenest and most frequent pleasures” (647a4–6).<sup>30</sup> The legislator (of the interlocutors' new city), and anyone of the slightest worth, holds this fear in the highest esteem, honoring it with the name of *aidôs*. He calls the boldness (θάρρος) that is the opposite of this quality “shamelessness” (ἀναίδειαν), “and regards it as the greatest evil anyone could suffer, whether in his private or his public life” (647a10–11). The Athenian goes on to say that there are two main causes of victory in war: boldness in the face of one's enemies, and fear of evil disgrace in the eyes of one's comrades (φίλων δὲ φόβος αἰσχύνης περὶ κακῆς) (647b6–7).<sup>31</sup> Citizens must be trained to become as fearless as

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<sup>29</sup> Trans. Saunders.

<sup>30</sup> In other words, it resists the influence of the first kind of fear, for example of death in battle, and also resists the allure of intemperate pleasures.

<sup>31</sup> I take it that *aischunê* at 647b7 denotes the condition of disgrace that attaches to one as a result of acting shamefully, rather than the emotion of shame.

possible with respect to bodily harms, but utterly fearful “of ever [ἐκάστοτε] daring to say, endure, or do anything shameful” (649d1–2).<sup>32</sup>

So far it might look as though Plato conceives of shame as an emotion that responds to external sanctions alone. It is the fear of a bad *reputation*, of disgrace in the eyes of one’s community. Does Plato’s theory recognize the more “personal” or “internalized” type of shame discussed by modern theorists, when a subject feels shame in his *own* eyes? Or is shame, in his view, always a reaction to the threat of exposure to an audience and the loss of others’ respect?

The *Laws* itself suggests that in a well-governed *polis*, the citizens will be habituated to feel shame at certain actions whether or not anyone observes them.<sup>33</sup> But the clearest evidence for an internalized sense of shame comes from the “tripartite” theory of the human soul developed in the *Republic* and other dialogues. Plato locates *aidôs* in the spirited part of the soul, which mediates between reason and the desires of appetite.<sup>34</sup> As Myles Burnyeat and others have shown, the emotions grouped together under the heading of “spirit” (θυμός) reflect the fact that we are social animals, and our need for recognition from others.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, the spirited part can be responsive

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<sup>32</sup> See *Laws* 699c on the contribution of the second kind of fear to the Athenians’ victory at Marathon.

<sup>33</sup> Note ἐκάστοτε at 649c–d, which I assume does not refer only to occasions when an audience is present. Cairns (1993, 377–78) notes several other relevant passages.

<sup>34</sup> See Cairns 1993, 383. The location of *aidôs/aischunê* in the spirited part of the soul is most clearly seen from the description of the noble horse in the Palinode of the *Phaedrus*.

<sup>35</sup> Burnyeat 2006, 8–12. Other helpful accounts of the spirited part of the soul include Cooper 1984; Hobbs 2000, 30–37; Brennan 2012.

to internalized standards of the noble and the shameful, which are acquired through habituation.

In *Republic* 4, Socrates introduces the spirited part through an example of shame that does not appear to be directly a response to public opinion. After Glaucon suggests that it may be in virtue of the appetitive part that we call a person's behaviour spirited, Socrates replies with the famous story of Leontius.

“As against that,” I said, “there’s a story I once heard which I think can guide us here. Leontius, the son of Aglaeon, was on his way up to town from the Piraeus. As he was walking below the north wall, on the outside, he saw the public executioner with some dead bodies lying beside him. He wanted to look, but at the same time he felt disgust and held himself back [ἄμα μὲν ἰδεῖν ἐπιθυμοῖ, ἄμα δὲ αὖ δυσχεραῖνοι καὶ ἀποτρέποι ἑαυτόν]. For a time he struggled, and covered his eyes. Then appetite got the better of him. He rushed over to where the bodies were, and forced his eyes wide open, saying, ‘There you are, you wretches. Have your fill of the fine spectacle [τοῦ καλοῦ θεάματος].’”<sup>36</sup> (439e5–440a4)

Although Socrates takes the story to illustrate the opposition between appetitive desire and anger (ὀργή), Leontius' reaction also implies shame. His bitterly ironical description of the corpses as a “fine spectacle” suggests the opposite of *kalon*, namely *aischron*, “ugly” or “shameful”.<sup>37</sup> Leontius recognizes the shameful of his desire to gaze at the

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<sup>36</sup> Translations from the *Republic* are from Griffith 2000, with revisions.

<sup>37</sup> See Burnyeat 2006, 11.

naked corpses and also of his failure to suppress it. In spite of the very public setting of the episode (Glaucón has heard this story too), Leontius' shame must be understood as more than just a reaction to how others might see him. A key word in the passage is the verb *δυσχεραίνω*, which I have translated "feel disgust". It could be taken to mean that Leontius felt disgusted by the corpses at the same time that he desired to gaze at them. But in that case, the story would seem to justify a further division *within* the appetitive part of the soul, rather than between spirit and appetite. The object of Leontius' disgust is his shameful *attraction* to the spectacle, not the rotting corpses themselves.<sup>38</sup>

The verb *δυσχεραίνω* looks back to the discussion of education in Book 3, where Socrates describes how the guardians of Kallipolis will be raised, through music, poetry and athletics, to have an instinctive love of the noble and contempt for the shameful. They will carry these emotional dispositions with them into adulthood. Socrates explains how they will come to be discriminating about what kind of dramatic characters they are willing to imitate.

"I think the moderate man, when he comes in his narrative to some saying or action of a good man, will be prepared to report it as if he himself really were the person concerned. He will not be ashamed [*οὐκ αἰσχυνεῖσθαι*] of an imitation of

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<sup>38</sup> This might be suggested by the reflexive pronoun in the phrase *δυσχεραῖνοι καὶ ἀποτρέποι ἑαυτόν*. Here I agree with the interpretation of Lorenz (2006, 16): "When Leontius attempts to resist his desire to take a close look at some corpses [...], he is not just experiencing a conflict between two desires, one a desire to take a close look, the other a desire not to. A description of what is going on just in these terms would miss an important feature of the situation: for Leontius seems to have an aversion not just to taking a close look at the corpses, but also to *having the desire to do so*. [...] In other words, the conflict in question is not just a conflict between two competing first-order desires. It also crucially involves a second-order desire, namely an aversion to having a desire of the first order."

this sort. [...] When he comes to someone who is unworthy of him, I think he'll refuse to make any serious attempt to resemble one who is his inferior – except perhaps briefly, when the character is doing something good – both because he has had no training in imitating people like this, and because he feels disgust [δυσχεραίνων] at shaping and modeling himself on the pattern of his inferiors. In his mind he treats it with contempt [ἀτιμάζων τῇ διανοίᾳ] – unless of course it's in jest.”<sup>39</sup> (396c6–e1)

The well-educated guardians, we may infer, will be no more inclined to imitate unworthy characters in private than they would be in the presence of their peers. The disgust that they feel and their shame in front of others are expressions of the same spirited disposition. Likewise, Leontius' shame at being seen staring at the corpses would be an expression of the same evaluative attitudes that trigger his self-disgust.

As we have seen, Plato portrays the spirited part of the soul, the seat of shame, as responding to internalized standards of the noble and the shameful. But he is clear that its commitment to these standards ultimately depends on the attitudes of others. Later in the *Republic*, spirit is described as *philotimos*, or “honor-loving” (544a ff.). The desire for honor, however, will only be satisfied in a community that recognizes one's traits and actions as worthy of praise and esteem. In the absence of others who share his conception

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<sup>39</sup> For other instances of δυσχεραίνω, see *Rep.* 387d1–2 and 401d4–402a4.

of the noble and the shameful, and regard him as deserving of honor, the spirited person's affective attachment to his values is liable to be undermined.<sup>40</sup>

The general picture of the psychology of shame that emerges from Plato's dialogues is very close to Williams' account. On the one hand, shame can be a response to internalized norms, and does not appear to depend on the presence of an audience. On the other hand, its effectiveness requires a community that shares and endorses the ideals a person has for himself. On Plato's conception, then, shame is an essentially social emotion, which expresses a concern for one's standing among those with whom one identifies.

There are, however, several passages in Plato that suggest a type of shame that does not appear to depend on the reinforcement of a community at all. This is the type of shame that Socrates avows at the conclusion of the *Hippias Major*:

“[W]hen I'm convinced by you and say what you say, that it's much the most excellent thing to be able to present a speech well and finely, and get things done in court or any other gathering, I hear every insult from that man (among others around here) who has always been refuting me [τοῦ ἀεί με ἐλέγχοντος]. He happens to be a close relative of mine, and he lives in the same house. So when I go home to my own place and he hears me saying those things, he asks if I'm not ashamed [εἰ οὐκ αἰσχύνομαι] that I dare discuss fine activities when I've been so

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<sup>40</sup> See Irwin 1995, 235.

plainly refuted about the fine, and it's clear I don't even know at all what *that* is itself!"<sup>41</sup> (304c6–dd8)

The “friend” who shames Socrates is of course Socrates himself. His awareness of his own ignorance and commitment to philosophical inquiry do not seem to depend in any way on the opinions of others.<sup>42</sup> Woodruff (2000, 144–46) dubs this type of motivation “Socratic” shame, and suggests that it provides the epistemic (though less than ideally rational) ground of Socrates’ examinations.<sup>43</sup> Socratic shame can be seen as an antecedent to the modern idea of a “conscience”, or a moral sense that reminds one about one’s deepest convictions.<sup>44</sup> But even if Plato recognizes a type of shame that operates independently of concerns about reputation, it is presented as an idealization (or even transfiguration) of the more common emotion. So perhaps it should not be given much weight in determining Plato’s view of the psychology of shame.

Aristotle’s account of shame in *Rhetoric* 2.6 also highlights the social nature of the emotion. “Let shame [αἰσχύνῃ] be a certain pain or disturbance in regard to bad things, whether present, past or future, that have the appearance of bringing one into

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<sup>41</sup> Trans. Woodruff 1982.

<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, Socrates refers to “others among here” who would also shame him. Are these his friends and followers? If so, are we to suppose that their presence is also needed to reinforce Socrates’ commitment to philosophy? It would seem that the internalized “friend” is sufficient.

<sup>43</sup> See also *Cri.* 49a–b. On the role of shame in Socrates’ examinations of others, see *Ap.* 29d–e; *Sph.* 230b–d (the Eleatic Visitor’s description of “noble” sophistry); *Smp.* 216a–c (the speech of Alcibiades); *Grg.* passim (see Kahn 1983).

<sup>44</sup> Woodruff (2000, 144). It is anticipated in various fragments of Democritus (DK B84, B244, B264), and developed by the later stoics (see Kamketar 1998).



disrepute [περὶ τὰ εἰς ἀδοξίαν φαινόμενα φέρειν τῶν κακῶν]” (1383b12–14).<sup>45</sup> Aristotle continues: “If shame is as defined, it follows that a person feels shame [αἰσχύνεσθαι] at the sorts of bad things that seem to be shameful either to himself or to those who matter to him [ὅσα αἰσχρὰ δοκεῖ εἶναι ἢ αὐτῷ ἢ ὧν φροντίζει]” (1383b15–18).<sup>46</sup> Notice that this last claim suggests that a subject might feel shame with regard to something that he himself does not consider shameful.<sup>47</sup> It is enough for him to recognize that someone else sees his trait or action as shameful, though he will only feel shame before certain others—those who matter to him. As Aristotle explains later in the chapter, these others include people we admire and by whom we want to be admired; those with whom we compete; and those whom we consider wise, namely the elderly and the educated. It is our desire to stand in good repute with them that explains the occurrence of the emotion, not just the fact that we share their attitude towards ourselves.

Although the emphasis in Aristotle’s account is on the subject’s concern for his reputation among others, it by no means precludes the possibility of a sense of shame that responds to internalized standards. As we have seen, Aristotle says that the objects of shame can be things that seem shameful to oneself, which may allow for the emotion to be felt independently of any fear of others’ disapproval. But given his focus on disrepute, Aristotle might think that when a person feels shame in his own eyes, this expresses an

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<sup>45</sup> Translations from the *Rhetoric* are my own. Further on in the chapter shame is said to be a “representation concerning disrepute [περὶ ἀδοξίας φαντασία]” (1384a22).

<sup>46</sup> Konstan (2006, 101), following Freese and Roberts, translates “...that seem disgraceful, either for ourselves or those we care about.” I agree with Cairns (1993, 423) that ὧν φροντίζω should be taken with δοκεῖ. For this use of φροντίζω, see 1384a25 and 33.

<sup>47</sup> In the next section we shall see that some modern theories of shame deny this possibility.

anxiety about how he would be seen by those who share his conception of what is shameful. In all cases, then, shame would remain a social emotion on Aristotle's analysis, whether before a real audience or an imagined and idealized one.

For Plato and Aristotle, shame ultimately seems to be a response to the perspective of a community whose attitudes we either share or respect. As we shall see, this conception underpins their doubts about the ethical value of shame and its role in a life of virtue. Their concern, however, is not that shame is heteronomous but that it is irrational, and can distort a subject's perception of value. Before considering their position in more detail, I want to take a closer look at the contemporary philosophical debate about shame. In a recent book, Julien Deonna, Raffaele Rodogno, and Fabrice Teroni reject the social conception of shame and argue that concerns about its ethical value are misplaced. In the next section, I shall give an overview of their theory and raise some doubts about its plausibility. In my view, the basic picture shared by Plato and Aristotle (and Williams) better explains the phenomena, as well as the destructive potential of shame.

#### 4. Modern controversies

Contemporary philosophical theories of shame divide into two broad camps.<sup>48</sup>

According to *group-centered* theories, shame involves a perception of oneself as having fallen short of the expectations of others.<sup>49</sup> *Agent-centered* theories, by contrast, conceive of shame primarily as the sense that one has failed to live up to one's own ideals and standards.<sup>50</sup> The judgments of others may play an *instrumental* role, but it is a necessary condition for experiencing shame that the subject accept the evaluation of the other.<sup>51</sup>

Group-centered theories reject this condition: in order to feel shame, it is sufficient that the subject sees himself as the object of another's disdain or contempt. It should be noted that the division between the two camps is very rough, and that both acknowledge that an adequate theory of shame must account for the intuitions that motivate the other side.

Agent-centered theories must account for the fact that shame often seems to be a social emotion, expressing our concern for our reputation among others. Group-centered theories must explain how it seems possible that a person can feel shame in private without the involvement of an audience, perhaps not even an imagined one.

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<sup>48</sup> Maibom 2010.

<sup>49</sup> See Deigh 1983; Calhoun 2004; Maibom 2010, 567: "[Shame] is a profoundly social emotion uniquely sensitive to the opinions of others." Williams (1993) might be included in this camp, although his view is very difficult to characterize.

<sup>50</sup> See Rawls 1999 [1971]; O'Hear 1977; Taylor 1985; Nussbaum 2004; Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni 2012.

<sup>51</sup> See Maibom 2010, 570: "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."

Some philosophers elect to divide the concept of shame into agent-centered and group-centered varieties. For example, Van Norden (2002) draws a distinction between “conventional” and “ethical” shame:

At one extreme, conventional shame is a sort of unpleasant feeling we have when we believe those whose views matter to us look down on us (or on those with whom we identify), on the basis of a standard appearance we share. [...] Ethical shame, in contrast, is a sort of unpleasant feeling we have when we believe that we (or those with whom we identify) have significant character flaws. It seems that we can also have ethical shame about our actions (or the actions of those with whom we identify). This is true, but I submit that we are ashamed of our actions because of what we think they reveal about our character. [...] [I]t is *not* relevant to ethical shame whether others are aware of our character flaws, or whether they look down on us because of them, or whether their opinions matter to us.<sup>52</sup>

While such an approach is useful for sorting out the different manifestations of shame, it is reasonable to seek a core account of the emotion that allows for such variations within the concept, and explains how they are related other than by homonymy.<sup>53</sup>

Determining the essential nature of shame is crucial to answering questions about its normative status. If shame is primarily a response to the opinions of others, it may be

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<sup>52</sup> Van Norden 2002, 60–61. See also O’Hear 1977; Woodruff 2000, 144.

<sup>53</sup> Of course, it may turn out that there is no unified account to be found, and that it is a mistake even to talk about “paradigm” or “central” cases of shame and their essential features. But some theories of shame seem to me to abandon the search too quickly.

morally suspect, insofar as it motivates us to act contrary to our own ethical values and to conform with standards we might not otherwise endorse.<sup>54</sup> Agent-centered theories tend to argue that once shame is recognized as a response to one's own standards, such concerns fall away. To the contrary, it is sometimes argued, shame has an important place in our moral lives because it makes us aware of our deepest commitments, and can serve as an ethical compass when reason alone proves inadequate.<sup>55</sup> But there are notable exceptions to this pattern. According to Cheshire Calhoun, shame is a morally valuable emotion precisely because it is heteronomous.<sup>56</sup> Shame makes us sensitive to the ethical standards of those among whom we live. Given that our lives are communal, she argues, it is important for us to be open and responsive to the evaluative attitudes of others, even if we disagree or find them abhorrent.<sup>57</sup>

In their recent book, *In Defense of Shame*, Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni present the most sustained argument yet in favor of the agent-centered view of shame (I shall refer to their theory as “the *IDS* account”). Their central thesis is that shame is not a social emotion at all and that its motivations are “never heteronomous”.<sup>58</sup> If this claim is correct, then we might be tempted to think that what Plato and Aristotle have to say about the ethical limitations of shame is of only historical interest. My task in the remainder of this chapter will be to present the *IDS* account and show why it—and indeed any theory

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<sup>54</sup> Isenberg 1949 raises such concerns. His is among the most illuminating discussions of shame I have come across.

<sup>55</sup> See O’Hear 1977; Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni 2012.

<sup>56</sup> Calhoun 2004.

<sup>57</sup> Nussbaum (2004), by contrast, defends an agent-centered conception of shame and argues that it is a morally harmful emotion because it implies a denial of our human vulnerability.

<sup>58</sup> Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni 2012, 127–33.

that marginalizes the social dimension of shame—is implausible. First, however, I shall briefly consider an earlier view of shame that has significant points of contact with the *IDS* account, as well as weaknesses that the new theory is designed to address.

### *The Rawlsian characterization of shame*

A classic statement of an agent-centered theory of shame appears in the third and final part of John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*.<sup>59</sup> Rawls identifies shame with a person's loss of the good of self-esteem or self-respect (he does not clearly distinguish the two). On his view, self-respect has two main components: first, it includes a person's "secure conviction that his conception of his good, his plan of life, is worth carrying out"; second, it "implies a confidence in one's ability, so far as it is within one's power, to fulfill one's intentions" (386). Roughly put, Rawlsian self-respect consists in a firm sense that one's goals and projects are truly valuable, and that one is reasonably capable of seeing them through. An individual's self-respect is therefore relative to his own conception of what sort of life is worth living, as well as his own assessment of his excellence. At the same time, however, Rawls stresses that we *share* our conceptions of the good with others, and

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<sup>59</sup> Rawls 1999 [1971], 386–91.

that maintaining confidence in the value of our goals and abilities depends on the confirmation of those others.<sup>60</sup>

Shame, on Rawls' account, is the feeling "that someone has when he experiences an injury to his self-respect or suffers a blow to his self-esteem" (388). A person's self-respect is injured either when his conviction in the value of his goals is shaken, or when his confidence in his ability to achieve them is undermined. Shame thus involves a diminishment in a person's sense of his own excellence. Again, Rawls emphasizes that shame is felt relatively to one's own ideals and standards: "It 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. Those with no musical ability do not strive to be musicians and feel no shame for this lack" (390). We might feel shame at any number of perceived deficiencies, depending on what our values and aspirations happen to be. Although Rawls insists on the importance of community for supporting our sense of worth, he is clear that when a person experiences shame, he loses respect in his *own* eyes, not only in the eyes of his community.

In an influential 1983 article, John Deigh raises a number of challenges to the Rawlsian characterization of shame.<sup>61</sup> I shall focus on two that, in my view, pose the greatest problems for agent-centered theories of shame, and which the *IDS* authors try to

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<sup>60</sup> As Rawls puts it, self-esteem is supported by "finding our person and deeds appreciated and confirmed by others who are likewise esteemed and their association enjoyed" (386). In the subsequent paragraph he makes a stronger claim: "unless our endeavors are appreciated by our associates it is impossible for us to maintain the conviction that they are worthwhile [...]" (387).

<sup>61</sup> Deigh 1983. Deigh makes clear that the target of his critique is the "Rawlsian characterization" of shame rather than Rawls' specific account. Deigh's description of the Rawlsian characterization accurately reflects the view presented in *A Theory of Justice*, while omitting some of the particulars.

circumvent. According to the Rawlsian characterization, as Deigh describes it, shame is “the shock to our sense of worth that comes either from realizing that our values are shoddy or from discovering that we are deficient in a way that had added to the confidence we had in our excellence” (229). Deigh argues that such an account is inadequate, first, because a person can have his confidence in his excellence diminished without experiencing shame. He imagines the case of a young tennis player who is the star of his community, and forms the aspiration to play professionally. The player has extreme confidence in his abilities, and works hard at improving his game. However,

when this young player enters his first state tournament, he quickly discovers that his skills are below those of the top seeded players. His first defeat need not be humiliating, just convincing. And though he will surely lose self-esteem, we need not suppose that he feels any shame. [...] The first defeat is sufficiently convincing that it alters his view of himself as a tennis player, and given his aims, this means loss of self-esteem. But just as others close to him would respond that his defeat is nothing to be ashamed of, so his own attitude toward it may reflect such judgment. (230–31)

Whether or not one finds the example persuasive, we can appreciate its general point. For Deigh, the Rawlsian characterization lacks the resources to differentiate cases where a subject feels shame from cases where he experiences disappointment or some other type of negative self-assessment. An adequate account of shame must capture the severity of



the emotion, in a way that distinguishes it from less radical readjustments of a person's sense of his own worth.

The second challenge runs as follows. In addition to there being cases of loss of Rawlsian self-esteem that do not involve shame, according to Deigh, there are also cases of shame where the subject's sense of his own excellence is not diminished. His chief example is based on Plato's *Crito*. In his attempt to persuade Socrates to leave prison and avoid his execution, Crito expresses his shame at the thought that the Athenians will regard him and his friends as cowards for not orchestrating an escape (45d–e). Crito's prospective shame is directed not at the possibility that they *will* prove to have been cowards, but rather at their being regarded as such. Deigh remarks:

And though Crito is in the end convinced that Socrates' course is the right one and knows all along that he has done everything one can expect of a friend, we still have, I think, no trouble picturing this good-hearted but thoroughly conventional man feeling ashamed when before some respectable Athenian, who reproaches him for what he believes was cowardice on Crito's part. Examples like this one demonstrate that shame is often more, when it is not exclusively, a response to the evident deprecatory opinion others have of one than an emotion aroused upon judgment that one's aims are shoddy or that one is deficient in talent or ability necessary to achieve them. (233)

In such cases, Deigh says, the subject's shame is perfectly intelligible without having to suppose that he *accepts* the criticism of his judging audience. We need not assume that

the Athenian's reproach brings to light Crito's hidden doubts about his virtue. Crito may retain his full conviction about the value of his actions, and still feel shame.

Deigh's *Crito* example points to a major challenge to agent-centered theories of shame, namely the problem of recalcitrant shame.<sup>62</sup> This occurs when a subject feels shame at some trait or action of his in spite of his judgment that there is nothing for him to be ashamed of. Deigh concludes that "a satisfactory characterization [of shame] must include in a central role one's concern for the opinions of others."<sup>63</sup> Such a conception, he thinks, is better equipped both to differentiate shame from other forms of negative self-assessment, and to explain cases where a subject experiences shame without thinking that he has failed to live up to his own ideals. This broad conception of shame, as Deigh points out, has dominated the philosophical tradition since antiquity, and several contemporary theorists have joined him in rejecting the agent-centered view.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> On recalcitrant emotions, see D'Arms and Jacobson 2003; Brady 2008.

<sup>63</sup> Deigh 1983, 238. Deigh acknowledges that Rawls does give such concern an important role, but it is not "internally related to shame" (238). He writes: "The characterization, through emphasis on the dependency of one's self-esteem on the esteem of others, can accord the concern an important role in an overall understanding of shame. But this makes the concern part of a mechanism that induces shame rather than part of our conception of shame. A mechanism exists which, when put into operation, transforms high self-esteem into low; part of that mechanism is the concern one has for the opinion of others; and one way in which the mechanism gets going is when others on whose good opinion one's self-esteem depends deprecate one and one apprehends this. In this way, the characterization gives one's concern for the opinion of others an important role. But it is only a supporting role and not the central one I think it deserves" (238–39). In other words, the importance of the audience is merely contingent upon the extent to which a subject's self-esteem depends on the confirmation of others.

<sup>64</sup> He cites Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Spinoza, Darwin, and Sartre.

*The IDS account*

Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni's *In Defense of Shame* presents a version of the Rawlsian view that attempts to answer the main challenges raised by Deigh and others. The authors' principal aim is to defend shame against two "dogmas" that appear pervasively in the philosophical and psychological literature on the emotion. The first dogma is that shame is an essentially social emotion, in that it expresses our deep concern for how we appear in the eyes of others. A common corollary of this dogma is that shame is heteronomous, in that it can motivate us to act according to ideals and expectations that are not our own. It is therefore at best morally irrelevant: even if someone does the right thing from a sense of shame, he does it for the wrong reasons. The second dogma, which shows up more often in the psychological literature, is that shame is not just irrelevant to morality, but morally problematic and even harmful, because it tends to promote narcissistic and anti-social behavior. The authors' strategy against the two dogmas is to argue that shame is, contrary to appearances, "never heteronomous", since it is always a response to the subject's own evaluative standards. Their view is that once the nature of shame is properly understood, we can appreciate its profound importance in moral life. The authors go so far as to claim that a sense of shame can be considered a "full blown virtue, so long as we endorse without hesitation the values that sustain it".<sup>65</sup> (In what follows I shall focus on their response to the first dogma. Much of their response to the second dogma depends on their argument against the first.)

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<sup>65</sup> Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni 2012, 178. Hereafter *IDS*.

The *IDS* authors give their general characterization of shame as follows:

In shame, we apprehend a trait or an action of ours that we take to exemplify the polar opposite of a self-relevant value as indicating our incapacity to exemplify this self-relevant value even to a minimal degree. (178)

Central to their account is the notion of a self-relevant value, which refers broadly to any value that a subject cares about exemplifying. Such values constitute a person's identity: "These values shape the expectations [a subject] has with regard to others and herself, and through them she will assess herself in value terms" (88). Self-relevant values are not necessarily those that a person *claims* to care about, or would endorse on reflection. If someone repeatedly acts in a way that shows no concern for a certain value, e.g. honesty, we might be justified in concluding that it is not one of her self-relevant values—no matter what she says. But it does not follow that self-relevant values are simply determined by a person's behavior. Instead, the *IDS* authors suggest, they should be understood in "affective terms": the values to which we are attached, and which constitute our identity, show themselves above all in our "emotions and affective dispositions" (89). Thus our emotional responses, including our shame responses, can reveal self-relevant values of which we were previously unaware (178).

The *IDS* authors put the notion of a self-relevant value to work in two main ways. First, it captures the pluralism that we saw to be a significant feature of Rawls' account of shame. A subject may feel shame with respect to any value to which she is attached: moral virtues such as courage, generosity, or patience; skills such as being a good cook or

having a good jump shot; and attributes like wealth, cleanliness, or physical beauty. According to the *IDS* account, there is no set of values (e.g. integrity, privacy, honor) that has a privileged connection to shame.<sup>66</sup> Second, the notion of a self-relevant value supports their contention that although shame involves a negative self-assessment, it does not imply a global condemnation of the self. Here the authors of *IDS* differ from Rawls (and most other theorists<sup>67</sup>), who conceives of shame as a blow to one's overall sense of worth. On their account, a person can feel shame with respect to values that are quite peripheral to his sense of identity. His shame need not be "global" if there are other self-relevant values that are more important to him, and which he does take himself to exemplify. He might be ashamed of his failures as a teacher, but proud of what he has achieved as a scholar; and if his scholarly activities matter more to him, he will not be ashamed of himself overall.<sup>68</sup>

The authors of *IDS* acknowledge that a person can be conscious of failing to exemplify a self-relevant value in a number of ways without feeling shame. I may value having a good jump shot, but find myself struggling over the span of several games. As a result, I might be severely disappointed in myself and begin to lose confidence in my abilities. A principal objection to the Rawlsian characterization, as we saw, was that it failed to explain the difference between other types of negative self-assessment, such as

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<sup>66</sup> See their discussion at 118–22. Here they disagree with Velleman (2001), who argues that shame is rooted in a concern for privacy.

<sup>67</sup> One of their main targets is Taylor (1985), who identifies the self-relevant values of shame in terms of the subject's "central commitments". The *IDS* authors argue that this fails to account for minor, peripheral shame episodes.

<sup>68</sup> The *IDS* authors of course agree that a subject will feel shame more intensely with respect to values that he cares about more deeply.

self-disappointment and blows to self-esteem, and the emotion of shame. An adequate theory of shame, as the *IDS* authors put it, must capture “the distinctively severe evaluation present in shame.”<sup>69</sup> Their account attempts to meet this challenge through the claim that when a subject experiences shame, he apprehends himself not simply as failing to exemplify a self-relevant value, but as exemplifying the *polar opposite* of that value. For example, I regard my lack of success on the basketball court as an indication that I am a *lousy* jump shooter, not just a struggling or a streaky one. Similarly, a person who values being compassionate may realize that he falls far short of his ideal, and commit to being more attentive to the hardships of others. But in order to experience shame, he must perceive some trait or action of his as a sign that he is *uncaring* or *cruel*. The *IDS* authors strengthen their account with a further condition. In shame, they say, we apprehend a trait or an action of ours as indicating our “incapacity” to exemplify a self-relevant value “even to a minimal degree.” The authors do not devote much space to elaborating on this claim, but it appears to mean that the subject sees himself as condemned to exemplify the polar opposite value (e.g. being a lousy jump shooter, or an uncaring person) *no matter what he does or how hard he tries*.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *IDS*, 87: “The intuition that an appeal to self-esteem cannot capture [...] is that, in shame, the failing is perceived by the subject as sufficiently severe to affect his identity in some distinct way.”

<sup>70</sup> See *IDS*, 103: “The evaluation, in shame, is not the realization that we have simply failed to exemplify this or that self-relevant value, but it rather questions our very capacity to meet the demands that are entailed by this particular value.”

According to the *IDS* account, shame is distinguished from other varieties of negative self-assessment by its “all-or-nothing” character.<sup>71</sup> In shame, we sense that “the threshold of what we take to be acceptable given our values has been crossed” (104).<sup>72</sup> The authors stress that this threshold is set by the agent: it is determined by the expectations he has for himself and others (109–10). A concert pianist and an amateur may both care about displaying skillfulness and artistry in their playing. But they will probably have different conceptions of what it takes to exemplify those values and, correspondingly, of when they have crossed the threshold beyond which they see themselves as incapable. What counts as incompetence for the concert pianist, the amateur may apprehend as improvement in his own case. The notion of a threshold nicely explains one of the ways in which shame can be irrational. An amateur might set his threshold too high, and feel unjustified shame at failing to exemplify the skillfulness or artistry of a professional. The concert pianist, in turn, might place demands on himself that go beyond what anyone could expect of a human being. He would then be liable to feel constant shame at his incapacity to live up to those demands, and (wrongly) consider himself inept or devoid of artistic sensibility.

Notice that the *IDS* account of shame, as the apprehension of oneself as being incapable of exemplifying a self-relevant value, makes no reference to an audience (real or imagined) or to the subject’s concern for public opinion. The awareness of how one

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<sup>71</sup> See also Taylor 1985. Again, on the *IDS* account the negative self-assessment is not “all-or-nothing” in the sense of “all-encompassing”.

<sup>72</sup> See *IDS*, 106: “there is a minimal display of attitude and behavior still compatible with being attached to a self-relevant value and, in shame, this threshold is perceived as having been crossed.”

appears in the eyes of others plays no essential role. The authors believe that such a conception is required in order to explain cases of “solitary” shame, where a subject appears to be ashamed only in his own eyes (138). For example, we could imagine our concert pianist feeling shame after a performance that received universal praise, including from his most accomplished peers. According to the *IDS* account, we need not suppose that he envisions an audience judging him with contempt. Again, it is enough that he sees himself as having fallen below the threshold of what *he* considers acceptable given his values.<sup>73</sup>

Another fine example of this sort of shame comes at a crucial moment in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeth has just received a letter from Darcy revealing the truth about Wickham’s character. The contents deliver a painful blow to her self-image:

She grew absolutely ashamed of herself. – Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think, without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd.

‘How despicably have I acted!’ she cried. – ‘I, who have prided myself on my discernment! – I, who have valued myself on my abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister, and gratified my vanity, in useless or blameable distrust. – How humiliating is this discovery! – Yet, how just a humiliation! – Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind.

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<sup>73</sup> See also O’Hear 1977, 77.



But vanity, not love, has been my folly. – Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned. Till this moment, I never knew myself.<sup>74</sup>

It seems that we can make sense of Elizabeth's reaction without attributing to her any concern for her reputation. The *IDS* account appears to have all of the resources needed to make her shame intelligible. Elizabeth takes herself to have exemplified the polar opposites of the qualities she values most. While she used to pride herself on her discernment about others' characters, she now realizes that she has been "wretchedly blind". She thought herself insusceptible to flattery, but now sees that Wickham's attentions and Darcy's indifference have prejudiced her judgment—a further sign of her vanity. Elizabeth experiences a shattering of her self-image: she has crossed a threshold, and views herself in an entirely new light ("Till this moment, I never knew myself.").

How, then, do the *IDS* authors respond to the widely shared view that shame is a social emotion? This is one of the central dogmas that their book aims to address. The authors acknowledge that shame often does appear to be a response to the disapproval of others, but they think that this can be accounted for without posing any threat to the autonomy of shame. On their view, there are three main ways in which shame can take on a social character, consistent with the thesis that shame is always a matter of perceiving ourselves as failing to exemplify our own ideals and values.

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<sup>74</sup> Austen 2004 [1813], 159.

First, it is obvious that many of the self-relevant values with respect to which a person feels shame will have been shaped by the norms of his community. This explains the cross-cultural variances in the kinds of traits and actions that are liable to be objects of shame. But this strong element of social determination is by no means unique to shame.<sup>75</sup> In any case, the authors argue, the fact that our self-relevant values are often derived from our community does not make them any less our own. It does not follow that when we feel shame we are really responding to the standards and expectations of others.

The *IDS* authors recognize that shame is often felt in the presence of an audience (they call this “public shame”). This is the second way in which shame can take on a social character. However, they argue, we should be careful to distinguish between the *content* of shame and its *eliciting conditions*. Although exposure to an audience may sometimes be what elicits shame, the subject’s emotion is not *about* being exposed, or losing the respect of others (any more than if someone tells me a ghost story, my fear is about the storyteller). In such cases, according to the *IDS* account, the public plays an “instrumental” or “ancillary” role, by triggering our awareness that we are incapable of exemplifying a self-relevant value even to a minimal degree (138–39). This is one of the ways in which shame can be a morally valuable emotion, namely as an antidote to self-deception. As they explain: “others are often required for us to realize the full extent of our moral shortcomings by drawing our attention to our theoretical or practical blind

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<sup>75</sup> *IDS*, 152–53: “this claim about the social nature of the developmental path of shame is true of many emotions, if not all” (153).

spots. Because we take autonomously the insights of some of these others to be authoritative, they may contribute to correcting, refining, or enlightening our moral sensitivity” (153). The disapproval of an audience may bring about this realization, but to the extent that we feel shame we accept their evaluation as our own.

The *IDS* authors’ analysis of public shame may account for many cases when the perspective of an audience seems central. But it does not help with those cases of recalcitrant shame, as in the *Crito* example, where the subject does *not* appear to accept the evaluation of his audience, but experiences the emotion nonetheless. It therefore fails to address Deigh’s second challenge to the Rawlsian characterization. However, the *IDS* authors introduce a third way in which shame can take on a social character, where the judgment of an audience plays a more constitutive role. Sometimes a person will feel shame because he has lost honor in the eyes of his peers, his reputation has been tarnished, or his privacy has been violated. In such cases, the subject’s standing in relation to a public is not merely an eliciting condition of shame, but part of its content. According to the authors, that is because honor, reputation, and privacy are among the self-relevant values with respect to which a person can feel shame:

[D]espite the appearances, shame is never heteronomous. In order to feel shame, [...] [subjects] must perceive their attitudes or traits as threatening something they *do* value. [...] [W]hat the subject does value in these cases concerns either her reputation (honor or public image) or her sense of privacy (intimacy, safety). It is

when others' judgments or attitudes are perceived as threatening values to which we are attached that shame ensues.<sup>76</sup>

Recall that, on their account, shame may be felt with respect to any of my self-relevant values, and that it may only be felt locally—that is, with respect to one of my values but not myself as a whole. They might account for the Crito case as follows. Crito may be convinced that he is not a coward, and that the Athenians' contempt is unjustified. He may even believe that he demonstrated courage in accepting Socrates' choice. But he might still feel shame in virtue of having fallen in the eyes of the Athenians, since having a good reputation in the city has always mattered to him deeply. He is not ashamed of what his community condemns him for; rather, his shame consists in the apprehension of his incapacity to exemplify the self-relevant value of *having a good reputation* even to a minimal degree.

Such an analysis would explain how a person could feel shame before a public even when he rejects their judgment of him. In cases where the subject *does* accept the evaluation of his audience, his shame may be compounded by the fact that he has been exposed. The public would then play both an instrumental *and* a constitutive role. For example, a person may be caught shoplifting and have the incident published in the police report of his local newspaper. According to the *IDS* account, he may feel shame, in the first instance, because the exposure makes him realize that he is a *thief*, and in the

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<sup>76</sup> *IDS*, 130.

second instance, because he becomes aware that he has lost all standing in his community. The shame of disrepute *adds* to the shame of perceiving himself as a thief.

When honor or reputation is one of a person's self-relevant values, the *IDS* authors argue, his shame may be rightly considered heteronomous and superficial. But it does not follow that shame is heteronomous in its own right:

[W]hen issues of reputation take center stage, the subject need not agree with the relevant judgment for her to feel shame. The explanation of this striking fact is, however, not to be found in shame's heteronomy but in the nature of the specific value perceived as threatened in the circumstances. Since others' judgments and attitudes form our reputation independently of whether we perceive them as justified, shame will be elicited independently of our actual agreement with these judgments and attitudes when we perceive them as threatening our standing in the eyes of others.<sup>77</sup>

As we have seen, the *IDS* account holds that no self-relevant value has a privileged connection to shame. Concerns about honor and reputation, therefore, are no more essential to shame than the desire to have a good jump shot or to be an expert mycologist. What determines whether or not a person's motivations are heteronomous is the makeup of his self-relevant values, not his susceptibility to shame.

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<sup>77</sup> *IDS*, 131. See 152: "shame can be said to be properly social, we have agreed, when the self-relevant values of reputation or privacy are at stake. Indeed, there may be a case for saying that shame, when occasioned by the subject's perceiving that he has failed with respect to these values, is not morally relevant. There is, of course, no reason for drawing from this local truth about shame any conclusion about the general irrelevance of this emotion for morality."

In this way, the *IDS* authors claim to be able to account for the intuition that shame is a social emotion, while preserving their thesis that it is always autonomous. Although Plato and Aristotle are not directly concerned with issues of autonomy, their deep ambivalence about shame, as we shall see, rests on their understanding of its motivations as fundamentally oriented towards the opinions of a community. If the *IDS* authors are correct in thinking that this conception of shame is mistaken, then we might question whether Plato and Aristotle can provide much insight into its normative status. To conclude this chapter, I shall raise some problems for the *IDS* account and lend my support to the more traditional view.

#### *Problems for the IDS account*

Let me start with the feature of the *IDS* account that I find least convincing, namely the way it explains the relationship between shame and a person's concern for honor and reputation. The claim is that shame is properly described as "social" in situations where the judgments of others are not merely instrumental in eliciting the emotion, but are part of the emotion's content. In such cases, as we saw, the analysis is that the subject feels shame with respect to a self-relevant value that has a particularly social character, such as *receiving honor from one's community*, or *having a good reputation*. This is supposed to allow the *IDS* authors to account for instances of recalcitrant shame, as in the Crito example, when a person feels shame before a

disapproving audience but does not accept its judgment of him. The analysis is also supposed to explain why shame is often more intense when it involves exposure to a public than when it occurs in private. My shame with respect to one self-relevant value, e.g. honesty, may be *compounded* by the fact that I have been exposed as dishonest, and my reputation (a second self-relevant value) has been destroyed.

This analysis seems to me to misrepresent the usual link between the experience of shame and one's concern for the opinion of others. Often a person's shame at being exposed is not something *added on* to his shame at failing to exemplify another self-relevant value. Consider the following (hypothetical) scenario. I am having a conversation at a party and I make a joke that is in extremely poor taste, although I do not recognize it as such. When leaving the party my wife reminds me of the joke and says "I can't believe you would say something like that! I wouldn't expect that from you." I feel deeply ashamed and avoid her gaze, suddenly aware of my insensitivity. According to the *IDS* account, my emotional state can be explained as follows. I feel shame, in the first instance, because I apprehend myself as having exemplified the polar opposite of some self-relevant value, namely sensitivity. My wife can be said to have been instrumental in making me aware of my failing, but that does not exhaust her role. My shame is all the more profound because I realize that I have lost her respect. On the *IDS* analysis, I apprehend myself as having exemplified the polar opposite of a further self-relevant value: having the respect of my wife. My shame therefore has two objects: my insensitivity and the loss of her respect. (If I did not accept my wife's judgment of my joke as exemplifying insensitivity, I might still be ashamed of losing her respect.)

In my view, however, the above analysis distorts the phenomena. In particular I think it is a mistake to interpret the loss of my wife's respect as a second object of my shame. What I am ashamed of is my insensitivity. The case is perfectly intelligible without supposing that I am also ashamed of losing her respect. In certain circumstances, that might become the object of my shame—for instance if I had to explain to my parents why she left me. But in the scenario as described, it seems more natural to say that my feeling ashamed of (and not just feeling disappointed about) my insensitivity and my anxiety about falling in the eyes of my wife are aspects of the same emotional state. There is not one feeling of shame compounded by another, but one complex emotion involving a perception of myself as I appear to another.

The central weakness of the *IDS* account, as I see it, is the claim that one's concern for honor, reputation and respect from others bear only a contingent relation to shame, in virtue of the self-relevant values one happens to have. Recall Hector's shame at having to face the Trojans, were he to retreat inside the city walls. What Hector is ashamed of is his recklessness, which has brought his city to the brink of ruin. His fear of what the Trojans would say about him does not reveal a second object of his shame, namely his lack of honor in their eyes. Insofar as he is ashamed of losing honor, it is because that is a reflection of his failures as a leader. But if he did not care what others thought of him, we might conclude that he was not ashamed at all. A person's self-image



and his awareness of how others regard him cannot be easily disentangled in the way the *IDS* account suggests.<sup>78</sup>

In my view, then, the authors' attempt to explain the social dimension of shame in terms of the subject's self-relevant values does not succeed. As we have seen, this part of their theory was needed to account for cases where the subject does not accept the evaluation of the other, but experiences shame nonetheless. On their analysis, the subject apprehends his failure to exemplify a self-relevant value of a particularly social kind, e.g. having a good reputation. In this way, they could maintain that shame is never heteronomous in its own right, but only in virtue of certain values that are no more essential to the emotion than any others. If this analysis fails, as I believe it does, the authors need to find an alternative explanation for cases where the subject does not share the judgment of his audience, without conceding that shame is centrally concerned with the opinions of others.

One approach would be to say that in *all* instances in which a person feels shame before an audience (real or imagined) he really *does* accept their evaluation. The *IDS* authors could argue that the other plays an instrumental role, by causing the subject to become aware of his failure to exemplify some value that he considers important. This analysis could be used to explain cases of recalcitrant shame, where a person continues to feel ashamed of some aspect of himself, even though he believes the emotion is unwarranted.

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<sup>78</sup> Rawls (1999 [1971], 386–87) emphasizes this point. See also Cairns 2011, 38: "Individual identity is intimately bound up with group membership. Self-esteem depends on the esteem of others. This is the only way it can be."

Imagine that a young man from a conservative family has decided to have a sex change operation. His closest friends and his parents are all very supportive, and he generally feels proud of what he sees as a courageous choice. At the same time, he would be mortified were his grandfather to find out, and so he avoids family gatherings and makes others promise to keep his decision private. When he imagines his grandfather hearing the news, he feels deeply ashamed, although he does not think that there are any good reasons for him to disapprove and considers his values out-of-date. We could even imagine the young man getting angry with himself for feeling ashamed. What should we say about this case? The *IDS* authors could claim that when the young man imagines the gaze of his grandfather, he is made aware of his failure with respect to one of his self-relevant values, such as an ideal of manliness. Alternatively, they might say that he grants his grandfather the authority to judge him. In either case, on their analysis, the young man's shame would indicate that he accepts his grandfather's judgment of him, and so his emotion is autonomous.

I do not find this sort of explanation persuasive. In the company of others, the young man does not have any negative feelings about his decision, and may be scornful of traditional standards of manliness. Of course, we could always appeal to depth psychology and say that he actually does regard himself as shameful or worthy of contempt. Perhaps he has managed to deceive himself about his values and the rest of his life, and it is only the gaze of his grandfather that forces him to be honest. But here is another possible explanation. The young man cares about his grandfather's opinion of him, and wants to be admired by a man that he loves. In order for him to feel shame, it is

sufficient for him to imagine how he would appear in his grandfather's eyes. It does not follow that the young man thereby endorses the point of view that is the cause of his shame. We can imagine that were the grandfather to find out about his decision and accept him, the young man's shame would dissipate. Whether or not the young man feels shame depends entirely on the attitude of the other.

The *IDS* account leaves us with only two options for explaining cases like the above: either the subject is ashamed of the fact that his reputation is threatened, or he really does share the attitude of his audience. I think that the more plausible analysis involves neither of these alternatives. A person might feel ashamed of some feature of himself simply because he is aware of how he appears to others. The identity of those others, as Williams argues, will often be shaped by his own ideals and expectations, but it is not just his own point of view of which he becomes aware. Group-centered theories of shame, in my view, because they emphasize the sensitivity of the emotion to the judgments of others, are better equipped to explain the cases that present problems for the *IDS* account.

## 5. Conclusion

I have offered support for the view that an adequate theory of shame must give a central place to the subject's concern for his standing among others. Of course, there is much more to be said about the relationship between this concern and a subject's self-

image, and moreover how a group-centered view can account for cases of shame that seem far removed from anxiety about one's public reputation. My aim here has been to show that the traditional conception shared by Plato and Aristotle is still worth taking seriously. In the two studies that follow, I shall explore the normative side of their views on shame, and in particular their reasons for denying that a sense of shame and honor is a virtue.

## Chapter Two

### *Aidôs in Plato's Charmides*

τοὺς ἐραστὰς εἰς οὐδέν ἄλλο τοῦ σώματος τῶν ἐρωμένων ἀποβλέπειν ἢ τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς, ἐν οἷς τὴν αἰδῶ κατοικεῖν.

“Lovers look upon no other part of their beloveds’ body than the eyes, where *aidôs* resides.”

– Aristotle, *Eroticus* (Fr. 96.2; Athenaeus XIII, 564b)

#### 1. Introduction

In the first half of the *Charmides*, Socrates examines three definitions of the virtue *sôphrosunê* (“temperance”, “moderation”, “soundness of mind”) proposed by Plato’s uncle Charmides, who is portrayed in the dialogue as a youth in his early to mid-teens.<sup>1</sup> My starting point in this chapter will be the examination of Charmides’ second proposal, that *sôphrosunê* is the same as *aidôs*, or a sense of shame (160d–161b).<sup>2</sup> After securing Charmides’ agreement that *sôphrosunê* is a good thing, Socrates recalls a single line from

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<sup>1</sup> Nails (2002, 91) puts him at no more than seventeen.

<sup>2</sup> I shall use the Greek terms *aidôs* and *sôphrosunê* throughout the present chapter, in order to avoid begging too many questions about their relationship.

Homer's *Odyssey*: "*aidôs* is no good in a needy man."<sup>3</sup> Since *aidôs* is no more good than bad, Socrates infers, it cannot be the same as *sôphrosunê*. Charmides accepts the conclusion, and then immediately puts forward a third definition for Socrates to consider—and *aidôs* is never mentioned again.

*Charmides* 160d–161b is the only passage in Plato's corpus that directly addresses the question of whether *aidôs* is a virtue. Its argument is among the briefest in any of the dialogues, and it has been rarely discussed in the scholarly literature. Those who do comment on the refutation, however, draw very different conclusions about its merits. For many, Socrates' argument is mostly straightforward and unobjectionable.<sup>4</sup> Others have been far less sanguine. John Beversluis, for example, deems it "one of the lamest arguments in the early dialogues."<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Douglas Cairns (author of the standard work on the concept) finds Plato's treatment of *aidôs* in the passage "extremely superficial."<sup>6</sup> But few have given the refutation—and its larger role within the dialogue—the careful consideration that it deserves.<sup>7</sup>

I shall argue that the apparent superficiality of the argument is a provocation, designed to make Plato's readers look more closely at the portrayal of *aidôs* in the dialogue as a whole. The key to understanding the refutation, as we shall see, lies in the lengthy narration that opens the dialogue, in which Socrates describes his initial

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<sup>3</sup> *Odyssey* 17.347.

<sup>4</sup> See Tuckey 1951, 19–20; Martens 1973, 30–31; Irwin 1995, 36–38; Tuozzo 2011, 164.

<sup>5</sup> Beversluis 2000, 141. I should note here that I do endorse the standard Anglophone view that the *Charmides* is an "early" dialogue.

<sup>6</sup> Cairns 1993, 373. See also Hyland 1981, 69.

<sup>7</sup> Illuminating treatments of the passage include Bloch 1973, 61–69; Schmid 1998, 25–29; McCoy 2005, 142–47; Lampert 2010, 172–73; Tuozzo 2011, 161–65.

encounter with Charmides. In addition to his physical beauty, the most striking feature of the youth is his *aidôs*. Socrates' portrait of the young Charmides, which suggests a deep ambivalence about *aidôs*, throws light on the puzzling refutation that follows, and in particular the appeal to Homer. Towards the end of the chapter I explore how Plato's dialogue adapts and transforms a central theme from the *Odyssey*. Through drama, dialectic, and poetic allusion, the *Charmides* presents a rich and complex picture of both the ethical value and the limitations of shame.

## 2. Puzzles of *Charmides* 160d–161b

Let us start by taking a closer look at Charmides' second definition of *sôphrosunê* and the argument Socrates uses to refute it. The conversation with Charmides and his cousin (and guardian) Critias takes place in a wrestling school (*palaistra*), on the day following Socrates' return from the siege of Potidaea in Thrace.<sup>8</sup> The ostensible aim of the conversation is to determine whether Charmides is already *sôphrôn* (the adjective from which the abstract noun *sôphrosunê* is formed), or whether Socrates must sing an incantation consisting of beautiful *logoi* (“discourse”, “speeches”, “arguments”) that will

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<sup>8</sup> Socrates narrates the dialogue to an anonymous friend. The conversation within the narrative frame is set in the late spring of 429, after the Athenians' devastating defeat near Spartolus. See Nails 2002, 311–12. On the Athenian campaign in Potidaea, see Thucydides 1.56–65; 2.58, 70, and 79 (on the Spartolus defeat).

engender the virtue in his soul (157a3–b1). Socrates proposes to diagnose him in the following manner:

“Now, it is clear that if *sôphrosunê* is present in you, you are able to form some opinion about it. For it is necessary, surely, that by being inside you—if in fact it is—it provides some sensation [αἴσθησίν τινα], which would give you some opinion about it, as to what *sôphrosunê* is and what kind of thing it is [ὅτι ἐστὶν καὶ ὅποιόν τι].” [...] “Now then, in order that we may conjecture [τοπάσωμεν]<sup>9</sup> whether it is in you or not, tell me what you claim *sôphrosunê* to be, in your opinion [κατὰ τὴν σὴν δόξαν].”<sup>10</sup> (158e7–159a10)

After Charmides’ first attempt to define *sôphrosunê* as “a sort of calmness” (ἡσυχιότης τις: 159b5) has been examined and rejected, Socrates encourages him to try again:

“Then go back again, Charmides,” I said, “and with greater concentration look into yourself [εἰς σεαυτὸν ἀποβλέψας]<sup>11</sup>, and consider what sort of person *sôphrosunê* makes you by being present, and what sort of thing there is that would produce [ἀπεργάζοιτο ἄν] a person like that. When you’ve taken account of all of this, tell me well and bravely what it appears to you to be.”

And after pausing and examining the matter in relation to himself in a very manly way, he said, “Well then, it seems to me that *sôphrosunê* makes a person

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<sup>9</sup> For τοπάζω in the context of medical diagnosis, see Aristophanes *Wasps* 73.

<sup>10</sup> Translations from the *Charmides* are my own, unless otherwise noted. I have consulted with the translations in West and West 1986, Cooper 1997, and Tuozzo 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Reading T and W, and rejecting Burnet’s emendation: ἐμβλέψας.



feel shame and be sensitive to shame [αἰσχύνεσθαι ποιεῖν ἢ σωφροσύνη καὶ αἰσχυντηλὸν τὸν ἄνθρωπον], and that *sôphrosunê* is just what *aidôs* is.”  
(160d5–e5)

Socrates then sets to work:

“Very well,” I said. “Weren’t you just agreeing that *sôphrosunê* is a fine thing?”

“Absolutely,” he said.

“Then are they not also good men [ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες], the ones who are *sôphrônes*?”

“Yes.”

“Now, could something that produces [ἀπεργάζεται] good men fail to be a good thing?”<sup>12</sup>

“Of course not.”

“So then it is not only a fine thing, but also a good thing.”

“In my opinion it is.”

“What then?” I said. “Do you not trust Homer to be speaking finely [Ὁμήρῳ οὐ πιστεύεις καλῶς λέγειν] when he says that ‘*aidôs* is no good in a needy man’ [αἰδῶς δ’ οὐκ ἀγαθὴ κεχρημένῳ ἀνδρὶ παρεῖναι]?”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The text at 160e11 is likely corrupt. For a thorough discussion of the issues, see van der Ben 1985, 28–32. I adopt Schneider’s elegant solution (which preserves the validity of the subsequent inference): Ἄρ’ οὖν ἂν εἴη <μὴ> ἀγαθὸν ὃ [μὴ] ἀγαθοὺς ἀπεργάζεται. See Bloch 1973, 65, n. 18.

<sup>13</sup> *Od.* 17.347.

“I do [Ἐγὼ γάρ],” he said.

“So it looks like *aidôs* is a good thing and *not* a good thing.”

“Apparently.”

“But *sôphrosunê* is a good thing, if it does in fact make those in whom it is present good, and those in whom it is not present bad.”

“Why, yes, that’s the way it seems to me—as you say.”

“Then *sôphrosunê* would not be *aidôs*, if it does in fact happen to be a good thing, while *aidôs* is no more [οὐδὲν μᾶλλον] a good thing than a bad thing.”

“Well, in my opinion, Socrates,” he said, “that is the correct thing to say.”

(160e6–161b4)

Charmides abandons his definition and asks Socrates to examine a third account of *sôphrosunê*—“doing one’s own things” (τὸ τὰ ἑαυτοῦ πράττειν: 161b6)—which he recently heard from someone else. This someone else turns out to be Critias, who is seated on his other side. When Charmides again proves unable to defend the definition, a frustrated Critias tries to rescue it, and the spotlight turns on him and his own opinions about the virtue. In the second half of the dialogue, Socrates conducts a thorough examination of Critias’ claim that to be *sôphrôn* is to “know oneself”, as the Delphic inscription enjoins us to do (164e7–165a1). Charmides silently watches on, until Socrates addresses him once more at the conclusion of the dialogue.

There will be more to say about the rest of the conversation, but first I want to focus on Socrates’ refutation at 160d–161b. Here is my reconstruction of the argument:

- (1) *Sôphrosunê* is a fine or admirable (καλόν) thing.
- (2) Those who are *sôphrônes* are also good men (sc. because of their *sôphrosunê*).
- (3) Whatever causes men to be good must itself be a good (ἀγαθόν) thing.
- (4) *Sôphrosunê* is therefore not only a fine thing, but also a good thing.
- (5) *Aidôs* is no good in a needy man.
- (6) *Aidôs* is a good thing and not a bad thing.
- (7) *Aidôs* is no more a good thing than a bad thing.
- (8) *Sôphrosunê* and *aidôs* are not the same.

As I have presented it, Socrates' reasoning needs filling out.<sup>14</sup> In order for the refutation to work, the conclusion of the first half of the argument (premise 4) should be that *sôphrosunê* is a good thing *invariably* or *in every respect*, and so can never be a bad thing. Perhaps Socrates thinks that this is achieved by the causal principle at premise 3.<sup>15</sup> Out of charity, then, we could reconstruct the premise to read:

- (3\*) Whatever causes men to be good must itself be a good thing *invariably*.

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<sup>14</sup> Irwin (1995, 359, n. 13) puzzles over the inference from (1) to (2), for which I have supplied "because of their *sôphrosunê*".

<sup>15</sup> Socrates reiterates the causal claim at 161a8–9: "But *sôphrosunê* is a good thing, if it does in fact make [ποιεῖ] those in whom it is present good, and those in whom it is not present bad." Premise 3 recalls a more general Platonic principle (the principle of "causal synonymy"): if X causes Y to be F, then X is essentially (or strictly) F, and cannot be not-F in any respect. For instance, if fire causes the kettle to be hot, then fire is essentially or strictly hot, and it cannot admit of coldness in any respect. Likewise, if *sôphrosunê* causes a person to be good, then it cannot admit of badness in any respect. See Woodruff (1982, 153–55; 172–75) on "strict predication", and also Sedley 2006, 54–58. From a dramatic perspective, however, we have no reason to expect that Charmides would be familiar with any of this. I take that as further evidence for my view that his acceptance of the argument is premature. (See the next few paragraphs.)

It would then follow that *sôphrosunê* is never a bad thing (4\*). Since the goodness of *aidôs* is variable—it is “no more [οὐδὲν μᾶλλον] a good thing than a bad thing” (161b1)—it must not be the same as *sôphrosunê*.

Even on this charitable reading of Socrates’ argument, however, the passage remains puzzling in several respects. The first thing we should be struck by is the sheer brevity of the refutation, given the importance of *aidôs* in traditional morality, and its strong association with *sôphrosunê* in Greek thought.<sup>16</sup> Many of the characteristic qualities of the *sôphrôn*—being quiet and reserved in public, respecting elders and other authority figures, sexual modesty (especially in women and children), moderation in drinking, self-restraint in those with political power—could be attributed to the presence of *aidôs*.<sup>17</sup> To his audience in the wrestling school, one can imagine, Charmides’ definition would have seemed perfectly reasonable, and Socrates’ rejection of it awfully glib.<sup>18</sup> Yet Charmides accepts the conclusion without offering any resistance, and puts forward a new account of *sôphrosunê* that he learned from Critias.

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<sup>16</sup> For examples of the latter, see Homer *Il.* 21.462–9; *Od.* 4.158–60; Theognis 479–83; Aristophanes *Clouds* 960, 992–95, 1006; Thucydides 1.84; Plato *Phdr.* 253d3–e1; Xenophon *Constitution of the Spartans* 3.1–5. *Sôphrosunê* is sometimes treated as a less archaic synonym for *aidôs*. Compare Theognis 1135–50 with Hesiod *Op.* 190–200; Democritus 208DK with Theognis 409–10; Plato *Prt.* 323a with 322c. On the conceptual connection between *aidôs* and *sôphrosunê*, see North 1966, 5–7; Cairns 1993, 314–15; Tuozzo 2011, 91.

<sup>17</sup> See North 1966, 1: “What the classical sophrosyne shares with the Homeric *aidôs* is chiefly a fear of overstepping boundaries. It is for this reason that both can restrain *hybris*, the arrogant violation of limits set by the gods or by human society.”

<sup>18</sup> Cairns (1993, 373, n. 88) observes that “the ordinary Athenian might equally say of *aidôs* everything that Soc. says of *sôphrosunê*, and vice versa.” The refutation is a useful reminder that when Socrates is examining definitions, he is not relying on ordinary usage alone. His task is to a large extent revisionary.

Charmides' concession looks even more premature when we examine the key premise of the argument, quoted from Homer's *Odyssey*: "*aidôs* is no good in a needy man." The saying is likely to have been proverbial, seeing that a very similar line appears in Hesiod's *Works and Days*.<sup>19</sup> The general sense of the proverb is that *aidôs* is not a good quality to have when it inhibits a person from pursuing his rational self-interest.<sup>20</sup> In the context of Book 17 of the *Odyssey*, the "needy man" is Odysseus, who has returned to Ithaca disguised as a wandering beggar, in order to take vengeance on the suitors and reclaim his kingdom. When Telemachus sees him appear at the door to the palace, he sends the swineherd Eumaeus with instructions for his father to beg for scraps from the suitors, and to not let his sense of shame get in the way: "*aidôs* is no good in a needy man." At first blush, we might wonder why Socrates thinks this example shows anything significant about the value of *aidôs*. Even if a sense of shame may prevent a man from satisfying his hunger, Charmides could object that it is no less of a virtue for that.<sup>21</sup> The same might also be said in certain contexts of justice and courage—and, for that matter,

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<sup>19</sup> *Op.* 317: "*aidôs* is no good at providing for a needy man [αἰδῶς δ' οὐκ ἀγαθὴ κεχρημένον ἄνδρα κομίζειν]." The subsequent lines (318–19) read: "*aidôs*, which greatly harms men and also benefits them: for *aidôs* goes along with poverty, and boldness [θάρσος] goes along with wealth." (Trans. Most, with slight revisions.) See also *Il.* 24.44–45. For analysis of the Hesiod passage, see Cairns 1993, 148–51 and most recently Edwards 2012.

<sup>20</sup> See Tuozzo 2011, 164: "αἰδῶς, as a concern not to infringe upon the rightful claims of another, may sometimes turn into a hesitation to attend to one's own needs or to assert one's own justified claims. Insofar as αἰδῶς makes one fail to act out of a proper concern for oneself, it is not good."

<sup>21</sup> Charmides' wealthy and aristocratic status seems relevant here. Cairns (1993, 171) discusses the ideological role of *aidôs* in the elegies of Theognis: "That it is a mark of the *agathoi* to forego desirable ends achieved by unjust or disgraceful means implies that they are led to do so by their *aidôs*, and this is substantiated by passages like 83–6: 'Not even if you searched among all men would you find more than one ship would hold of those who have *aidôs* on their tongues and eyes, whom profit [*kerdos*] does not lead to disgraceful [*aischron*] dealing'." In a footnote, he adds: "Behind the distaste for improper *kerdos* in the Theognidea there probably lies a distaste for the commercial practices of the inferior classes" (171, n. 84).

*sôphrosunê* itself. That *aidôs* sometimes inhibits a person from fulfilling certain of his needs does not appear to be enough to prove that it is not a virtue. Before Charmides agrees with the quotation from Homer, he should consider *which* needs, if any, would justify a person in abandoning his sense of shame. His acceptance of Socrates' argument again seems premature.

Finally, we should note the peculiar way in which Socrates introduces the quotation from the *Odyssey*: "Do you not trust Homer to be speaking finely [Ὅμηρος οὐ πιστεύεις καλῶς λέγειν] when he says that...?" What Charmides is being asked to consider is not whether he thinks the saying about *aidôs* is true or justified, but whether he trusts *Homer* to speak well on the matter.<sup>22</sup> So when he replies, "I do" [Ἔγωγ'], he appears to be accepting the premise solely on the poet's authority. Socrates surely cannot think that this is a sound way to reach a conclusion about a matter of profound ethical significance, such as the nature of *sôphrosunê*.<sup>23</sup> But Charmides does not challenge the claim about *aidôs*, and the refutation follows inexorably from there.

Even if the conclusion of Socrates' argument is true, and *sôphrosunê* is not the same as *aidôs*, it seems clear that Charmides does not understand why this is so, and why *aidôs* is not the virtue he thought it to be. This should matter to him, however, because

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<sup>22</sup> Note the emphatic position of Ὅμηρος; see also *Prt.* 309a6–b2. Here I disagree with Tuozzo (2011, 165), who writes: "Socrates asks Charmides not simply to accept Homer's authority but rather whether he agrees with what Homer says in that passage."

<sup>23</sup> McCoy 2005, 144: "Socrates' response to this definition is peculiar. He gives no real argument, instead citing Homer's authority on the matter. See also Beversluis 2000, 141: "Charmides should have explained that he does not accept things on Homeric authority. He should have added that, in view of the fact that Socrates always objects when his interlocutors appeal to poetic authority, he is surprised to find him doing the same thing." By contrast, Bloch (1973, 66–69) argues that the appeal to Homer is legitimate, because the poet is an authority on the usage of *aidôs*.

*aidôs* is what he perceived when he looked inside himself to say what made him *sôphrôn*. But the understanding that Charmides lacks, I shall now argue, is made available to us, Plato's readers, through the opening scene of the dialogue. The ambivalence about *aidôs* expressed in the Homer quotation is justified through the portrait of Charmides himself. It will emerge that *aidôs* is the very quality that prevents him from engaging critically with Socrates' refutation, and from coming to recognize the thing he needs most.

### 3. Undressing Charmides

The opening narration of the *Charmides* takes up a quarter of the dialogue. It is punctuated by richly allusive passages in which Socrates describes the impression Charmides makes on him and the others in the wrestling school. At the climactic moment of the opening scene, Socrates asks a question that causes Charmides to blush, and he appears even more beautiful to Socrates than before. But the episode also points to the limitations of his *aidôs*, which surface in the dialectical exchange that follows. It is through the portrait of Charmides that we come to see why "*aidôs* is a good thing and not a good thing" (161a6).

Having been away on campaign for nearly three years, Socrates is eager to learn about the current state of "philosophy" in Athens, and whether any of the city's youths have distinguished themselves "in intelligence or beauty or both" (153d4–5). Critias looks toward the door and tells Socrates that he will know "straightaway" (154a3) who

the most beautiful one is. We learn that the young man entering with a crowd of admirers is Critias' cousin, Charmides, whom Socrates remembers fondly.<sup>24</sup> Here we are given some important details about Charmides' age. He was still a "boy" (παῖς: 154b4) when Socrates left Athens, but now he is a "lad" (μειράκιον: 154b5), which places him in adolescence.<sup>25</sup> Critias remarks that Socrates "will know straightaway both how grown up and what sort of person he has become" (154b6). For Socrates, however, things will not be so immediately apparent.

When Charmides finally emerges through the door, Socrates marvels at his stature and physical beauty.<sup>26</sup> But he is more interested in the effect that the youth's appearance has on everyone else in the room.

All of the others seemed to me, at least, to be in love with him—so stunned and excited [ἐκπεπληγμένοι τε καὶ τεθορυβημένοι ἦσαν] they became when he made his entrance—and indeed many other lovers were following among those behind him. Now there was little to marvel at on the part of us men. But I was also paying close attention to the boys, and noticed that not a single one of them was looking anywhere else [ἄλλος' ἔβλεπεν]—not even the littlest among them—but

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<sup>24</sup> Later we learn that Critias is also his "guardian" (ἐπίτροπος: 155a6). Charmides' father is deceased.

<sup>25</sup> See Nails 2002, 91.

<sup>26</sup> 154c1–2: ἐκεῖνος ἐμοὶ θαυμαστὸς ἐφάνη τό τε μέγεθος καὶ τὸ κάλλος.



all were gazing at him as if he were a statue [πάντες ὥσπερ ἄγαλμα ἐθεῶντο αὐτόν].<sup>27</sup> (154b8–c8)

Chaerephon jokes that if Charmides were willing to undress, Socrates would think he had no face at all,<sup>28</sup> so utterly beautiful is his figure (τὸ εἶδος πάγκαλός: 154d5). When the other men express their agreement, Socrates exclaims: “Heracles! What an irresistible man you speak of—if, that is, he happens to have only one small thing in addition. [...] If he happens to have been favored by nature [εὖ πεφυκώς] with respect to his soul” (154d7–e1). Critias assures him that in this area, too, his cousin is utterly fine and good (πάννυ καλὸς καὶ ἀγαθός: 154e4). And Socrates replies: “Then why don’t we undress this part of him and gaze at [ἐθεασάμεθα] it before we gaze at his figure? For surely now that he is all grown up, he is willing to have a conversation [διαλέγεσθαι]” (154e5–7). Again, Critias offers him assurance: “By all means, since as a matter of fact he is also a philosopher and, in the opinion of others and in his own,<sup>29</sup> quite a poet” (154e8–155a1).

The stage is now set for the drama that unfolds. Socrates will attempt to “undress” and “gaze at” Charmides’ soul by engaging him in conversation.<sup>30</sup> Critias comes up with a ruse to persuade his cousin to come speak with them. He sends a slave to tell Charmides that there is a doctor he wants him to consult with about his recent morning headaches.

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<sup>27</sup> The language here recalls the Palinode of the *Phaedrus* (see 248a ff.). For ἐκπλήσσω, see also *Smp.* 211d5, 216d3; *Amat.* 133a4–5.

<sup>28</sup> Literally he would be “faceless” (ἀπρόσωπος: 154d4–5).

<sup>29</sup> The manuscripts read: ὥς δοκεῖ ἄλλοις τε καὶ ἑαυτῷ. Bloch (1973, 22) suggests that it would be inapposite for Charmides to be said to have such a high estimation of his poetic abilities, given his modest character. In his view, the correct reading is ἐ<μ>αυτῷ, in which case Critias would be highlighting his own authority as an accomplished poet to give a verdict about Charmides’ abilities.

<sup>30</sup> For the theme of undressing, see *Tht.* 162b, 169b; *Prt.* 352a–b.

Socrates agrees to play along and will pretend to know a cure.<sup>31</sup> We now come to the dialogue's most memorable episode. As Charmides approaches, his admirers jostle with each other to make room for him to sit down, forcing the man at one end of the bench to stand up, and knocking the other one to the ground. Socrates recounts what happened next:

But he came and sat down between myself and Critias. Now here, my friend, is where *I* began to fall into confusion [ἡπόρουν], and my former boldness was knocked out of me—the boldness I had when I supposed it would be very easy to carry on a conversation with him. But when, after Critias told him that I was the one who knew the cure, he looked into my eyes in such an irresistible way [ἐνέβλεψέν τέ μοι τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἀμήχανόν τι οἶον],<sup>32</sup> and was preparing to ask a question, and everyone in the palaestra was flowing around us in a complete circle—it was then, my noble fellow, that I saw what was inside his cloak [εἰδόν τε τὰ ἐντὸς τοῦ ἱματίου] and started to burn and was beside myself. And I deemed Cydias to be the wisest in erotic matters; for he said, advising another about a beautiful boy: “Take caution lest a fawn coming before a lion be caught as a portion of meat.” For I myself thought that I had been caught by such a creature. Nevertheless, when he asked if I knew the cure for his head, with difficulty I somehow answered that I did know it. (155c4–e3)

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<sup>31</sup> To no avail: Charmides is never deceived about the identity of the “doctor” (see 156a4).

<sup>32</sup> West and West (1986) translate “looked at me with his eyes”, but this seems redundant.

Here Socrates' *erôs* is aroused far more intensely than when Charmides first came into view. The glimpse of "what was inside his cloak" sets him aflame, and he struggles to maintain his composure and keep up the ruse.<sup>33</sup> I draw attention to this episode because in a moment Socrates will be even more deeply impressed by Charmides' beauty, and we shall need to ask why.

Once he has managed to collect himself, Socrates explains the nature of the remedy: "I said that it was a certain leaf, and that there was a certain incantation that went along with it. And if one sang it at the same time as he used the leaf, the remedy would make him healthy in every respect; but without the incantation, the leaf would have no benefit at all [οὐδὲν ὄφελος]." (155e5–8) He tells Charmides that he learned the cure from one of the Thracian doctors of the cult of Zalmoxis, who held that just as the eyes cannot be healed without treating the head, nor the head without the whole body, so the body cannot be healed without treating the soul.

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<sup>33</sup> McCabe (2007, 13) points out that the referent of the euphemistic expression "what was inside his cloak" (τὰ ἐντὸς τοῦ ἱματίου) is indeterminate: "it includes not only the most exciting part of Charmides' anatomy, but his soul too, the part that Socrates says he is interested in." Does Socrates see Charmides' soul through his eyes? The temporal markers (ἐπειδὴ δὲ ... τότε δὴ) might suggest this: "But when [...] he looked into my eyes [...] it was then [i.e. when he looked into my eyes], my noble fellow, that I saw what was inside his cloak." Notice the contrast of aorist and imperfect verbs: ἐπειδὴ δὲ [...] ἐνέβλεψέν τέ [...] καὶ ἀνήγετο [...] καὶ οἱ [...] περιέρρεον [...] τότε δὴ, ὃ γεννάδα, εἶδόν τε [...] καὶ ἐφλεγόμην. Charmides "looked" and "was preparing", and—while the others "were flowing around"—Socrates "saw" and "started to burn". If Charmides' gaze was really as "irresistible" (ἀμήχανόν) as Socrates claims, it would perhaps be surprising if he was then distracted by another, more alluring, part of his body. The adjective ἀμήχανον echoes the more poetic ἄμαχον at 154d7, where Socrates says that Charmides will be "irresistible" if his soul also happens to be favored by nature. Any way we choose to read the passage, we should be careful not to take a reductive view of Socrates' *erôs*. See Tuozzo 2011, 109–10.

“For he said that all things stem from the soul, what is both bad and good for the body and for the entire human being, and they flow from there just as from the head to the eyes.<sup>34</sup> So that must be taken care of first and foremost, if both the head and the rest of the body are going to be in a fine condition. And he said that the soul, my blessed fellow, is cared for by means of certain incantations, and that these incantations consist in beautiful discourse [τὰς δ’ ἐπαδὰς ταύτας τοὺς λόγους εἶναι τοὺς καλοὺς]. And it is from this kind of discourse that *sôphrosunê* comes to be, and when it has come to be and is present, it is then easy to provide health both to the head and to the rest of the body.” (156e6–157b1)

The Thracian doctor, Socrates says, ordered him never to cure the head of a patient who had not provided his soul for treatment—no matter how rich or high born or beautiful the person happened to be. So if Charmides is willing to first submit himself to the incantations, Socrates will administer the remedy.

At this point Critias intervenes and says that his cousin “is thought to be far and away the most *sôphrôn* of his peers; and in all other respects, for someone of his age, he is second to none” (157b6–8). Here we reach the climax of the opening narration, when Socrates asks a question that will give him an even clearer glimpse of Charmides’ beauty. He begins with a brief encomium to the young man’s illustrious ancestors, who had been praised by the greatest poets for their “beauty and virtue and the rest of what is called

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<sup>34</sup> See *Rep.* 518c4–d1.

happiness [κάλλει τε καὶ ἀρετῇ καὶ τῇ ἄλλῃ λεγομένη εὐδαιμονία].” He then turns his focus on Charmides himself:

“Since you have come from such as these, you are likely to be first in all things.<sup>35</sup> Now with respect to your visible features, my dear son of Glaucon, in my opinion you bring disgrace on none of your forebears.<sup>36</sup> But if, indeed, you are also sufficiently [ἱκανῶς] endowed by nature with *sôphrosunê* and the rest, as this man attests, then a blessed child, my dear Charmides,” I said, “your mother bore in you.<sup>37</sup> So this is how things stand: if *sôphrosunê* is already present in you, as Critias here says, and you are sufficiently [ἱκανῶς] *sôphrôn*, then you have no further need of the incantations of Zalmoxis or of Abaris the Hyperborean, and the cure for your head should be given to you right away. But if you seem to be still in need of [ἐπιδεής] these things, you must be sung to before you receive the drug. So tell me yourself: do you agree with this man and do you claim that you already partake sufficiently [ἱκανῶς] of *sôphrosunê*—or are you in need of [ἐνδεής] it?” (158a6–c4)

The question elicits a striking response:

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<sup>35</sup> The phrase ἐκ δὲ τοιούτων γεγονότα echoes 157a5 (ἐκ δὲ τῶν τοιούτων λόγων...ἐγγίγνεσθαι), where Socrates had said that *sôphrosunê* is engendered by the “beautiful discourse” of the incantations. Notice that he says it is only “likely” (εἰκός) that happiness has come to Charmides through his ancestry.

<sup>36</sup> Reading T: τῶν προγόνων κατασχύνειν.

<sup>37</sup> μακάριον σε [...] ἢ μήτηρ ἔτικτεν. As West and West (1986, 22, n. 21) observe, the line echoes Telemachus’ remark about his father at *Od.* 3.95: πέρι γάρ μιν οἴζυρὸν τέκε μήτηρ (“A wretched child his mother bore in him”). I explore further connections between the *Charmides* and the *Odyssey* in §5 below.

At first Charmides blushed and appeared still more beautiful [ἔτι καλλίων ἐφάνη]—for his sensitivity to shame was becoming at his age [καὶ γὰρ τὸ αἰσχυνηλὸν αὐτοῦ τῇ ἡλικίᾳ ἔπρεψεν]—then he also answered in a way that was not ignoble. For he said that it was not easy, in the present circumstances, either to agree or to disagree with what was being asked. “For if I deny being *sôphrôn*,” he said, “not only is it out of place [ἄτοπον] for someone to say such things in regard to himself, but I will also give the lie to Critias here, as well as many others in whose opinion I am *sôphrôn*, as he says. Then again, if I claim that I am and I praise myself, perhaps it will appear offensive [ἐπαχθὲς φανεῖται]. Therefore, I am unable to give you an answer.” (158c5–d6)

Notice that, in Socrates’ eyes, Charmides’ blush makes him appear “still more beautiful”—more beautiful, even, than when Socrates saw “what was inside his cloak” and nearly lost his senses. Why does Socrates find such beauty in his blush?

In his classic work, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, Darwin describes blushing as “the most peculiar and the most human of all expressions.”<sup>38</sup> Plato was no less fascinated by the phenomenon of blushing: there are six dialogues in the Platonic corpus narrated by Socrates, and each contains at least one blushing episode.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Darwin 2009 [1872], 310.

<sup>39</sup> *Amat.* 134b (the Rival Lover); *Lys.* 204b–c (Hippothales), 213d (Lysis); *Euthd.* 275d (Cleinias), 297a (Dionysodorus); *Prot.* 312a (Hippocrates); *Rep.* 350d (Thrasymachus). Many scholars doubt the authenticity of the *Amatores* (“Rival Lovers”). If indeed Plato did not write it, this may show that his imitators were aware of the Platonic Socrates’ interest in blushing. The same could be said about the spurious *Eryxias*, which contains two such episodes (395c, 397b). For a general

What accounts for this fascination? I believe that the *Charmides* suggests an answer.

What Socrates sees is not just the flush of Charmides' cheek, but an aspect of his soul—the very thing he wanted to “undress” and “gaze at” before admiring his figure.<sup>40</sup>

Charmides' blush reveals a particular quality of his soul, namely his “sensitivity to shame” (τὸ αἰσχυντηλόν) or *aidôs*. His emotional state is perhaps best understood as a combination of shame and embarrassment (the ancient Greeks did not have separate words for the two emotions). Charmides feels shame at the prospect of answering Socrates' question because he anticipates that either response would be indecent, and would lower him in the eyes of his audience. He blushes at the thought. He also feels embarrassment, insofar as he is conscious of his inability to produce an answer, when both Socrates and Critias have just raised the expectations of everyone in the room.<sup>41</sup>

But why is Socrates so attracted to Charmides' *aidôs*? On the one hand, his admiration reflects a traditional conception of the virtues proper to youth. Charmides

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discussion of Platonic blushing (with a focus on Thrasymachus), see Gooch (1987), who oddly misses out the *Charmides* episode.

<sup>40</sup> Charmides' blush reveals his soul *in* or *through* his body. See Xenophon *Memorabilia* 3.10, where Socrates asks the painter Parrhasius whether his art is capable only of representing beautiful bodies, or whether it can also represent the soul. “Or is [the soul] not a subject for representation at all?” Parrhasius replies: “How could it be, Socrates, when it has neither shape nor color nor any of the other qualities that you mentioned just now, and is not even visible at all?” Socrates points out that the soul's qualities are revealed through facial expressions and bodily gestures, which are themselves visible: “dignity and freedom, insolence and vulgarity – all show themselves both in the face and in the gestures of still and moving subjects.” (Trans. Tredennick, rev. Waterfield) See also Scruton 1986, 66: “In blushing and smiling, another is revealed in the life of his body. In our experience of these things, our sense of the animal unity of the other combines with our sense of his unity as a person, and we perceive these two unities as an indissoluble whole.”

<sup>41</sup> My analysis of embarrassment is indebted to Taylor 1985: “The tension and confusion so typical of embarrassment are due to [the subject's] seeing the situation as creating a demand to which he is unable to respond” (69).

embodies an aristocratic ideal of modesty, respectfulness, and reticence that was praised by contemporary moralists.<sup>42</sup> But I think that the text suggests a different explanation. I want to propose that the beauty of Charmides' *aidôs*, in Socrates' eyes, is explained by the cognitive structure of shame. Shame involves a complex perception of how I appear from another point of view. As Darwin writes, "It is not the simple act of reflecting on our own appearance, but the thinking of what others think of us, which excites the blush."<sup>43</sup> Both Plato and Aristotle define shame as a fear for one's reputation, for the way one is thought of by others.<sup>44</sup> This is not to say that shame is a reaction merely to what *others* think. It seems that shame is most often felt, or felt most deeply, when I accept the judgment of my audience. As we have seen, Charmides is not just afraid of being criticized by others. He anticipates that one way of answering Socrates' question would be "out of place" (ἄτοπον), and that the other way might seem "offensive" (ἐπαχθές). These are evaluative concepts that he shares with his community, and that he would use to judge someone else in his situation.<sup>45</sup> Charmides' *aidôs* implies the acceptance of standards that transcend his own subjective point of view, and against which his opinions and actions are measured.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See the speech of the Better Argument in Aristophanes' *Clouds*. Of special relevance is Xenophon's account of Spartan education in the *Constitution of the Spartans* (see esp. 3.1–5).

<sup>43</sup> Darwin 2009 [1872], 324. See also Scruton 1986, 65: "Blushing is a response, intimately connected with our sense of how we appear in another's perspective."

<sup>44</sup> See Chapter 1, §3 above.

<sup>45</sup> See Williams 1993.

<sup>46</sup> Here I think Plato anticipates Aristotle's remarks about *aidôs* in the final chapter of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (10.9): "In fact, however, arguments seem to have enough influence to stimulate and encourage the civilized ones [τοὺς ἐλευθερίους] among the young people, and perhaps to make virtue take possession of a well-born character that truly loves what is fine [ἡθὺς τ' εὐγενὲς καὶ ὡς ἀληθῶς φιλόκαλον]; but they seem unable to turn the many toward being fine



My proposal is that Socrates finds beauty in Charmides' *aidôs* because it contains the seed of his own philosophical disposition. Socrates' practice of self-examination requires detaching himself from his own opinions and transforming them into objects to be evaluated from an objective point of view. This ability to view himself from a critical distance is revealed in Charmides' blush, as well as in his verbal response, which Socrates describes as "not ignoble". Rather than saying the first thing that comes to his mind, Charmides is circumspect. He calmly explains why either way of answering would be inappropriate and reaches a characteristically Socratic conclusion: "Therefore, I am unable to give you an answer."<sup>47</sup> Charmides is in a state of *aporia*: he is aware that he does not know what to say.<sup>48</sup>

Considered in another way, however, the resemblance between Charmides' *aidôs* and Socrates' disposition is merely superficial. Charmides explains his difficulties wholly in terms of what others would think of him, were he to affirm or deny being *sôphrôn*. But a genuinely Socratic answer would look something like this: "How can I say whether or

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and good [πρὸς καλοκαγαθίαν προτρέψασθαι]. For the many naturally obey fear, not *aidôs*; they avoid what is base because of the penalties, not because it is shameful [διὰ τὸ αἰσχρὸν]. For since they live by their feelings, they pursue their proper pleasures and the sources of them, and avoid the opposed pains, and have not even a notion of what is fine and [hence] truly pleasant, since they have had no taste of it. [...] Arguments and teaching surely do not prevail on everyone, but the soul of the student needs to have been prepared by habits for enjoying and hating finely, like ground that is to nourish seed. For someone who lives in accord with his feelings would not even listen to an argument turning him away, or comprehend it [if he did listen]; and in that state how could he be persuaded to change? And in general feelings seem to yield to force, not to argument. Hence we must already in some way have a character suitable for virtue, fond of what is fine and objecting to what is shameful [στέργον τὸ καλὸν καὶ δυσχεραῖνον τὸ αἰσχρόν]." (1179b7–31; trans. Irwin, with slight revisions) See Burnyeat 1980.

<sup>47</sup> Bloch (1973, 44) notes the rhetorical elegance of Charmides' response: ἐὰν μὲν γὰρ [...] ἄμα μὲν [...] ἄμα δὲ [...] ἐὰν δ' αὖ [...].

<sup>48</sup> See *Chrm.* 167b7–8: [Socrates:] "For I am puzzled [ἀπορῶ]. Shall I explain to you what I am puzzled about?"

not I'm *sôphrôn*, when I'm not even sure that I understand what the thing you are asking about, *sôphrosunê*, is? Let's investigate the matter."<sup>49</sup> We might say that Charmides, by contrast, is in a state of merely "social" *aporia*. His inability to answer is the result not of any genuine puzzlement about the truth of the matter, but rather of his audience's (and his own) expectations about what it would be appropriate for him to say. Indeed, the answer he does give Socrates is perfectly compatible with his believing that he does possess the virtue sufficiently.<sup>50</sup> He may even think that he responded in the "most *sôphrôn*" (157d6) way possible for someone in his awkward position.

As we have seen, Charmides' blush reveals his ability to evaluate himself from an external perspective. But at the same time, that perspective reflects the attitudes and expectations of his community, which Charmides fails to transcend. Socratic conversation, by contrast, aspires to inhabit a critical perspective that is not bound by social norms. Consider the *Crito*, where Crito attempt to persuade Socrates to escape his impending execution. Among the considerations that Crito raises is the shameful prospect that they will be regarded as cowards (45d–46a). In reply, Socrates asks him whose opinions they should be bearing in mind when deciding what to do (46c). "In cases of just and unjust things, shameful and fine ones, good and bad ones—in cases of what we're now deliberating about—is it the opinion of the majority we should follow and fear? Or is it the opinion of the one man—if there is one who understands these things—we

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<sup>49</sup> See *Chrm.* 165b5–c2.

<sup>50</sup> Contrast Crito's response at *Crito* 50a4–5: "I am not able, Socrates, to answer the question you are asking. For I do not know [οὐ γὰρ ἐννοῶ]."

should respect and fear [αἰσχύνεσθαι καὶ φοβεῖσθαι] above all others?”<sup>51</sup> (47c9–47d3) Crito agrees that it is the opinion of the one man, and a moment later Socrates reiterates the point: “Then, my very good friend, we should not give so much thought [φροντιστέον<sup>52</sup>] to what the majority of people will say about us, but think instead of what the one who understands just and unjust things will say—the one and the truth itself [ὁ εἷς, καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ ἀλήθεια]” (48a5–b7). Notice that Socrates abstracts away from the points of view of any particular others, first, to that of “the one who understands these things”, and then, to that of “the truth itself”. But in order to determine what “the truth itself” will say about the justice of my actions, I need to determine whether or not my actions are just, independently of what anyone might say. Socratic inquiry may start by considering the opinions of others, but it aims to eventually leave them behind.

Although Socrates views Charmides’ *aidôs* as the most beautiful thing about him, the passage suggests a deep ambivalence about this quality in his soul. Recall Socrates’ remark that the young man’s sensitivity to shame was “becoming at his age” (158c6). The opening scene of the dialogue has provided us with several details about his age, which place him in a transitional stage between boyhood and manhood. This should prompt us to ask how much longer his *aidôs* will remain a thing of beauty in Socrates’ eyes. Socrates’ aim in the conversation that follows will be to turn Charmides’ gaze away from the opinions of those around him, and towards himself and “the truth itself”. But

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<sup>51</sup> Trans. Reeve, with slight revisions.

<sup>52</sup> See Aristotle *Rhetoric* 2.6.

Charmides will prove to be less willing to participate than his cousin had implied (154e5–155a1).

#### 4. The limitations of *aidôs*

We are now in a position to revisit the passage with which we began. Earlier we saw that the refutation of Charmides' claim that *aidôs* and *sôphrosunê* are the same was suspect, and that Charmides seemed to accept it prematurely. In the light of the dialogue's opening narration, it becomes clear that Charmides' shame is what prevents him from challenging the refutation, and from understanding the limitations of his *aidôs*.

Immediately after the blushing episode, Charmides is told to give his opinion about the nature of *sôphrosunê* based on the sensation it creates inside him (158e6–159a10). Socrates now adds another stroke to his portrait: “And at first he was hesitant [ᾤκνεῖ] and was not quite willing to answer” (159b1–2). The verb ᾤκνέω, which I have translated “hesitate”, often connotes shame or embarrassment. Charmides seems to be afraid that stating his opinion will expose him to criticism or ridicule. His initial definition of *sôphrosunê*, as a “sort of calmness” (159b5), is safe and conventional—as Socrates notes, it is the kind of thing “they say” (159b7–8). Socrates then leads him through a refutation that is as contentious as the one that will follow, and meets with no resistance. Charmides is now told to look inside himself “with greater concentration” and say what sort of person *sôphrosunê* makes him, and what sort of thing would make him

like that. Socrates wants him to pay attention not to what others say about the virtue, but to what he perceives about himself.<sup>53</sup>

“And after pausing and examining the matter in relation to himself in a very manly way [πάνυ ἀνδρικῶς], he said, ‘Well then, it seems to me that *sôphrosunê* makes a person feel shame and be sensitive to shame, and that *sôphrosunê* is just what *aidôs* is’” (160e2–5). Charmides’ answer displays a certain type of self-knowledge, namely of his own psychological disposition. But he is not aware of the limitations of his sense of shame and mistakes it for genuine virtue. Socrates tries to purge him of this conceit by exposing a conflict in his beliefs about the value of *aidôs*. He first gets Charmides to agree that *sôphrosunê*, whatever it may turn out to be, is a good thing, and then invokes the line from Homer: “*aidôs* is no good in a needy man.” Recall the puzzling fact that Socrates introduces the quotation with an appeal to the poet’s authority. We can now provide an explanation: Charmides fails to challenge the argument because of his *aidôs*.<sup>54</sup> For him to question Homer’s authority would be a bold act of self-assertion; it would seem to place his own judgment above the wisdom of the poet. Charmides has to set his *aidôs* aside in order to discover whether Homer is speaking the truth. In support of this reading, compare Socrates’ remark at the start of Book 10 of the *Republic*, when he is

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<sup>53</sup> Tuozzo (2011, 162) suggests that Charmides perceives his own shame at having just been refuted: “The last example Socrates adduced in the earlier refutation is particularly relevant. Socrates had remarked that those who are able to find the right answer without difficulty are worthy of praise. Charmides has just failed to find the right answer in their current investigation. He must realize that his performance in the investigation has fallen short of being praiseworthy. Charmides, in a word, is embarrassed. [...] In reflecting on himself at this moment to discover what effect σωφροσύνη has on him, Charmides takes his cue from his present embarrassment and concludes that σωφροσύνη is modesty (αἰδώς).”

<sup>54</sup> See also McCoy 2005, 143ff.

about to begin the final critique of poetry. “I must say what’s on my mind—and yet a certain affection and *aidôs* I’ve had for Homer since I was a boy inhibits me from speaking. [...] All the same, no man is to be honored before the truth” (595b9–c4). Socrates realizes that he must overcome his *aidôs* for the sake of the philosophical inquiry.<sup>55</sup> Again, this does not mean that Socrates is merely afraid of what others will think. He has internalized a social norm of respect and deference towards Homer, and breaching it would cause him to feel shame in his own eyes. Nonetheless, he recognizes that this attitude should not determine his actions when it conflicts with the goal of carrying through the discussion.

This is a lesson that Charmides has not yet learned. Instead of questioning Homer’s claim about *aidôs*, he takes the poet at his word, and quickly proposes a third definition of *sôphrosunê* that he heard from Critias. Through Charmides’ very failure to examine the refutation, however, Plato shows *us* the truth behind the quotation. *Aidôs* is not a good quality in Charmides insofar as it prevents him from better understanding the virtue that he lacks.

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<sup>55</sup> Compare Parmenides’ remark to the young Socrates, who does not deign to puzzle over [ἀπορεῖς] whether there are forms of hair and mud: “That’s because you are still young, Socrates,” said Parmenides, “and philosophy has not yet gripped you as, in my opinion, it will in the future, once you begin to consider none of the cases beneath your notice [οὐδὲν αὐτῶν ἀτιμάσεις]. Now, though, you still care about what people think, because of your youth [νῦν δὲ ἔτι πρὸς ἀνθρώπων ἀποβλέπεις δόξας διὰ τὴν ἡλικίαν]” (130e1–e4). Trans. Gill and Ryan in Cooper 1997.

## 5. Homeric echoes

Before concluding, I want to explore a further significance of the Homer quotation for interpreting the *Charmides*. It is not simply Homer who says that “*aidôs* is no good in a needy man”—but the poet in the voice of Telemachus, Odysseus’ son. Plato’s portrait of the young Charmides recalls the story of Telemachus in the *Odyssey* in a number of striking ways.<sup>56</sup> When we first meet Telemachus at the start of the epic, his most distinguishing characteristics are his physical beauty and stature, as well as his *aidôs*.<sup>57</sup> Like Charmides, he is in a transitional stage between youth and manhood. His *aidôs* shows itself positively in his observance of the customs of guest-friendship, in his respect for elders, and in his *nemesis* (“moral indignation”) towards the suitors.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, he fails to stand up to the suitors for fear of being mocked. A central theme of Telemachus’ story is his struggle to overcome his boyish *aidôs* and achieve the virtue proper to a man. In the opening book, the goddess Athena visits Telemachus in the likeness of a foreign king. She urges him first to call an assembly and order the suitors to return to their homes, and then to embark on a voyage to the kingdoms of Nestor and Menelaus, to learn of his father’s fate. On returning, he is to take vengeance on the suitors for the wrongs done to him and his father: “for it does not beseem you to practice

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<sup>56</sup> Laurence Lampert (2010, 150–53) discusses larger parallels between the *Charmides* and the *Odyssey*, in particular how Socrates’ homecoming from the battle at Spartolus is modeled after Odysseus’ *nostos*. Lampert does not explore the connection between Telemachus and Charmides.

<sup>57</sup> Telemachus’ beauty and stature: *Od.* 1.301 (καλόν τε μέγαν τε); cf. 3.199–200; 18.219. Compare Socrates’ remark about Charmides at 154c1–2 (ἐκεῖνος ἔμοι θαυμαστός ἐφάνη τό τε μέγεθος καὶ τὸ κάλλος).

<sup>58</sup> Telemachus’ *aidôs*: *Od.* 1.158; cf. 1.228–29. See Cairns 1993, 103–5; 133–34).

childish ways, since you are no longer of such an age” (1.296–97).<sup>59</sup> In the following scene he boldly speaks his mind to the suitors, as they “marvel” at his newfound courage.<sup>60</sup> He shows disdain for the *nemesis* of the suitor Antinous (1. 389), and asserts his right to rule.

But on the journey to learn news of his father’s homecoming, Telemachus’ *aidôs* returns. At the start of Book 3, his ship reaches Nestor’s kingdom at Pylos. Athena, now in the guise of Mentor, advises him not to let *aidôs* prevent him from discovering the truth about his father (3.14–20). Telemachus is apprehensive: “Mentor, how shall I go, and how shall I greet him? I am as yet unversed in subtle speech, and moreover a young man has *aidôs* to question an elder” (3.22–24). Athena tells him to trust in himself and in the gods. At the palace, she inspires Telemachus with the boldness to be forthright with the king and seek the unvarnished truth.<sup>61</sup>

In Book 4 Telemachus is brought to the kingdom of Menelaus by Nestor’s son, Peisistratus. With the goddess no longer at his side, however, *aidôs* gets the better of Telemachus once again. When Menelaus comments on the young man’s striking resemblance to Odysseus, Telemachus can only weep and hide his face in his cloak.

Peisistratus must answer for him: “Menelaus, son of Atreus, fostered by Zeus, leader of

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<sup>59</sup> Translations from the *Odyssey* are by A. T. Murray (rev. Dimock), with minor revisions.

<sup>60</sup> θαύμαζον: 1.382; cf. 18.411. Socrates’ description of Charmides’ entrance into the *palaistra* echoes Telemachus’ appearance before the assembly at the start of Book 2: “and all the men marveled at [θηεῦντο] him as he came” (2.13).

<sup>61</sup> Telemachus himself tells Nestor not to feel *aidôs*: “And do not out of *aidôs* or pity for me speak soothing words, but tell me truly what evidence you came upon” (3.96–97). At *Chrm.* 158b4 (μακάριόν σε...ἢ μήτηρ ἔτικτεν), Socrates echoes Telemachus’ remark about his father: πέρι γάρ μιν ὀϊζυρὸν τέκε μήτηρ (*Od.* 3.95; cf. 4.325). Also compare Nestor’s praise of Telemachus at *Od.* 3.124–5 (οὐδέ κε φαίης | ἄνδρα νεώτερον ὧδε εἰκότα μυθήσασθαι) with Socrates’ praise of Charmides at 158d7 (μοι εἰκότα φαίνη λέγειν, ὦ Χαρμίδη).



hosts, indeed this youth is his son, as you say. But he is *saophrôn* and feels *nemesis* at heart [νεμεσσᾷται δ' ἐνὶ θυμῷ] thus on his first coming to make a show of forward words in the presence of you, in whose voice we both take delight as in a god's" (4.156–60). It is only the following morning that Telemachus explains the reason for his visit, in the same manner in which he had addressed Nestor (4.315–31). Menelaus tells him everything he had hoped to learn (and much more) and offers to host the pair in his palace for eleven nights, before sending them home with splendid gifts. But Telemachus politely asks to leave without further delay and declines the gifts as impractical. Even though such haste could be seen as an affront, Menelaus applauds him for being forthright.<sup>62</sup> This marks a significant change in Telemachus' character and outlook. Unaided by the goddess, he refuses to let *aidôs* prevent him from fulfilling his goal of returning to Ithaca and exacting vengeance on the suitors.

It is in the light of these earlier scenes that we need to interpret Telemachus' remark about *aidôs* in Book 17. By this point in the story, father and son have reunited and devised a plot to reclaim the kingdom. Odysseus will go to his palace disguised as a wandering beggar, to test how the suitors treat him. When Telemachus sees his father appear at the threshold, he fills a basket with food and tells the loyal swineherd Eumaeus to bring it to the old man: "Take, and give this to the stranger, and bid him go about himself and beg of the suitors one and all: *aidôs* is no good in a needy man" (17.345–47).

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<sup>62</sup> In Book 15, Telemachus again has to refuse Menelaus' gifts, and avoids being detained by Nestor at Pylos. On the relationship between *aidôs* and the norms of guest-friendship, see Cairns 1993, 110–12.

The remark is one of several signs in the later books of the *Odyssey* that Telemachus has outgrown his boyish sense of shame and achieved a new, more mature perspective.<sup>63</sup>

Telemachus' message to Odysseus takes on multiple meanings at once. For the swineherd, who is ignorant of the beggar's identity, it means that a man should not let his shame at having to beg prevent him from satisfying his hunger. When he delivers the message to Odysseus, he slightly alters the maxim: "*aidōs*, he says, is no good in a beggar man [αἰδῶ δ' οὐκ ἀγαθὴν φησ' ἔμμεναι ἀνδρὶ προΐκτη]" (17.352). The shift from "needy" (κεχρημένος) to "beggar" (προΐκτης) is significant, because it shows that Eumaeus does not understand the true nature of Odysseus' need.<sup>64</sup> As a message from Telemachus to his father, however, it means that Odysseus should not let his shame at being abused interfere with the plan to slaughter the suitors, restore his honor, and reunite with his wife.<sup>65</sup> We can also interpret Telemachus as giving advice to himself: *he* must

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<sup>63</sup> At *Od.* 17.188–9, the swineherd remarks to Odysseus about his son: ἀλλὰ τὸν αἰδέομαι καὶ δεῖδια, μὴ μοι ὀπίσσω | νεικέῃ. Telemachus is now the *object* of *aidōs*. Cf. 17.15, 489–91; 18.406–11; 20.69; 24.506–12.

<sup>64</sup> In her recent commentary, Deborah Steiner (2010) offers a different explanation for why the swineherd alters the message: "The speech reported by Eumaeus repeats Telemachus' words in *oratio oblique*, a technique very common in H. and probably a hallmark of oral composition. In the second instance, however, the speaker replaces the subjective and humiliating term *κεχρημένωι* with the more neutral *προΐκτηι*" (124). I doubt that this adequately accounts for the shift. Later on in the scene, the suitor Antinous insults Odysseus by calling him a "bold and shameless beggar" (θαρσαλέος καὶ ἀναιδής [...] προΐκτης: 17.499). He also has a narrow view of what is driving Odysseus. On the significance of *κεχρημένος* for Odysseus, see my next note.

<sup>65</sup> The adjective *κεχρημένος* is applied to Odysseus in the opening lines of the epic, where he is described as "longing for" (*κεχρημένον*) his return and his wife (1.13). An exchange between Odysseus and the swineherd in Book 14 points forward to the different interpretations of "need" in Book 17. Eumaeus says to the stranger: "wanderers in need [*κεχρημένοι*] of sustenance tell lies at random, and have no desire to speak the truth. [...] And readily would you too, old man, fashion a story, if one would give you a cloak and a tunic to wear." Odysseus then promises him that his king shall indeed return. "And let me have a reward for bearing good tidings, as soon as he shall come, and reach his home; clothe me in a cloak and a tunic, handsome clothes. But before that, however sore my need [*κεχρημένος*], I will accept nothing; for hateful in my eyes as

not let his *aidôs* at allowing a beggar (his own father, no less) to be mistreated within his house prevent him from carrying out the plot.<sup>66</sup> In the following book, Penelope rebukes him for letting Odysseus fight another beggar for the suitors' entertainment:

“Telemachus, your mind and your thoughts are no longer steadfast as heretofore. Even when you were still a child you behaved more intelligently; but now that you are grown and have reached the bounds of manhood, and would be called a rich man's son by one who looked only to your stature and handsome appearance, being himself a stranger from afar, your mind and your thoughts are no longer right as before. What a thing is this that has been done in these halls, that you have let this stranger be so maltreated! How would it be if the stranger, while sitting as he does in our house, should come to some harm through being roughly dragged about? On you, then, would fall shame and disgrace among men.

(18.215–25)

Telemachus replies: “My mother, I do not feel *nemesis* towards [νεμεσῶμαι] you for being angry; I myself am aware of and understanding everything, the good and the bad; but before this I thought as a child” (18.227–29). The mature Telemachus of the later books is by no means insensitive to the disgrace he invites for allowing the beggars to fight (just as Odysseus is not insensitive to the suitors' abuses). But he has learned to

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the gates of Hades is that man who, yielding to the stress of poverty, tells a deceitful tale.” Odysseus feels *aidôs* at the thought of deceiving Eumaeus for the sake of clothes. But he will not feel *aidôs* at using deception for the sake of revenge. (For Odysseus as κερημένον, see also 20.378.)

<sup>66</sup> On the importance of the treatment of beggars to the concept of *aidôs*, see Cairns 1993, 105–8.

subordinate his *aidôs* within a wider practical outlook, in which social expectations will play a less determining role. With his new understanding of “the good and the bad”, Telemachus may have to set *aidôs* aside for the sake of more urgent needs.

I suspect that the parallels between Telemachus and Charmides would have been obvious to Plato’s fourth-century audience. Charmides, too, is carefully observant of social norms and hesitant to speak out in Socrates’ presence. Recall the famous scene in the dialogue where Charmides sits down next to Socrates and reveals “what was inside his cloak” (155d3). Socrates describes how Charmides “was preparing” (ἀνήγετο: 155d1) to ask his question, and everyone in the wrestling school “was flowing around” (περιέρρεον: 155d2) them in a circle. It is tempting to hear echoes of the young Telemachus embarking on his voyage across the sea, in order to find out what he needs to know.<sup>67</sup> For Socrates’ purposes, however, the question is whether Charmides will see the resemblance between himself and Homer’s young hero. But if Charmides is going to learn from the example of Telemachus, he cannot use it uncritically as a model for his own moral development. During the slaughter of the suitors that follows Odysseus’ self-revelation, Telemachus displays a thirst for vengeance that surpasses even that of his father. At 22.435, Odysseus instructs Telemachus and the herdsmen to kill the twelve disloyal maidservants with their swords, but Telemachus defies his father’s orders and decides to have them hanged *en masse*. Homer describes the scene in chilling detail:

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<sup>67</sup> This is the only occurrence of the verb ἀνάγω in the middle voice in all of Plato’s dialogues (it also turns up in the spurious *Eryxias* at 392d). In the first book of the *Iliad* it means to “put to sea” (1.478). See also Herodotus 3.137, 4.152; Thucydides 6.30; Aeschylus, *Ag.* 626.

So he spoke, and tied the cable of a dark-prowed ship to a great pillar and cast it about the round house, stretching it high up that none might reach the ground with her feet. And as when long-winged thrushes or doves fall into a snare that is set in a thicket, as they seek to reach their roosting place, and hateful is the bed that gives them welcome, even so the women held their heads in a row, and round the necks of all nooses were laid, that they might die most piteously. And they writhed a little while with their feet, but not for long. (465–73)

One wonders whether his former *aidôs* would have prevented an act of such brutality.<sup>68</sup> From a Socratic perspective, it appears that Telemachus gains his manhood at a terrible cost.<sup>69</sup>

As a message from Socrates to Charmides, then, “*Aidôs* is no good in a needy man” must mean something different than it does for any of Homer’s characters.

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<sup>68</sup> Telemachus’ campaign does not end there: “Then out they led Melanthius through the doorway and the court, and cut off his nose and his ears with the pitiless bronze, and tore out his genitals for the dogs to eat raw, and cut off his hands and his feet in the anger of their hearts. After that they washed their hands and feet, and went into the house to Odysseus, and the work was done” (474–79).

<sup>69</sup> Modern reactions to the slaughter of the suitors deserve a study in their own right. See Lattimore 1967, 17: “Their doom seems excessive to me. I do not know how it seemed to Homer.” On the execution of the maidservants, see especially Horkheimer and Adorno 2002 [1947], 61–62. Heath (2005, 113–14) has a very different take on Telemachus’ “innovative slaughter” (114) of the maidservants: “His maturity is further signaled when he kills the handmaids. Odysseus has ordered them all to be struck down with swords, but Telemachus comes up with a more creative plan, instead hanging them by a ship’s cable. Some readers have been appalled at the speech and actions of “mild” Telemachus, seeing in them a sign of his immaturity or cruelty. But Telemachus’ motives are perfectly in line with the thoughts of the other characters. [...] As for the manner of the maids’ deaths, the poet himself treats the maids with particular contempt by comparing them in graphic fashion to animals (22.468–73). [...] Whatever we may think of Telemachus’ actions, Homer does nothing to make us feel that the maids did not deserve their fate or that he wants us to disapprove of the way they die – or even the much more gruesome dispatching of Melanthius that follows.”

Charmides must learn to overcome his *aidôs* not for the sake of some determinate end, such as satisfying his hunger or restoring his honor.<sup>70</sup> The dialogue as a whole suggests that the good that he needs, *sôphrosunê*, the healthy condition of the soul, is of a radically different kind. It is the source of the value of all other goods, “for the body and for the entire human being” (156e7–8).<sup>71</sup> In other dialogues it goes by different names, such as wisdom or virtue, but its essence is always the same.<sup>72</sup> In the *Charmides*, therefore, we see Plato adapting the tradition of ambivalence about *aidôs* for his own philosophical ends.<sup>73</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

Let me conclude this chapter by offering some brief reflections on the closing pages of the *Charmides*. In the second half of the dialogue, Socrates examines Critias’

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<sup>70</sup> Notice that Eumaeus’ and Telemachus’ interpretations of the proverb reflect the desires proper to the appetitive and the spirited parts of the soul in the *Republic*.

<sup>71</sup> Recall Socrates’ remark that without the “incantation”—which, it turns out, is nothing other than philosophical conversation—the cure for Charmides’ head will have “no benefit at all” (155e8).

<sup>72</sup> See *Euthd.* 281d2–e1: [Socrates:] “So, to sum up, Clinias, it seems likely that with respect to all the things we called good in the beginning [e.g. wealth, health, beauty, and honor] the correct account is not that in themselves they are good by nature, but rather as follows: if ignorance [ἀμαθία] controls them, they are greater evils than their opposites, to the extent that they are more capable of complying with a bad master; but if understanding and wisdom [φρόνησις τε καὶ σοφία] are in control, they are greater goods. In themselves, however, neither sort is of any value.” See also *Rep.* 505a2–b3.

<sup>73</sup> Socrates also quotes the line from Homer at the conclusion of the *Laches* (201b2–3). He and the other older gentlemen must not let shame prevent them from seeking someone to teach them about courage.

claim that *sôphrosunê* consists in “knowing oneself”. Shame once again proves an obstacle in the conversation (168c3–d1), this time in the form of Critias’ *philotimia* (“love of honor”), and the search for the nature of *sôphrosunê* ends in *aporia*.<sup>74</sup> One of Socrates’ aims in exposing Critias’ ignorance, I take it, is to undermine Charmides’ confidence in the authority of his cousin’s opinions. Recall that Critias was the one who originally declared Charmides the “most *sôphrôn*” young man of his day (157d6). So long as Charmides defers to the wisdom of others, he will fail to realize what he is lacking. This points to a crucial difference between Socrates’ *erôs* for Charmides, and that of his other admirers, who regard him as a finished product. The boys in the wrestling school all gaze at him “as if he were a statue” (154c8), with the reverence due to a god. Critias considers his protégé to be “fine and good” in every respect (154e4; see 157b6–8), and takes pride in the fact that his guardianship has turned out such a remarkable specimen. Contrast this with the way Socrates sees the young man. Although he is deeply struck by the beauty of his *aidôs*, and what it implies about his capacity for virtue, he knows that Charmides’ development is far from complete. Socrates’ task, as a true *erastês*, will be to expose Charmides to his own lack of virtue and awaken his desire for wisdom—making him still more beautiful.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> On Critias’ *philotimia*, see Wolfsdorf 2008, 217–25.

<sup>75</sup> See *Smp.* 204a–7: “What’s especially difficult about being ignorant [*ἀμαθία*] is that you think you are sufficient [*ικανόν*], even though you are neither beautiful and good nor thoughtful. If you don’t think you need [*ἐνδεής*] anything, of course you won’t want what you don’t think you need [*ἐπιδεῖσθαι*].” Trans. Nehamas and Woodruff in Cooper 1997 (with slight revisions). On the ugliness of lacking self-knowledge, see *Phlb.* 48c–49c.

By the end of the dialogue it appears that Socrates has made progress in this respect. After he and Critias fail to discover the nature of *sôphrosunê*, Socrates rebukes himself for his incompetence in the search. He then addresses Charmides for the first time since Critias took over the conversation:

“But see whether you have it [*sôphrosunê*] and are in no need of [μηδὲν δέη] the incantation. For if you do have it, I would advise you even more to consider me a fool and incapable of searching for anything whatsoever through argument—but as for yourself, to the extent that you are *sôphrôn*, consider yourself to be that much happier as well.” (176a1–5)

Socrates echoes the question that had previously made Charmides blush, but this time he elicits a different response:

“By Zeus, Socrates! I don’t know whether I have it or not [οὐκ οἶδα οὔτ’ εἰ ἔχω οὔτ’ εἰ μὴ ἔχω]. For how could I know it, when you two are unable to find out whatever it is, as you say? But you do not convince me at all; and as for myself, Socrates, I absolutely do believe that I need the incantation. And as far as I’m concerned, there’s nothing to prevent my being charmed by you for however many days it takes, until you say it is sufficient [ἕως ἂν φῇς σὺ ἱκανῶς ἔχειν].” (176a6–b4)

In the earlier passage, Charmides was unable to say whether or not he was *sôphrôn* because either response was liable to offend his audience in some way. As we saw, that



was compatible with Charmides *thinking* that he did in fact have the virtue to a sufficient degree. During the course of the dialogue, Charmides appears to have undergone a transformation: he is now aware that he is unable to say whether he is *sôphrôn* because he lacks an adequate grasp of what *sôphrosunê* is. On an optimistic reading, the conversation has elevated his *aidôs* into a genuine desire for wisdom.

However, there are hints that Charmides' transformation is far from complete. He declares his intention to be "charmed" by Socrates' song until he is told that it is sufficient. This might suggest that Charmides has not understood the heart of the matter. First, he implies that wisdom is the sort of thing that a human being can have sufficiently.<sup>76</sup> Second, he is prepared to defer to Socrates' judgment. In what follows, his deference takes on a darker hue.<sup>77</sup> After Critias commends his intention to spend more time with Socrates, Charmides replies: "I would be behaving terribly [δεινὰ γὰρ ἂν ποιοίην], if I were to disobey my guardian and not do what you command" (167b9–c2). Plato's audience knew that a quarter century after the conversation in the wrestling school, Critias and Charmides, acting under his cousin's authority, would become leaders of the oligarchic regime responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Athenians and resident foreigners.<sup>78</sup> In spite of its memorable comic moments, the *Charmides* ends on a note of

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<sup>76</sup> Contrast Socrates' remark to Critias at 166c7–d2: "What sort of person do you take me for? Do you think that if I refute you as much as possible, I am doing it for any other reason than the one for which I would also thoroughly examine anything I say—namely, that I'm afraid that at some point I'll escape my own notice, thinking that I know something when I don't?"

<sup>77</sup> For an alternative reading of the end of the *Charmides*, see Tuozzo 2011.

<sup>78</sup> For a summary of the "Rule of the Thirty", see Nails 2002, 111–13. Both Charmides and Critias died fighting a group of exiled democrats in the battle of Munychia (403 BCE).

tragedy, as we are left to wonder whether Charmides' *aidôs*—the very thing that Socrates found most beautiful about him as a young man—contributed to his downfall.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> I am grateful to audiences at King's College London and at the 2012 International Plato Society in Ann Arbor for their comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this chapter.

## Chapter Three

### Shame and Virtue in Aristotle

Λόγου, [...] μουσικῇ κεκραμένου, ὃς μόνος ἐγγενόμενος σωτὴρ ἀρετῆς διὰ βίου ἐνοικεῖ τῷ ἔχοντι.

“Reason, [...] mixed with musical education, is the only thing which once it has been born, inhabits the one who has it as a protector of virtue throughout his life.

– Plato, *Republic* 549b6–7

#### 1. Introduction

In the previous chapter we saw how Plato’s *Charmides* combines drama, dialectic, and poetic allusion to show that *aidôs*, or a sense of shame, is not a genuine virtue.

Aristotle, as we shall now see, reaches the same conclusion in Book 4 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Though by the fourth century BCE the status of *aidôs* had diminished, Aristotle still saw fit to include it in his systematic account of the virtues. But in his main discussion of *aidôs*, which concludes Book 4, he considers it only to reject it. The two arguments of *NE* 4.9 have puzzled commentators: both passages seem to conflict with things he says elsewhere in the treatise, and neither is fully persuasive in its own right. The primary aim of this chapter is to reconstruct Aristotle’s view of *aidôs* and

argue that he does have good grounds for excluding it from his list of virtues. Beyond solving an interpretive puzzle, I hope to show that his skepticism about the importance of shame to virtuous action is justified.

I begin by analyzing the opening argument of *NE* 4.9, in which Aristotle suggests that *aidôs* is not a virtue because it is the wrong sort of “condition of the soul” (§2). The standard objection is that he fails to distinguish between occurrent and dispositional senses of the emotion term. I show that in spite of this weakness the argument points to a more persuasive line of thought, which can be pieced together from other passages in his ethical works. After offering some ideas for how such a restoration might look, I turn to the second, more substantive, argument of *NE* 4.9, and consider an objection that has its roots in antiquity (§3). Here the central complaint is that Aristotle fails to distinguish between the prospective, or inhibitory, and backward-looking varieties of shame. This has led commentators to claim that the prospective kind of *aidôs* does play a central role in the virtuous person’s motivations.<sup>1</sup> In the final part of the chapter, I draw on other aspects of Aristotle’s ethical theory to demonstrate that, in his view, shame has no significant role to play in the psychology of virtue (§4). The key text for my purposes is his discussion of “civic” courage in *NE* 3.8, which I analyze in the light of two passages from the *Iliad* (both cited by Aristotle), that represent heroes acting from *aidôs* without true virtue. In a brief coda, I consider Alexander of Aphrodisias’ response to Aristotle in the *Ethical Problems*, in connection with a puzzling remark in the second argument of *NE* 4.9.

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<sup>1</sup> See Taylor 2006 and Irwin 1999.

2. The first argument: *aidôs* is more like a feeling (πάθος) than a state (ἔξις)

In the opening lines of *NE* 4.9, Aristotle suggests that *aidôs* cannot be a virtue because it belongs to a different genus than the virtues he has just discussed.

But is not appropriate to speak of *aidôs* as a virtue; for it seems more like a feeling [πάθει] than a state [ἔξει]. It is defined, at any rate, as a sort of fear of disrepute [φόβος τις ἀδοξίας], and it has an effect comparable to that of fear of dreadful things. For people blush when they feel ashamed [οἱ αἰσχυνόμενοι], and when they are afraid of death, they turn pale. So it appears that both are, in a way, bodily conditions, which seems to be characteristic of a feeling rather than of a state.<sup>2</sup> (1128b10–15)

This highly condensed argument draws on the conclusion of *NE* 2.5, where Aristotle had identified the genus of virtue among the three “conditions that arise in the soul”: *pathê* (“feelings”, “affections”, or “emotions”), *dunameis* (“capacities”), and *hexeis* (“states” or “dispositions”).

By feelings I mean appetite, anger, fear, confidence, envy, joy, love, hate, longing, jealousy, pity, and in general whatever is attended by pleasure or pain. By capacities I mean that in respect of which we are said to be susceptible to these feelings—for example, capable of being angry or of being afraid or of feeling pity.

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, translations from the *Nicomachean Ethics* are based on Irwin 1999 (with substantial revisions).

By states I mean that in respect of which we are well or badly off in relation to the feelings. If, for instance, our feeling is too intense or too slack, we are badly off in relation to anger, but if it is intermediate, we are well off; the same is true in other cases. (1105b21–28)

In this passage, at least, Aristotle treats *pathê* as occurrent episodes of emotion or appetitive desire. The mention of pleasure and pain may be intended to capture his view, stated elsewhere, that *pathê* of the soul invariably involve changes in the body.<sup>3</sup> He goes on to argue that the virtues and vices cannot be feelings on the grounds that (a) feelings are not the proper objects of praise and blame (“for we do not praise the angry or the frightened person, and do not blame the person who is simply angry, but only the person who is angry in a particular way”); (b) feelings occur “without decision” (ἀπροαιρέτως), whereas “the virtues are decisions of some kind, or are not without decision”; and (c) while feelings account for our being moved (or undergoing change: κινεῖσθαι), the virtues and vices account for our being disposed (διακεῖσθαι) in a certain way. As for the notion that the virtues might be capacities, Aristotle argues that merely having the natural capacity to be affected by feelings deserves neither praise nor blame. It follows that the virtues and vices of character must be *hexeis* or “states”— stable dispositions to feel and act in certain ways. In the following chapter, Aristotle explains that virtue is specifically the state that disposes one to choose the “mean” in any situation, the response that is neither excessive nor deficient given the circumstances.

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<sup>3</sup> See *De Anima* 1.1, 403a16–19.

Aristotle's strategy at the start of *NE* 4.9, then, is to show that *aidôs* is not a virtue because it is the wrong kind of psychic condition. He first points out that it is defined as a type of fear, which is itself a straightforward example of a *pathos*.<sup>4</sup> Like fear, moreover, it has a characteristic physiological expression. The phenomenon of blushing suggests that *aidôs* is episodic, involving a momentary change, whereas a *hexis* endures in a person over a long period of time, and is difficult to alter or remove.<sup>5</sup> But if *aidôs* is not a *hexis*, then it cannot be a virtue according to Aristotle's account.

As it stands this line of argument is unpersuasive, since it overlooks a key distinction—namely, between *aidôs* as an occurrent feeling or emotion, and *aidôs* as an emotional disposition.<sup>6</sup> Compare the distinction in English between *feeling shame* at a particular moment and *having a sense of shame*. The two main ancient Greek words for shame, *aidôs* and *aischunê*, could be used in either an occurrent or a dispositional sense.<sup>7</sup> In the former sense, *aidôs* or *aischunê* is clearly a *pathos*; but it was also common for *aidôs* (and less often *aischunê*) to refer to something like a character trait, the quality of being disposed to feel shame when appropriate.<sup>8</sup> So the conclusion that *aidôs* is not a virtue because it is more like a feeling than a state seems premature.

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<sup>4</sup> See *NE* 2.5, 1105b22, 1106a2–3; 2.6, 1106b18. For the definition, see *Rhet.* 2.6; Plato, *Euthphr.* 12a–c.

<sup>5</sup> See *Categories* 8, 8b27ff.; *NE* 2.4, 1105a33.

<sup>6</sup> See Broadie and Rowe 2002, 334.

<sup>7</sup> Notice that in the passage under discussion Aristotle uses the participle αἰσχυρόμενοι for those who blush.

<sup>8</sup> See Theognis 409–10: “There is no better treasure that you can lay in store for your children than *aidôs*, which attends good men.” It is the *pathos* (namely *aischunê*) that Aristotle makes the subject of his study of shame in the *Rhetoric* (2.6). The term *aidôs* appears in the list of *pathê* at *Eudemian Ethics* 2.2 (1220b12–14), but not in the list at *NE* 2.5 (1105b21–23). The fact that

The fact that Aristotle says *aidôs* is “more like” a feeling than a state might indicate that he was not fully persuaded. Moreover, an earlier passage of the *NE* seems to acknowledge the dispositional sense of the term. In 2.7, Aristotle provides an outline of the individual virtues of character, identifying each as a “mean state” (μεσότης) between two vicious extremes. Following his sketch of the social virtues, he remarks:

There are also mean states among the emotions and concerned with the feelings [ἐν τοῖς παθήμασι καὶ περὶ τὰ πάθη]. For instance, *aidôs* is not a virtue, but the person who has a sense of shame [ὁ αἰδήμων] is also praised. For here also one person is called intermediate, and another—the diffident sort, who feels *aidôs* at everything [ὁ καταπλήξ ὁ πάντα αἰδούμενος]—is called excessive; the person who is deficient or does not feel it at all is said to be shameless [ἀναίσχυντος]; and the intermediate one is said to have a sense of shame [ὁ δὲ μέσος αἰδήμων].  
(1108a30–35)

Here Aristotle identifies a mean state with respect to *aidôs* while denying that *aidôs* itself is a virtue. The *aidêmôn* is someone who feels *aidôs* in the appropriate way, and is praised on that account. Aristotle does not give the relevant mean state a name, but the natural choice (in terms of ordinary usage) would be simply *aidôs*.<sup>9</sup> Consider the parallel passage in *Eudemian Ethics* 3.7: “*Aidôs* is a mean state [μεσότης] between shamelessness

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*aidôs* was commonly thought of as a character trait is presumably why Aristotle considers it worth asking whether *aidôs* is a virtue in the first place.

<sup>9</sup> Perhaps he is trying to avoid the awkwardness of having to say, for instance, that *aidôs* is a matter of feeling *aidôs* in the right way. Another possible name for the mean state would be *aidêmosunê*.



and diffidence: the person who cares for nobody’s opinion is shameless, the person who values everyone’s is diffident, while the *aidêmôn* regards only that of manifestly decent people [τῆς τῶν φαινομένων ἐπαικῶν]” (1233b26–29; cf. the table of means at 1221a1).<sup>10</sup> Whereas the *NE* passage defines the mean in relation to the *things* about which a person feels *aidôs* (ὁ πάντα αἰδούμενος), the *EE* passage defines it in relation to the *audience* before whom the emotion is felt.<sup>11</sup> But in both cases the *aidêmôn* is praised for being disposed to feel *aidôs* in the right way. If we follow Aristotle’s own threefold division of the “conditions that arise in the soul” in *NE* 2.5, it seems this disposition would have to be a *hexis*—since neither a *pathos* nor a *dunamis* is a suitable object of praise and blame (1105b31–1106a2, 1106a7–9). His argument at the start of 4.9 is therefore all the more puzzling.

However, I think it may point to another line of argument that Aristotle does not make explicit. For even if *aidôs* (understood as a mean state) belongs to the same genus as the virtues, it may fail to satisfy the other criteria specified in Book 2 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. A virtue is a state of character on account of which a person is

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<sup>10</sup> Translations from the *Eudemian Ethics* are based on Kenny 2011 (with revisions). Compare *Magna Moralia* 1.29: “*Aidôs* is a mean between shamelessness and diffidence, and it has to do with deeds and words. For the shameless person is he who says and does anything on any occasion or before any people; but the diffident person is the opposite of this, who is afraid to say or do anything before anybody (for such a person is incapacitated for action, who is diffident about everything); but *aidôs* and the person who has a sense of shame are a sort of middle state between these [ἡ δὲ αἰδὼς καὶ ὁ αἰδήμων μεσότης τις τούτων]. For he will not say and do anything under any circumstances, like the shameless person, nor, like the diffident person, be afraid on every occasion and under all circumstances, but will say and do what he ought, where he ought, and when he ought.” (Revised Oxford Translation, slightly modified.)

<sup>11</sup> *Rhet.* 2.6 discusses both the kinds of things (ποῖα) one is ashamed of and the types of people before whom (πρὸς τίνας) one is ashamed. The *MM* passage quoted in the previous footnote also deals with both.

praised; yet not every praiseworthy state is a virtue. In 2.6, Aristotle gives his full definition of virtue as follows: “Virtue is a state that issues in decision [ἐξίς προαιρετική], consisting in a mean state, relative to us, which is determined by reference to reason, that is to say, to the reason by reference to which the person of practical wisdom would determine it [ὁρισμένη λόγῳ καὶ ᾧ ἂν ὁ φρόνιμος ὀρίσειεν]” (1106b36–1107a2). A virtue is not any kind of state, but a “state that issues in decision” (ἐξίς προαιρετική).<sup>12</sup> To make a “decision” (προαίρεσις) is to choose a course of action as the result of deliberation about how to achieve some desired end.<sup>13</sup> The definition also specifies that the mean is determined not in any manner, but in the way a wise person (φρόνιμος) would determine it—that is to say, through grasping the *logos* (“reason” or “account”) that explains its correctness. For Aristotle, being morally virtuous implies having the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom or *phronêsis*. In order for *aidôs* to be considered a virtue, then, it must issue in decisions of the relevant sort, and it must imply practical wisdom. Does Aristotle have clear views on these matters?

We can start to explore this question by recalling that *NE* 2.7 distinguishes *aidôs* (as well as *nemesis*, or “moral indignation”) from the other mean states on the grounds that it is “among the emotions and concerned with the feelings” (ἐν τοῖς παθήμασι καὶ περὶ τὰ πάθη). It is not at all obvious what contrasts are being made, either between

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<sup>12</sup> On the translation of ἐξίς προαιρετική as “state that issues in decision” see Lorenz 2009, esp. §3.

<sup>13</sup> The correctness of the decision, crucially, is not just a matter of how one reasons instrumentally, but also of desiring the right end for the right reasons. See Lorenz 2009, 185.

*pathêmata* and *pathê*, or between the prepositions *en* and *peri*.<sup>14</sup> Let us assume that both nouns refer to the kinds of thing listed in 2.5 (emotions and appetitive desires). What should we make of the claim that there are mean states “among the emotions”? To my mind, the most likely explanation is that *aidôs* and *nemesis* are names for both praiseworthy states of character *and* feelings or emotions. Unlike courage, temperance, and justice, they are found among the emotions analyzed in Book 2 of the *Rhetoric*.<sup>15</sup> But unlike anger, pity, and fear, they are also names for mean states in the ethical treatises. That of course does not tell us why *aidôs* and *nemesis* fail to be genuine virtues, or why they are “more like” feelings than states. As we shall see, however, Aristotle seems to think that the linguistic data reveal something important about the *kind* of mean states *aidôs* and *nemesis* are.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Irwin (1999) translates: “There are also means in feelings and about feelings.” Taylor (2006) translates: “There are also means in episodes and kinds of feeling....” He comments: “Aristotle distinguishes between *pathêmata* (translated ‘episodes (of feeling)’ ) and *pathê* (rendered here ‘kinds of feeling’), saying that the means in question are ‘in’ (*en*) the former and ‘concerned with’ (*peri*) the latter. Since the two terms are often used interchangeably, it is not easy to see what distinction is being drawn” (119). Broadie and Rowe (2002) translate: “There are also intermediates in the affective feelings and in relation to things that happen to people....” And Broadie comments: “Here Ar. introduces two examples [i.e., *aidôs* and *nemesis*] of a new sort of triad, consisting of excessive, deficient, and intermediate responses to things that befall people. One example consists in responses to things involving oneself, the other in responses to the fortunes of others. It is strange that he classes these triads as affective feelings (i.e. affections), as they seem to be dispositions” (309). Broadie appears to treat the *pathêmata* in this passage as equivalent to the *pathê* discussed in 2.5 (and contrasted with *dunameis* and *hexeis*). She takes the *pathê* with which *aidôs* is concerned (or “in relation to” which it stands) to be “things that befall” oneself. This seems very unlikely, though, since Aristotle conceives of shame principally as a response to things one does (or might do). See *NE* 4.9, 1128b20–33. In *Rhet.* 2.6, he treats things people suffer as a subclass of the causes of shame (1384a15–20).

<sup>15</sup> Again, the *Rhetoric* chapter is on *aischunê*, but Aristotle appears to treat *aidôs* as a synonym.

<sup>16</sup> See below on *EE* 3.7, 1234a23ff.

What about the claim that *aidôs* and *nemesis* are “concerned with the feelings”? It is puzzling that this should distinguish them in any way from the other mean states, since virtue of character had been defined in *NE* 2.6 as being “concerned with feelings and actions” (περὶ πάθη καὶ πράξεις) (1106b16–18).

We can be afraid, for instance, or be confident, or have appetites, or get angry, or feel pity, and in general have pleasure or pain, both too much and too little, and in both ways not well. But having these feelings at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way, is the intermediate and best condition, and this is proper to virtue. Similarly, actions also admit of excess, deficiency, and an intermediate condition. (1106b18–24)

*Aidôs*, understood as a mean state, would be the disposition to feel shame (*aidôs* or *aischunê*) at the right times, about the right things, etc. *Nemesis* would be the disposition to feel indignant at another’s success in an appropriate manner (e.g. when the success is undeserved). So why should they not be thought of as virtues? One possibility is that they are concerned *only* with feelings and not with actions, whereas the virtues are concerned with both. At first sight this seems implausible, because clearly shame and indignation can motivate a person to act in various ways.<sup>17</sup> Is there another sense in which *aidôs* and

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<sup>17</sup> See Taylor 2006, 119: “Since every virtue and vice is concerned with feelings (as well as with actions), Aristotle’s thought must presumably be that shame and the other feelings mentioned in the following lines do not prompt to action; hence in these cases the mean is concerned with feelings exclusively. If that is his thought, it is not true; as well as exhibiting shame by such reactions as blushing, one may be motivated by shame e.g. to run away and hide. Similarly, indignation and its contrasted vices may motivate action.”

*nemesis* are “concerned with the feelings” that explains why they should not be considered virtues?

An answer seems to emerge from the parallel discussion of non-virtuous mean states in *Eudemian Ethics* 3.7.<sup>18</sup> Having finished his analysis of the particular virtues of character—courage, temperance, even temper, liberality, magnanimity, and magnificence—Aristotle writes:

Roughly speaking, each of the other objects of praise or blame concerning character are excesses or deficiencies or mean states, but that issue in feelings [παθητικά]. The envious man and the malicious man provide examples. For—to take the states from which they get their names [καθ’ ὧς γὰρ ἔξεις λέγονται]—envy is being pained by the good fortune of people who deserve it, while though there is no name for the feeling [πάθος] of the malicious person, such a character shows itself [ὁ ἔχων δῆλος] by rejoicing at the misfortunes of those who deserve better. (1233b16–22)

Here Aristotle distinguishes the non-virtuous mean states (as well as excesses and deficiencies) from the genuine virtues (as well as vices) by saying that they are *pathêtikai*, or “issue in feelings”. The mean states that he goes on to place in this category include not only *aidôs* and *nemesis*, but also qualities treated as genuine virtues in the *NE*:

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<sup>18</sup> There is little scholarly consensus on the relationship between the two *Ethics*. I do not think my interpretation is affected if we take one treatise to be later or more authoritative than the other. On the question whether *aidôs* is a virtue, the two *Ethics* are in agreement, and I believe their arguments illuminate each other.

friendliness (φιλία), candidness (ἀλήθεια), and conviviality (εὐτραπεία).<sup>19</sup> Notice that this passage apparently refers to envy (φθόνος) as both a feeling and a state.<sup>20</sup> A person is said to be “envious” (φθονερός) because he feels pain at the good fortune of those who deserve it. Both the disposition to feel this sort of pain, a *hexis*, and the feeling itself, a *pathos*, are called “envy”. Likewise in the case of *nemesis*: a person is said to be “morally indignant” (νεμεσητικός) not because he feels *envy* in the right way, but because he feels pain at the good fortune of those who do not deserve it. Again, the disposition and the feeling are both called *nemesis*. This points to a potentially important difference between the non-virtuous mean states and the virtues that Aristotle takes to be genuine. *Nemesis* (understood as a mean state) is attributed to people based on their tendency to feel indignation in appropriate circumstances. Similarly, *aidôs* (understood as a mean state) is attributed to people based on their tendency to feel shame in appropriate circumstances.<sup>21</sup> In each case, the mean state is expressed through the *pathos*. But the same does not appear to be true of the virtues. Although a courageous person is disposed to feel fear on the right occasions and in the right amount, his courage is expressed not through *fear*, but through acting well in dangerous situations. Although an even-tempered person is well disposed with respect to anger, he shows his virtue not by feeling anger, but by acting

<sup>19</sup> *EE* 3.7 also discusses dignity (σεμνότης), which is absent from the analysis of mean states in the *NE* (perhaps it is considered part of magnanimity). The *EE* does not discuss the *NE*’s nameless virtue relating to minor honors.

<sup>20</sup> At 1234a13, Aristotle refers to conviviality as a “most decent state” (ἐπιεικεστάτη ἔξις).

<sup>21</sup> I say “similarly” because the two cases are not exactly parallel. For Aristotle, *nemesis* (understood as a *pathos*) seems to be always positive. If a person feels indignation in the wrong circumstances, they do not feel *nemesis* but rather *phthonos*. In the case of *aidôs* or *aischunê* (understood as *pathê*), however, Aristotle thinks that a person can feel either of these emotions inappropriately. His analysis is complicated by the fact that in ordinary Greek usage the emotion *aidôs* often *does* have a positive connotation just on its own.

appropriately in response to slights that are unintended or inconsequential.<sup>22</sup> So Aristotle's view might be that while the genuine virtues are "concerned with" feelings, they do not "issue in" feelings as do the other mean states. While the non-virtuous mean states can also motivate a person to act, such actions are *explained* by the relevant feelings or emotions—whereas actions that result from the virtues are not.<sup>23</sup>

Further on in the chapter Aristotle says explicitly why the qualities he has just analyzed are not virtues:

All these mean states are praiseworthy without being virtues, and their opposites are not vices either, because they are without decision [ἄνευ προαιρέσεως γάρ]. They all occur in classifications of the emotions [ἐν ταῖς τῶν παθημάτων διαιρέσεσιν], since each of them is a particular feeling [πάθος τι]. However, since they are natural, they contribute to the natural virtues, for, as will be said later, each virtue occurs both naturally and otherwise, that is to say, in company with practical wisdom [μετὰ φρονήσεως]. Envy, for instance, contributes to injustice (for the actions that result from it affect others), *nemesis* contributes to justice,

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<sup>22</sup> Aristotle discusses even temper (πραότης) at *Rhetoric* 2.3, although I wonder whether it is properly conceived of as a *pathos*, rather than as a good disposition in relation to a *pathos* (namely anger).

<sup>23</sup> The analysis is complicated by the fact that the even-tempered person, for example, *does* get angry when appropriate. Is this anger an expression of his virtue? I think Aristotle would be reluctant to say that it is an expression of his *even temper*. He also believes that the courageous person feels appropriate fear and that the temperate person enjoys appropriate pleasures. But does the former exercise *courage* and does the latter exercise *temperance* when they are motivated by these feelings? Notice that Aristotle thinks each of these virtues is properly defined in contrast to the vicious state involving an *excess* of the relevant *pathos* (irascibility, cowardice, intemperance). People who are deficient with respect to anger or fear or pleasure are rare, and are easily mistaken for the virtuous. In the case of *aidôs*, however, the one who contrasts more sharply with the *aidêmôn* is not the diffident person (who feels shame at everything), but the shameless one.

*aidôs* to temperance (owing to which people even define temperance in this class), and the sincere and the untruthful are respectively sensible and foolish. (1234a23–30)

Aristotle provides two main reasons for excluding the *pathêtikai* mean states from his list of virtues, and each echoes part of his definition of virtue at *NE* 2.6. First, they are “without decision” (ἄνευ προαιρέσεως). As we have seen, Aristotle defines virtue as a *hexis proairetikê*—a “state that issues in decision”, or that disposes one to choose actions as the result of deliberating about how to achieve some end.<sup>24</sup> When a person acts from virtue, it is the decision rather than any feeling or emotion that explains her action. It is therefore tempting to divide the class of mean states into two narrower kinds, those that are *proairetikai* and those that are *pathêtikai*, or “issue in feelings”. Because feelings, on Aristotle’s view, occur “without decision” (ἄπροαιρέτως), it is reasonable for him to suppose that the dispositions to have these feelings share the same characteristic.<sup>25</sup>

How should we interpret Aristotle’s claim that *aidôs* is “without decision”? Is it that a person *never* acts on the basis of a decision when he acts from *aidôs*? That seems implausible, because someone might take “I should avoid disrepute” as the major premise of his practical syllogism, recognize a certain action as one that will preserve his

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. *EE* 3.1, 1237a27: πᾶσα ἀρετὴ προαιρετική. Magnificence is said to be προαιρετικός at 1233a37. See also προαιρετική ἕξις at 1222a31 and 1227b8 (the definition of virtue). “In general terms it has been stated that the virtues are means, and that these virtues themselves and their opposing vices are *proairetikai*” (1228a23–1228b5).

<sup>25</sup> See again *NE* 2.5, 1106a2–4: “Further, we are angry and afraid without decision [ἄπροαιρέτως]; but the virtues are decisions of somekind, or are not without decision [αἱ δ’ ἀρεταὶ προαιρέσεις τινὲς ἢ οὐκ ἄνευ προαιρέσεως].”



reputation, and decide to act accordingly.<sup>26</sup> In that case, he *would* be acting on a *proairesis*. Perhaps what makes *aidôs* a *pathêtikê* mean state is that a person *can* act from *aidôs* without decision. But that is also true of the mean states that are considered genuine virtues. Aristotle plainly denies that every virtuous action must follow from a *proairesis*. A person may do the courageous thing “suddenly” (ἐξαίφνης: cf. *NE* 1111b9–10, 1117a20–22; *EE* 1226b4), from a courageous disposition, without deliberating about how to achieve some end. In retrospect, however, the virtuous person could spell out the reasoning that would have led him to that decision.

Even if the virtues do not always issue in decisions (when a person acts virtuously), they never motivate a person to act *contrary* to his decision. Perhaps that is what marks the difference between the mean states that are *pathêtikai* and those that are *proairetikai*. It is clear that *aidôs* would belong to the former group. A soldier, for example, might decide to drop his shield and flee from battle in order to save his life, but be held back by *aidôs*. Likewise, *aidôs* might inhibit a citizen from acting on his decision to speak out in the assembly against a popular cause that he believes will endanger the *polis*. Aristotle does not spell any of this out. For him, as we shall see (in §4), it seems that the more important difference between *aidôs* and the genuine virtues is that even when the former does issue in decisions, it aims at the wrong sort of end.

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<sup>26</sup> Likewise, someone who is motivated by fear might deliberate about how to avoid danger; and someone who is motivated by anger might deliberate about how to get revenge. (I am grateful to Stephen White for calling this issue to my attention.)

Aristotle also says that *aidôs* and the rest of the non-virtuous mean states are “natural” and contribute to the “natural” virtues.<sup>27</sup> On his account, if a person is disposed to feel shame in the appropriate way “by nature” (φύσει), then *aidôs* (understood as a mean state) cannot be a virtue, because the virtues are acquired through habit and education—not by luck, good breeding, or divine favor.<sup>28</sup> Aristotle appears to think that some people are simply born with the correct disposition, while others are naturally more brazen or bashful.<sup>29</sup> *Aidôs* “contributes” to virtue, we can suppose, because the person who has *aidôs* tends to do the right thing, and one acquires the virtues by performing virtuous actions.<sup>30</sup> But it is not a genuine virtue because it does not involve practical wisdom or *phronêsis*. On Aristotle’s account, as we saw, virtue requires an intellectual grasp of the reasons for acting in accordance with the mean. Once a person acts with understanding, his “natural” virtue is supplanted by virtue in the full sense (in the case of *aidôs*, by temperance). Aristotle spells this out in the second of the “common books” (*NE* 6.13/*EE* 5.13):

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<sup>27</sup> It is unclear whether Aristotle thinks *aidôs* and *nemesis* are themselves “natural” virtues, or whether he thinks they contribute to the “natural” versions of temperance and justice. One possibility is that *aidôs* and *nemesis* (understood as mean states) are just the same as “natural” temperance and “natural” justice.

<sup>28</sup> See *NE* 2.1–2. Recall that at *NE* 2.5, Aristotle denies that the virtues are *dunamis* because we have capacities by nature, but do not become good or bad by nature.

<sup>29</sup> See the passage from *NE* 6.13/*EE* 5.13 below. If Aristotle thinks that *aidôs* is *innate* as opposed to being “natural” in some other way (e.g. it develops without much conscious effort), his view seems implausible. The ability to feel *nemesis* presupposes having the concepts of *success* and *desert*. The ability to feel *aidôs* involves an awareness of how others view oneself and one’s actions. So both of these capacities seem to depend on a certain amount of socialization and cognitive development.

<sup>30</sup> See *NE* 2.4

The relationship between natural virtue and virtue strictly so called is similar to, though not exactly the same as, the relationship between practical wisdom and cleverness. For everyone regards each type of character as obtaining in some sense by nature; we are just and in a way temperate and brave and have the other qualities right from birth; but we look for something else to count as true goodness, wanting such qualities to obtain in a different manner. For these natural states obtain [αἱ φυσικαὶ ὑπάρχουσιν ἔξεις] in children and in beasts also, but without intelligence they are evidently harmful. So much seems manifest, that this case is comparable to that of a strong body moving without sight, which may suffer a mighty fall because of being unable to see. But the acquisition of intelligence makes a difference in conduct, and the state [ἔξεις] will turn into the true virtue it previously only resembled. So that just as in the belief-forming part of the soul there are two types, cleverness and practical wisdom, so in the moral part there are two types, natural virtue and true virtue, and the latter cannot occur without practical wisdom [ἄνευ φρονήσεως]. (1144b1–17)

Here Aristotle adds that the natural virtues are even likely to *harm* the person who has them, since he acts without practical wisdom. So even if the *aidêmôn* is disposed to feel shame according to the mean, his *aidôs* is not a reliable guide to action. Why exactly Aristotle believes this to be the case will become clear in §4.

Before going any further, let me briefly take stock of the analysis so far. I began with Aristotle's argument at the start of *NE* 4.9 that *aidôs* is not a virtue because it is

more like a feeling than a state. His conclusion appears to depend on treating *aidôs* exclusively as an occurrent emotion, when *aidôs* can also be the name for an emotional disposition. Aristotle seems to acknowledge the dispositional sense at *NE* 2.7, when he identifies a mean state with respect to shame. However, he separates it off from the genuine virtues on the grounds that it is “among the emotions and concerned with the feelings” (ἐν τοῖς παθήμασι καὶ περὶ τὰ πάθη). This appears to correspond the position of the *Eudemian Ethics*, where *aidôs* and several other praiseworthy qualities are classified as *pathêtikai* (“issuing in feelings”). They are not true virtues, according to Aristotle, because (a) they are “without decision” (ἄνευ προαιρέσεως), and (b) they occur “naturally” and not “in company with practical wisdom” (μετὰ φρονήσεως). This account coheres with the definition of virtue in *NE* 2.6, which states that virtue is a *hexis proairetikê* (a “state that issues in decision”) and that the mean is determined in the way the practically wise person (ὁ φρόνιμος) would determine it. I suggested that the mean states could be divided into two further kinds, the *pathêtikai* and the *proairetikai*—the former being dispositions to have certain feelings or emotions, and the latter being dispositions to make “decisions” of the relevant sort. Aristotle believes that *aidôs* is not a virtue not only because it results in feelings rather than decisions, but also because it occurs without practical wisdom and is therefore liable to bring one harm.<sup>31</sup>

On the above interpretation, Aristotle should not have said that *aidôs* fails to be a virtue because it is more like a feeling than a state. Rather, he should have argued that it

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<sup>31</sup> The second claim is actually entailed by the first claim, because *phronêsis* is expressed through correct decisions.

is the wrong kind of state. We have seen plenty of material elsewhere in the ethical treatises suggesting that this was his view. An adequate reconstruction and assessment of the view would require a more thorough treatment of the relationship between virtue and emotion, as well as a general account of the non-virtuous mean states—including the ones about which Aristotle seems to have changed his mind. Such a project is beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, I want to focus on what Aristotle says about *aidôs* in particular, by turning to the second argument of *NE* 4.9.

### 3. The second argument: Shame is not characteristic of a decent person

The opening lines of *NE* 4.9 appeared to be motivated by the view that even if *aidôs* is a praiseworthy disposition, and in that respect is like a virtue, it is a disposition to have feelings of a certain kind rather than to make decisions guided by practical wisdom. The same reasoning would apply to *nemesis* and also, perhaps, to the other mean states classified as *pathêtikai* in the *Eudemian Ethics*. But Aristotle goes on to offer a further line of argument, which appeals to the specific nature of *aidôs* as distinct from the other non-virtuous mean states. His claim is that *aidôs* is not a virtue because it is praiseworthy only in a qualified sense. Once again, we shall see that the argument as presented is not wholly persuasive, and that it needs to be buttressed by other parts of his theory of virtue.

Here is the rest of the chapter in full:

The feeling is not suitable for every time of life, but only for youth. We think that young people should have a sense of shame [αἰδήμονας εἶναι] because, living by feeling, they are liable to make many mistakes, but are inhibited by *aidôs*; and we praise those among the young who have a sense of shame [τοὺς αἰδήμονας], whereas no one would praise an older person for being susceptible to shame [αἰσχυντηλός]—since we think he shouldn’t do anything at which shame is felt [ἐφ’ οἷς ἐστὶν αἰσχύνη]. For shame is not at all characteristic of a decent person [οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐπιεικοῦς ἐστὶν ἡ αἰσχύνη], if indeed it is felt at base actions [ἐπὶ τοῖς φαύλοις]. (For these sorts of actions should not be done. And if some are shameful in truth and others according to opinion, it makes no difference—neither sort should be done, and so one should not feel shame [οὐκ αἰσχυντέον].) But it belongs to a base person even to be such as to do anything shameful. To be disposed so as to be ashamed [αἰσχύνεσθαι] were one to do any such thing, and to consider oneself decent on account of this, is absurd; for *aidôs* pertains to voluntary actions, and the decent person will never voluntarily do base things. *Aidôs* might be something decent in a conditional sense [ἐξ ὑποθέσεως]—if one *were* to do such a thing, one *would* be ashamed [αἰσχύνοιτ’ ἄν]—but this does not apply to the virtues. And if shamelessness—that is to say, *not* feeling *aidôs* [τὸ μὴ αἰδεῖσθαι] at doing shameful things—is something base, it does not follow that being ashamed [αἰσχύνεσθαι] of doing such things is something decent. Self-

control is not a virtue either, but rather a sort of mixed quality. But it will be explained later. Now let us discuss justice.<sup>32</sup> (1128b15–35)

As in the chapter's opening argument, Aristotle draws on his general account of virtue in Book 2—in particular, the claim that the virtues are the proper objects of praise. Whereas in *NE* 2.7 he had said that the *aidêmôn* is praised, he now adds the qualification that only the *young* are praised for their *aidôs*. But if no one would praise an adult for being disposed to feel shame—even when the feeling is appropriate—then *aidôs* cannot be a virtue. An adult is expected not to do anything shameful in the first place, so he should never have any reason to feel shame. Of course, if he were to act shamefully, it would be better for him to be ashamed than not. He would not be praiseworthy, however, but only less deserving of contempt.

Many commentators have thought that Aristotle once again elides an important distinction—in this case, between retrospective shame and shame as a prospective, anticipatory emotion. He appears to argue that *aidôs* does not merit praise in adults because the feeling of shame depends on one's *having done* something shameful. The thought seems to be that a decent person will have no need of dispositional *aidôs* since there is no reason for him ever to feel occurrent shame. If the exercise of a disposition requires one to do what a virtuous person would never do, then clearly the disposition cannot be a virtue. However, this argument ignores the fact that shame can *inhibit* action:

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<sup>32</sup> My translation. We would expect Aristotle to go on to discuss *nemesis*, so it is possible that the end of Book 4 is lost and the final sentence about justice is an interpolation. See Broadie and Rowe 2002, 334.

it can prevent a person from doing what he might otherwise do. The experience of this prospective shame, of course, does not require that one has already done something shameful. So if we conceive of *aidôs* as a disposition to feel *this* emotion in the appropriate way, it no longer seems to follow that it is only good in a conditional sense, and therefore not a virtue.

Some have tried to pin the argument's weakness on a conflation of the terms *aidôs* and *aischunê*. Here is the Anonymous commentator, possibly writing in the second century CE:

*Aidôs* and *aischunê* seem to differ in this respect: *aischunê* arises in relation to bad deeds that have been done, whereas *aidôs* is a fear of disrepute in relation to the suggestion of shameful actions. It appears, then, that Aristotle shows this latter sort of feeling to be neither praiseworthy nor decent by passing from *aidôs* to *aischunê*.<sup>33</sup>

As a purely linguistic matter this must not be right, since in the fourth century BCE *aischunê* (and its cognates) could also refer to prospective, anticipatory shame.<sup>34</sup>

Nonetheless, it may be fair to accuse Aristotle of conflating two distinct concepts of shame. Again, he appears to argue that shame is not characteristic of a decent person by

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<sup>33</sup> Anon. 204.7–11 (my translation). The complaint is echoed in more recent commentators, e.g. Irwin 1999, 227: "Aristotle's argument [...] seems to depend on the identification of *aidôs* with *aischunê*." See also Taylor 2006, 235: "The lack of a distinction between the backward-looking reactive attitude and the forward-looking sense of restraint is reflected in Aristotle's treatment of the term *aidôs* as interchangeable with *aischunê* [...]. Anon. correctly distinguishes the backward-looking attitude (*aischunê*) from the forward-looking (*aidôs*) [...]."

<sup>34</sup> See *Rhet.* 2.6. Anon. appears to be employing a Stoic distinction; see Konstan 2006, 96–97.



focusing on only one kind of shame, namely the retrospective kind that depends on having done something shameful. In his recent commentary on *NE* 2–4, C. C. W. Taylor puts the central objection as follows:

[T]he claim that shame is not appropriate in older people, or in good people generally, since they should not (and in the case of the latter do not) do anything of which they should be ashamed, assumes that shame is exclusively a reactive attitude to one's own past misdeeds, thereby neglecting the notion of *aidôs* as a sense of shame [...]. Aristotle is right to say that the reactive attitude cannot be a characteristic of someone who is by his standards completely good. But *aidôs* as a sense of shame is not that attitude; rather, it is a sense of restraint inhibiting possible future action, a sense that one would be ashamed to do something like that. Since sensitivity to what it would be fine or noble to do necessarily involves comparison with what it would be disgraceful or shameful to do, Aristotle's insistence on that sensitivity as central to the motivation of the virtuous person ought to lead him to give a correspondingly prominent place to a sense of shame in that sensitivity.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Taylor 2006, 235. See also Irwin 1999, 227: "Aristotle is concerned here with retrospective shame at actions we have done, and, reasonably enough, denies it to the virtuous person. He does not consider the anticipatory shame of 1115a16, where I am properly ashamed when I even think of the possibility of doing a wrong action. He need not be rejecting that type of shame here, since it will apparently be a motive for the virtuous person (though not one of his virtues)." Irwin does not explain why the latter type of shame may be a motive for the virtuous person but not one of his virtues. In §4 I argue that it is neither.

Taylor agrees that by his own lights Aristotle ought to deny that a virtuous person could be disposed to feel retrospective shame.<sup>36</sup> But the *aidôs* that is a suitable candidate for being a virtue is the disposition to avoid acting shamefully because one *would* be ashamed to act that way. According to Taylor, this sense of inhibition is integral to the virtuous person's psychology. The suggestion is that the virtuous person often knows to do the noble (καλόν) thing by perceiving what it would be shameful (αἰσχρόν) to do (or not to do), and choosing to avoid it. One might suppose, then, that he will never have reason to feel retrospective shame in part because his prospective *aidôs* is always effective. On this account, it may be that the only justification for excluding *aidôs* from the list of virtues is that it plays a role in all of them.<sup>37</sup>

Some support for Taylor's view can be drawn from *NE* 3.6, where Aristotle explains that courage has only to do with certain kinds of fear.

Clearly we fear all bad things—for instance, disrepute [ἀδοξίαν], poverty, sickness, friendlessness, death—but they do not all seem to concern the courageous person. For fear of some bad things, such as disrepute, is actually noble [καλόν], and lack of fear is shameful [αἰσχρόν]; for if someone fears disrepute, he is decent and has a sense of shame [ἐπιεικὴς καὶ αἰδήμων], and if he has no fear of it, he is shameless [ἀναίσχυντος]. (1115a10–14)

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<sup>36</sup> I am not convinced that Aristotle should accept this. Perhaps a virtuous person could feel shame at things that happen to him, things done by his friends, family, or country, in addition to so-called “mixed” actions, which require one to submit to something shameful as a means to a noble end.

<sup>37</sup> See Broadie and Rowe 2002, 44: “every specific excellence [...] involves its own kind of sensitivity and concern for what is fine and disgraceful in its sphere.”

Here Aristotle describes the *aidêmôn*, the person who is disposed to feel shame in the appropriate way, as “decent” or *epieikês*—the same adjective used in *NE* 4.9 for someone who never has any reason to be ashamed. His thought seems to be that it is “noble” (καλόν) to fear disrepute because it prevents one from acting shamefully. Notice that he does not qualify these remarks by adding that *aidôs* is only admirable in the young, or in adults merely in a conditional sense. This suggests that Aristotle would allow for a type of shame that is simply noble. In that case, the second argument of *NE* 4.9 appears to miss the mark. While it may show that being disposed to feel shame is not necessarily indicative of virtue, it does not establish the stronger claim that having *aidôs* is always a sign of a “base” (φαῦλος) character.

However, I believe it can be shown that Taylor’s objection is misplaced, and that Aristotle has good reasons to think that *neither* type of *aidôs* is characteristic of the virtuous person. According to Taylor, the sense of shame that anticipates and prevents certain actions is “integral to the virtuous person’s standing motivation to do things because it would be fine to do them or disgraceful not to [...].”<sup>38</sup> On this account, there is no clear distinction to be made between acting for the sake of the noble (καλόν) and in order to avoid the shameful (αἰσχρόν), and acting from *aidôs* in the prospective, inhibitory sense. In the next section, I shall argue that Aristotle does make such a distinction, and that *aidôs* does not have the motivational role that Taylor ascribes to it. *Aidôs*, according to Aristotle, is not simply a fear of acting shamefully, but a fear of

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<sup>38</sup> Taylor 2006, 236.

*disrepute* (NE 4.9; cf. NE 3.6). In the *Rhetoric*, he defines shame (αἰσχύνῃ) as “a certain pain or disturbance in regard to bad things, whether present, past or future, that have the appearance of bringing one into disrepute.”<sup>39</sup> This definition, moreover, suggests that he views the two types of shame, prospective and retrospective, as aspects of a single emotion.<sup>40</sup> When a person is motivated by shame—whether to avoid a potentially shameful course of action, or in response to something already done—he acts because he fears the judgment of others. For Aristotle, however, this fear plays no significant role in the virtuous agent’s motivations.

#### 4. Shame, virtue, and practical wisdom

Before I argue for my interpretation, two points should be made in support of Taylor’s view. First, it seems true that often the best way to recognize what to do is to imagine doing the opposite. It is likely too stringent a conception of virtue to demand that Aristotle’s virtuous person just automatically sees how to act, without entertaining other options. He might be presented with a potential course of action and reject it in the belief that it would be shameful. And this need not imply any *temptation* on his part to do the

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<sup>39</sup> 2.6, 1383b15–16. For discussion, see Chapter 1, §3 above.

<sup>40</sup> See Konstan 2006, 98–99. This is also the view of Joseph Butler, who claims that the prospective kind of shame is more fundamental: “the original tendency of shame is to prevent the doing of shameful actions; and its leading men to conceal such actions when done is only in consequence of their being done, that is, of the passion’s not having answered its first end” (1983 [1726], 32).

wrong thing. Second, it is also true that we sometimes express our convictions about what we should do in terms of shame: “I would be ashamed not to vote in the election.” “It would be shameful not to do everything we can to help.” I take it that examples like these are what Taylor has in mind when he claims that a sense of shame is integral to the virtuous person’s motivation. Such expressions are found often in ancient Greek literature, and, again, they need not imply any temptation on the part of the speaker to choose the shameful course of action.

But even if one allows that a virtuous person should be attentive to what is shameful, and that he would be ashamed to act wrongly, it is another thing to say that *shame* is what motivates him. For instance, to say that you would be ashamed not to have voted is not (necessarily) to say that you voted because of shame. Indeed, shame might not figure in any significant way in the explanation of your action. Invoking shame as a motive seems to imply more than that you were convinced that voting was the right thing to do. For Aristotle, as we have seen, to say that someone acted out of shame implies that he feared disrepute.

Contrary to Taylor, then, I believe there is a distinction to be made in Aristotle’s theory between acting from *aidôs* and acting virtuously, i.e. for the sake of the *kalon* and to avoid the *aischron*. The virtuous person avoids doing the shameful thing because it is shameful (or because of its shameful-making features), *not* because he is afraid of disrepute. In what follows, I shall defend my reading from two directions. First, I will show that Aristotle thinks prospective, inhibitory *aidôs* can motivate an agent who lacks a well-developed character. Second, I will show that he thinks it can motivate someone

with a generally well-formed character to act unwisely. This division corresponds to the two sides of his account of moral virtue: virtue of character and practical wisdom or *phronêsis*. Although they are mutually entailing, by treating them separately we can get a clearer picture of why Aristotle denies that *aidôs* is a virtue.

### *Aidôs without virtue of character*

We have already encountered the first case in *NE* 4.9, where Aristotle explains why *aidôs* is praised in the young. Notice that the type of shame at issue here is the prospective, anticipatory kind, which prevents a person from acting shamefully. According to Aristotle, young people are prone to make mistakes because they live “by feeling” (πάθει). Elsewhere he says that the young are inclined to obey their bodily appetites, pursuing whatever strikes them as pleasant and avoiding pain.<sup>41</sup> *Aidôs* (in the occurrent sense) is also a feeling, but one that generally inhibits the pursuit of pleasure.<sup>42</sup> If a young person is *aidêmôn*, or disposed to feel shame in the appropriate way, the fear of disrepute (especially of parents and other authority figures) will tend to overrule his appetitive desires and keep him on the right path. The important thing to note is that Aristotle believes *aidôs* can be an effective motive for an agent who, in some sense, wants to act shamefully. But virtue disposes a person to desire to do the noble thing

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<sup>41</sup> See esp. *NE* 3.12, 1119b3ff.

<sup>42</sup> On the role of shame in moral education, see *NE* 10.9 along with Burnyeat 1980.

because it is noble. Perhaps this explains why Aristotle goes on to argue that an adult who feels shame cannot be virtuous. As he presents it, the problem is that feeling shame entails that one has done something shameful. But the underlying point of the argument might be that either type of shame—prospective or retrospective—is incompatible with virtue. If an adult is inhibited by shame, the fact that he needed shame to inhibit him reveals that he, in some sense, wanted to do what was shameful. This may supply the justification for Aristotle’s claim that “it belongs to a base person even to be *such as* to do anything shameful [φαύλου δὲ καὶ τὸ εἶναι τοιοῦτον οἷον πράττειν τι τῶν αἰσχρῶν].”

On the above interpretation, it is no surprise that Aristotle mentions self-control (ἐγκράτεια) at the very end of the chapter, remarking that it is not a virtue either, but a “mixed” sort of quality. In *NE* 7, we learn that the self-controlled person “knows that his appetites are base, but because of reason does not follow them” (7.1, 1145b13–15). The self-controlled person makes the correct decision and acts on it, yet has to struggle against the part of him that desires to do what reason prohibits. For Aristotle, to say that someone acts from self-control is to say that although he does the right thing, he finds shameful things pleasant, and so his character is somehow defective.<sup>43</sup> His account of self-control therefore parallels his account of the young person’s *aidôs*. At the same time, there is a crucial difference between the two dispositions. Whereas the self-controlled person acts on a rational judgment, the *aidêmôn* is motivated by the fear of disrepute,

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<sup>43</sup> See *NE* 7.9, 1151b34–1152a3: “the self-controlled and the temperate person are both the sort to do nothing against reason because of bodily pleasures, but the self-controlled person has base appetites, whereas the temperate person lacks them. The temperate person is the sort to find nothing pleasant against reason, but the self-controlled is the sort to find such things pleasant but not to be led by them.”

which does not imply that he understands the *reasons* for acting as he does. Indeed, on Aristotle's view, *aidôs* can motivate a person to act contrary to rational judgment. This is true even for someone who has a generally well-formed character—that is to say, who lacks the shameful desires of the “base” person.

### *Aidôs without practical wisdom*

The second type of case is best illustrated by Aristotle's account of “civic” or “political” (πολιτική) courage in *NE* 3.8.<sup>44</sup> By this point, Aristotle has argued that a courageous person is one who, while not being unaffected by fear, stands firm in the face of danger (above all the threat of being killed in battle). The courageous person, he says, “will stand firm against [fearful things], in the right way, as reason prescribes, for the sake of the noble [τοῦ καλοῦ ἕνεκα], since this is the end [τέλος] aimed at by virtue” (1115b11–13).<sup>45</sup> In 3.8, he sharpens his portrait of courage by contrasting it with several qualities for which it is often mistaken. The kind that comes nearest to genuine courage is typical of a citizen fighting on behalf of his *polis*:

For citizens seem to stand firm against dangers with the aim of avoiding reproaches and legal penalties, and of winning honors; that is why the most

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<sup>44</sup> See also *EE* 3.1.

<sup>45</sup> See 1116a11–13: “As we have said, then, courage is a mean about what inspires confidence and about what is frightening in the conditions we have described [i.e. in battle]; it chooses and stands firm because that is noble [ὅτι καλὸν] and anything else is shameful [ὅτι αἰσχρὸν τὸ μὴ].”



courageous seem to be those who hold cowards in dishonor and do honor to courageous people. That is how Homer also describes them when he speaks of Diomedes and Hector: ‘Polydamas will be first to put a reproach upon me’, and, ‘for some day Hector will say openly before the Trojans: “The son of Tydeus, running before me, [fled to his vessels].”’<sup>46</sup> This is most like the [genuine] courage described above, because it is due to virtue [ὅτι δι’ ἀρετὴν γίνεται]; for it is due to *aidôs* and the desire for something noble [δ’ αἰδῶ γὰρ καὶ διὰ καλοῦ<sup>47</sup> ὁρεξίῃ], namely honor, and to aversion from reproach, as something shameful [αἰσχροῦ ὄντος]. (1116a18–29)

Aristotle finds a paradigm for this latter type of “courage” in the heroes of the *Iliad*. In the quoted lines, Diomedes and Hector express their desire to engage in combat in terms of fear of what others might say about them should they retreat. It is striking that Aristotle attributes this motive to their “virtue” (ἀρετή), which in turn is attributed to their *aidôs* and desire for honor. But he must be using *aretê* in a loose sense, in order to distinguish the Homeric heroes from those who fight merely because they fear being punished by their cities or commanders. The latter sort, he goes on to say, “are worse to the extent that they act not from *aidôs* but from fear, avoiding not what is shameful but what is painful.” In other words, their fear of the consequences of defecting outweighs their fear of whatever they might suffer on the battlefield (perhaps because the result of fighting is more distant and uncertain).

<sup>46</sup> All Homer translations are from Lattimore 2011 [1951].

<sup>47</sup> Taylor’s translation “for the sake of the fine” is misleading because καλοῦ is indefinite.

For Aristotle, then, the fear of disgrace that spurs the Homeric heroes into battle is of a fundamentally different sort than the fear of corporal punishment. But he also believes that the motives of Diomedes and Hector, however admirable, do not constitute genuine courage. So what separates the truly courageous from those who act from *aidôs*?

The distinction is most easily grasped by comparing their respective ends or goals. Both desire something noble and want to avoid something shameful, but in significantly different ways. Aristotle says that the Homeric heroes stand firm in the face of danger out of the desire for honor and to avoid disrepute. In his view, honor is generally speaking (or “for the most part”) a good and noble thing, and worth pursuing for its own sake. But he does not think that a person should always pursue it. Similarly, while health is generally a good thing, it does not follow that we should always strive to be as healthy as possible. The virtuous person, Aristotle would say, chooses to exercise when and because it is beneficial to do so. This does not only mean that he avoids over-exercising and thereby harming his health. He also chooses not to exercise when more important activities demand his attention. In other words, he understands the relationship between individual goods, such as health and honor, and the end of human life as a whole, namely happiness (*εὐδαιμονία*, also “flourishing”), and does not mistake one for the other.<sup>48</sup> A truly

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<sup>48</sup> See *NE* 1.5, where Aristotle considers whether honor could be the ultimate human good, or *eudaimonia*: “This, however, appears to be too superficial to be what we are seeking; for it seems to depend more on those who honor than on the one honored, whereas we intuitively believe that the good is something of our own and hard to take from us. Further, it would seem, they pursue honor to convince themselves that they are good; at any rate, they seek to be honored by the practically wise, among people who know them, and for virtue. It is clear, then, that—in their view at any rate—virtue is superior [to honor].” (1095b23–30) Compare his criticism of Sparta at *Pol.* 2.9: “Another error, no less serious, is that although they think (rightly) that the good things

courageous person will stand firm in the face of danger “for the sake of the noble” (τοῦ καλοῦ ἔνεκα), not out of a “desire for something noble” (διὰ καλοῦ ὄρεξιν). The course of action that is most likely to bring him honor (and stave off disrepute) may not be what he has most reason to do. This is not to imply that the virtuous person must always be focused on the intrinsically noble qualities of an action, as opposed to the honor and esteem that may result. He might very well pursue honor for its own sake, but *subordinate* to the final good of *eudaimonia*. That is to say, he will be sensitive to situations in which his goals may conflict, and will choose the one that contributes most to his flourishing.<sup>49</sup>

For Aristotle, then, the hero who acts from *aidôs* differs from a person with true courage because he has the wrong end in view.<sup>50</sup> The point is not that shame inhibits his base desires, but that his generally noble desire to win honor and avoid disgrace blinds him to other values. We are now in a position to appreciate why Aristotle says that *aidôs* lacks practical wisdom. The virtuous person chooses to do the noble thing for the right

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that people compete for are won by virtue rather than by vice, they also suppose (not rightly) that these goods are better than virtue itself.” (1271b6–10; trans. Reeve)

<sup>49</sup> Note that this may mean choosing to sacrifice himself for his city, if that is what virtue requires. But in such cases the goal of honor and the goal of *eudaimonia* (in a severely restricted sense) coincide.

<sup>50</sup> See *EE* 3.1, 1230a23–33: “A man should stand his ground not because he will fall into disrepute [ἀδοξήσει], or is enraged, nor because he does not think he will die, or because he has effective protection, for in that case he will not think there is anything to be afraid of. But since every virtue issues in decision [πᾶσα <γ> ἀρετὴ προαιρετική] (in the manner earlier explained: it makes a man choose everything for the sake of some end, and the end is what is noble [καὶ τοῦτο ἐστὶ τὸ οὗ ἔνεκα, τὸ καλόν]), it is clear that courage being a particular virtue will make a man endure what is frightening for the sake of some end. Instead of making him do it in error, it will make him judge rightly, and instead of doing it for the sake of pleasure, he will do it because it is noble [ὅτι καλόν]. In a case where it is not noble but insane, he will not face the danger, for that would be something shameful [αἰσχρὸν γάρ].”

reasons. As we learned from *NE* 6.13/*EE* 5.13, Aristotle believes that without an intellectual grasp of the reasons for acting, the so-called “natural” virtues can bring one to ruin. I think it is significant that in both of the passages from the *Iliad* used to illustrate “civic” courage, we find examples where *aidôs* inspires a hero to act unwisely. The second quote comes from Book 8, after Diomedes has just saved Nestor from imminent death. Nestor takes the reins of his chariot and the two men rapidly bear down on Hector, when Zeus sends down a thunderbolt in their path. Nestor drops the reins and warns Diomedes to give up the chase: “no man can beat back the purpose of Zeus, not | even one very strong, since Zeus is by far the greater” (143–44). Diomedes answers back:

“Yes, old sir, all this you have said is fair and orderly.

But this thought comes as a bitter sorrow to my heart and my spirit;

for some day Hector will say openly before the Trojans:

‘The son of Tydeus, running before me, fled to his vessels.’

So he will vaunt; and then let the wide earth open beneath me.” (146–49)

Nestor assures him that the men and women of Troy will never believe Hector’s boasts, seeing that they have already suffered so much because of Diomedes’ valor. His words prove persuasive, but as they retreat towards the Greek ships and Hector shouts insults after them, Diomedes has to resist the urge to turn and face him:

Three times in his heart and spirit he pondered turning,

and three times from the hills of Ida Zeus of the counsels

thundered, giving a sign to the Trojans that the battle was turning. (169–71)

The scene beautifully illustrates the possible tension between *aidôs* and practical wisdom. Nestor's decision to retreat in the face of Zeus' thunderbolts is not a sign of cowardice, because he realizes there is nothing to be gained—and everything to be lost—by fighting Hector when the god is on his side. And Diomedes' unwillingness to retreat is not a mark of true courage, Aristotle would say, since it is based on a desire to save his reputation at the cost of something greater. Had Diomedes given in to his *aidôs*, it would have meant certain death for himself and Nestor, and disaster for the Greeks.

The episode makes a poignant contrast to the first passage cited, which precedes Hector's tragic end.<sup>51</sup> At the start of Book 22, Hector stands alone beneath the walls of Troy waiting to face Achilles. From above, his parents try to persuade him to retreat inside the citadel and gather reinforcements. They appeal to his sense of pity and filial duty, evoking images of the city's destruction and the degradation they will be made to suffer if Troy's most capable defender is slain. Hector hears their pleas and takes counsel with himself:

“Ah me! If I go now inside the wall and the gateway,  
Polydamas will be first to put a reproach upon me,  
since he tried to make me lead the Trojans inside the city  
on that accursed night when brilliant Achilles rose up,

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<sup>51</sup> In *EE* 3.1, the same quotation is preceded by: “And *aidôs* took hold of Hector.” This verse is not found in any other source for the *Iliad*.

and I would not obey him, but that would have been far better.  
Now, since by my own recklessness I have ruined my people,  
I feel *aidôs* before [αἰδέομαι] the Trojans and the Trojan women with trailing robes, that someone who is less of a man than I will say of me:  
‘Hector believed in his own strength and ruined his people.’  
Thus they will speak; and as for me, it would be much better  
at that time, to go against Achilles, and slay him, and come back,  
or else be killed by him in glory in front of the city.” (99–110)

Hector knows that he stands a better chance of defeating Achilles with the help of his fellow Trojans, who have amassed within the city walls. But he is ashamed to face them, because of his earlier decision (in Book 18) to reject his brother Polydamas’ sound advice and expose the army to ruin. Now he would rather die than hear his name dragged through the dust, and so, in an act of bad faith, he uses his previous folly as a reason to commit an even greater one. His death at the hands of Achilles seals his city’s fate.<sup>52</sup>

The lack of wisdom revealed in the Homeric heroes’ brand of courage is not simply a matter of miscalculation, of failing to take an adequate measure of the dangers of standing firm. Rather, to the extent that they are motivated by *aidôs*, they make a mistake about what the goal of standing firm ought to be. Once again, the truly courageous person acts “for the sake of the noble”, and if the wisest (and therefore

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<sup>52</sup> On Hector’s *aidôs*, see Redfield 1994, 115–19.

noblest) course of action is to retreat, then the prospect of honor and the threat of disgrace no longer have any motivational force.

John McDowell famously claims that virtue “silences” any competing considerations.<sup>53</sup> In his view, it is not as though the reasons for acting wisely *outweigh* the reasons for doing the unwise thing (e.g. the prospect of honor and esteem). Rather, “in the circumstances [the latter considerations] are not reasons at all.”<sup>54</sup> But one could argue that because the virtuous person is attentive to value in all its forms, he sees that the prospect of a good such as honor is still a reason to do the unwise thing. This is not to say that he is in any way *tempted* to act unwisely, or that after the fact he will experience some *regret* at his decision. The competing considerations will simply “have a voice”, and will enter into his deliberations, even though they do not have any pull. In this vein, Jeffrey Seidman draws a distinction between “motivational silencing” and “rational silencing” (69), and argues that eudaimonistic considerations (such as the prospect of pleasure or honor) that conflict with virtuous agency will be motivationally, but not rationally silenced by virtue.<sup>55</sup>

At this point, however, one might object that Aristotle’s critique of “civic” courage depends on a naïve understanding of honor and shame. It seems to suggest that the Homeric heroes are motivated by a crudely heteronomous concern for what others

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<sup>53</sup> I am grateful to Jonathan Dancy for calling this issue to my attention.

<sup>54</sup> McDowell 1998b, 17.

<sup>55</sup> Seidman 2005, 69.

think of them.<sup>56</sup> But as Bernard Williams and several others have argued, ancient Greek literature portrays the psychology of *aidôs* as predicated on an *internalized* system of values and shared expectations.<sup>57</sup> The Homeric heroes may feel shame for having failed to live up to the standards of their communities (or families, or friends, or enemies), but they are also ideals they have for themselves. Hector fears Polydamas' reproach in part because he has failed in his own eyes, since it has been proven that he is not the capable leader that both he and his city expected him to be.<sup>58</sup> So perhaps what Hector is really afraid of is not the opinions of others, but acting in a way that would *warrant* losing his reputation for *aretê*. If that is right, then the claim that a person who acts from *aidôs* has the wrong end in view seems unjustified.

Let me offer two brief responses to this objection. First, it is clear from the *Rhetoric* that Aristotle does *not* conceive of shame as being crudely heteronomous. There he says that people are especially ashamed of actions that reveal “bad things about one’s character” (τῶν τοῦ ἥθους κακιῶν)—i.e. things that one considers to be discreditable in others.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, a person does not feel shame before just any audience, but before those whose opinions *matter* to him, including the wise.<sup>60</sup> At the same time, Aristotle

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<sup>56</sup> See Cairns 1993, 420: “In these passages on bravery there is a strong suggestion that *aidôs* is concerned with external honour and reputation alone.”

<sup>57</sup> See esp. Williams 1993 and Cairns 1993.

<sup>58</sup> As Williams (1993, 82) says about the lines that follow: “Hector was indeed afraid that someone inferior to him would be able to criticise him, but that was because he thought the criticism would be true, and the fact that such a person could make it would only make things worse.”

<sup>59</sup> *Rhet.* 2.6, 1384a8. See Chapter 1, §3 above.

<sup>60</sup> *Rhet.* 2.6, 1383b26–34: “the people before whom we feel shame are those whose opinion of us matters to us. Such persons are: those who admire us, those whom we admire, those by whom we wish to be admired, those with whom we are competing, and those whose opinion of us we



conceives of shame as an essentially *social* emotion. Although it is shaped by one's own values and ideals, it is more than simply the fear of failing to live up to a personal standard. It is the fear of falling in the eyes of a community with whom one identifies. Second, I think that Aristotle's view reflects the psychological complexity of *aidôs* as it is actually portrayed in Homer. Consider, for example, how Nestor responds to Diomedes' fear that Hector will mock him before the Trojans:

“Ah me, son of brave Tydeus; what a thing to have spoken.

If Hector calls you a coward and a man of no strength, then

the Trojans and Dardanians will never believe him,

nor will the wives of the high-hearted Trojan warriors,

they whose husbands you hurled in the dust in the pride of their manhood.”

(8.152–56)

Again, Diomedes is not merely afraid of being mocked; he fears that Hector's insults would be justified. Nestor therefore reminds him that he is not a coward, as his actions have already proven. This shows that Diomedes' *aidôs* is responsive to rational considerations. But also notice what Nestor does *not* say. He does not try to tell Diomedes that his reputation is of no importance, and that the only thing that matters is the quality of his character. It is critical to his persuasive strategy that Diomedes thinks

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respect. We admire those, and wish those to admire us, who possess any good thing that is highly esteemed; or from whom we are very anxious to get something that they are able to give us—as a lover feels. We compete with our equals. We respect, as true the view of wise people, such as our elders and those who have been well educated.” (Revised Oxford Translation, slightly revised.)

that the Trojans will pay no heed to Hector's boasts—that there is an *audience* that knows he is no coward.

Williams also believes that shame ultimately responds to “real social expectations” (p. 84), however much they may be refined by one's own values. The *aidôs* of the Homeric heroes, on his view, is neither crudely dependent on the opinions of others nor wholly autonomous.<sup>61</sup> Unlike Aristotle, however, he doubts whether human beings have a better guide for meeting the demands of moral life. That is because he rejects the notion of a kind of practical judgment that transcends the mechanisms of honor and shame—a kind of judgment, as we have seen, that is central to Aristotle's theory of virtue. Williams claims that the early poets offer a more realistic picture of our ethical situation than what we find in Plato or Aristotle. But if I am right that Hector's tragedy reveals the destructive side of *aidôs*, one could argue that the *Iliad* depends for its effect on the possibility of something better. In that case, Aristotle may have learned more from Homer than Williams' story allows.

I have argued that in spite of the weaknesses of *NE* 4.9, Aristotle has good grounds for claiming that *aidôs* is not a virtue. In the last section, we saw that there are two main ways in which the virtuous person's motivations and the psychology of *aidôs* come apart. First, *aidôs* can motivate a person to act in the right way even if he is inclined

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<sup>61</sup> Notice that even if shame were wholly autonomous, it still would not play an important role in the virtuous person's motivations. The virtuous person avoids shameful actions because they are shameful (or because of the features that make them shameful), not because of how he would appear in his own eyes.

to act shamefully. Second, *aidôs* can bring a person with a generally good character to ruin, because it can cause him to act for the sake of the wrong end. While the virtuous person's actions and actions motivated by *aidôs* will often look the same from the outside, only the former can be explained without appealing to the desire to win honor and avoid disrepute.<sup>62</sup> Although *aidôs* has a role to play in the development of virtue, it is ultimately eclipsed by the disposition to act well for the right reasons.

## 5. Coda: *NE* 1128b23–25 and Alexander of Aphrodisias' *Ethical Problems* 21

To conclude this chapter, I want to briefly consider Alexander of Aphrodisias' response to the arguments of *NE* 4.9 in his *Ethical Problems*. For reasons we have not yet considered, Alexander argues that Aristotle's own theory commits him to the view that *aidôs* should play a central role in the life of virtue. According to Alexander, *aidôs* belongs to the virtuous person most of all.

Let us begin by revisiting a striking remark that appears partway through the second argument of *NE* 4.9. Shame, Aristotle says, is “not characteristic of a decent person at all, if indeed it is felt at base actions.” He then adds: “For these sorts of actions should not be done. And if some are shameful in truth and others according to opinion, it makes no difference [εἰ δ' ἐστὶ τὰ μὲν κατ' ἀλήθειαν αἰσχρὰ τὰ δὲ κατὰ δόξαν, οὐδὲν διαφέρει]—neither sort should be done, and so one should not feel shame.” Bywater puts

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<sup>62</sup> On the difficulty of judging actions from the outside, see Lorenz 2009, 191.

the latter two sentences in parentheses, and translators tend to follow his lead. According to the standard reading, the κατ' ἀλήθειαν/κατὰ δόξαν clause distinguishes between actions that are truly shameful and actions that are merely believed to be so, perhaps by the public at large.<sup>63</sup> Aristotle seems to be anticipating the following sort of objection: “You say that shame is not characteristic of a decent person at all, because he will never do anything that calls for shame. But what about things that are shameful according to opinion, even when they are not truly so? Isn't he liable to feel shame in regard to *them*?” We might expect Aristotle to reply that the virtuous person is only concerned to avoid what is actually shameful. Instead, he says that the good person will not feel shame about things that are only thought to be shameful because one should never *do* such things. On the face of it, this is puzzling, since we have just seen that the virtuous person's disposition to choose the *kalon* for its own sake makes having a sense of shame unnecessary. But now it appears as though he will be motivated by others' opinions after all. Even if the virtuous person manages to avoid doing anything shameful “according to opinion”, and so never has occasion to feel retrospective shame, it seems that a prospective, inhibitory sense of shame would be needed to keep him on the right course.

Irwin (1999) attempts to solve the problem by adding a gloss that ascribes the “opinion” to the decent person himself: “If some actions are really disgraceful and others are base [only] in [his] belief, that does not matter, since neither should be done, and so

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<sup>63</sup> Here are some other ways of rendering the passage: Ross in the Revised Oxford Translation (1984): “if some actions are disgraceful in very truth and others only according to common opinion, this makes no difference....” Crisp 2000: “it makes no difference whether some actions are genuinely disgraceful, while others are only believed to be so....” Rowe 2002: “if some are truly shameful, some only held to be so, it makes no difference....” Taylor 2006: “It makes no difference whether they are really base or only thought to be so....”

he should not feel disgrace.” On this construal, Aristotle is responding to a different sort of objection: “What if the decent person does something that he *believes* to be shameful, even when it is actually not? Shouldn’t he feel shame then?” Aristotle’s reply is that the virtuous person neither does anything truly shameful, nor does anything he mistakenly regards as shameful. But this reading strikes me as even more problematic, because it implies that the virtuous person will act in accordance with false judgments about the shameful, which his *phronêsis* ought to preclude. On the standard reading, by contrast, the virtuous person will act in accordance with *true* judgments about what is shameful only “according to opinion”.

The standard reading is supported by our two earliest commentators, Anonymous and Alexander of Aphrodisias.<sup>64</sup> Let us assume Aristotle means that one should not do things that are considered shameful *by others*. What kinds of things could he have in mind? We can rule out any cases where avoiding an action that is shameful *kata doxan* requires doing something truly shameful. Aristotle must be thinking of cases in which paying heed to others’ opinions involves no moral cost. A virtuous person will avoid what is shameful according to opinion *in addition to* what is truly shameful.

I think we can divide the relevant cases into two main classes. First, there are actions that are shameful relative to a particular set of cultural norms or conventions, which may not be universally shared. The Anonymous commentator mentions “eating in the agora” (202.12). Perhaps the Athenians thought it was shameful to eat in the agora, while the same practice was accepted or even encouraged in Thebes. Aristotle might say

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<sup>64</sup> Anon 202.10–16 and *Ethical Problems* 21.

that eating in the agora (unlike, for example, committing adultery) is not shameful in reality—but a person should respect the norms of whatever culture he participates in, so as to avoid giving offense.

In the second, and perhaps more interesting, kind of case, an action gives the *appearance* of being shameful when in fact it is not. Such actions are especially liable to be misrepresented. In the *Charmides*, for example, Socrates suggests that it would be shameful for him to speak with the beautiful young Charmides without his guardian, Critias, being present. It makes no difference if Socrates' intentions are entirely pure. Similarly, in a healthy society a politician would not want to be seen fraternizing with a lobbyist, even if he were not at all corrupted. Perhaps Aristotle thinks that a virtuous person should avoid the appearance of impropriety, in addition to doing nothing that is truly shameful.

Alexander observes that, on Aristotle's own account, we have an independent motive to avoid disrepute, because "reputation and honor are the greatest of external goods" (141. 29–30). A good person will want to guard his reputation, but just acting virtuously might not be sufficient. Alexander writes:

For it does not seem that disrepute comes about only with respect to deeds that are [really] not noble, but also with respect to those that are objects of suspicion and which can be misrepresented, this having its greatest influence among the ignorant. But if disrepute some[times] comes about with respect to such things, the person who has done nothing shameful is not excluded from being able to

become the subject of disrepute. If then one ought to fear this disrepute which comes from misrepresentations, no less than [that] from [actual] deeds, this feeling [sc. *aidôs*] will not be alien to any of those who are respectable and further advanced in years, not even according to [Aristotle], if one should avoid and fear disrepute, and this [fear] is *aidôs*.<sup>65</sup>

Alexander goes on to argue that *aidôs* will belong to the virtuous person most of all. Since acting shamefully is entirely alien to his nature, he will be all the more sensitive to any implication of disgrace. In Alexander's view, this sensitivity is more akin to a *hexis* or a *diathesis* than a *pathos*. If *aidôs* is not a virtue in the strict sense, it should at least be seen to have an important place in the virtuous person's psychology. Alexander does not say that *aidôs* is itself a virtue, but he clearly rejects the view that the virtuous person has no use for it.

Perhaps Aristotle's theory should be modified to accommodate Alexander's objection. When a virtuous person does something just or courageous, he acts not because he fears disrepute (or desires honor), but because he wants to do what is noble. *Aidôs* is not a virtue because it does not explain why he acts virtuously. But at the same time, a virtuous person does not only act for the sake of the noble. He pursues "external goods" such as health and wealth and honor, to the extent that pursuing them is consistent with acting virtuously. He will also take care to avoid disrepute; and if his actions are misrepresented, he will be concerned to restore his reputation. Following Alexander, we

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<sup>65</sup> 142. 1–8. Trans. Sharples, slightly modified.

could say that what motivates him in such circumstances is *aidôs*. But this standing desire to be honored by those whom he respects will never distort his moral vision.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> I am grateful to Jonathan Dancy, Duane Long, Christopher Moore, Dave Riesbeck, the audience at the 2012 Ancient Philosophy Workshop held at UT-Austin, and the participants in the UT-Austin Dissertation Seminar for discussion and comments on previous drafts of this chapter.



## Epilogue

The aim of this dissertation has been to show why Plato and Aristotle deny that *aidôs*, or a sense of shame and honor, is one of the virtues that constitute an agent's flourishing. Both philosophers conceive of *aidôs* as epistemically oriented towards the opinions of a community, rather than towards the ethical reality that grounds the attitudes of praise and contempt. As such, *aidôs* proves to be an unreliable guide to action, and must be subordinated to reason in the soul of a fully virtuous person. I would like to conclude this study by sketching out three possible directions for future research on this topic.

In the current project I focus on the role of *aidôs* in the life of a person who has achieved complete virtue. It would be worth taking a closer look at what Plato and Aristotle have to say about the less than ideal case, and in particular the role of *aidôs* in moral education. Both appear to think that a sense of shame is essential to ethical development because it is responsive to evaluative standards other than pleasure and pain, and can therefore restrain and shape a child's appetitive desires. Is *aidôs* an innate quality, or can it be nurtured? How does *aidôs*, which begins as a sensitivity to the norms of a community, transform into the practical wisdom that guides the fully virtuous person's

actions? Two key texts for filling in this part of the story are the *Republic* and the final chapters of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Although my dissertation emphasizes the harmony between Plato's and Aristotle's views of *aidôs*, I think there may be an important difference in their conceptions of the role of honor in *eudaimonia*. In the Coda to Chapter 3 I discuss Aristotle's view that honor is the greatest of the external goods, and what this may suggest about the virtuous person's concern for his reputation. If Plato, like the Stoics, believes that the possession of virtue is sufficient for *eudaimonia*, then he might think that the virtuous person will be quite indifferent towards his public reputation (even if honor is a "preferred" indifferent). The question is whether Plato recognizes anything like the virtue of *megalopsuchia* ("greatness of soul"), and if not, whether he is right to ignore it. In order to address this issue, we would need to look more closely at Plato's account of spirited desire in the *Republic* and *Laws*, as well as Aristotle's various remarks on the value of honor in the *Ethics* and *Politics*.

Finally, the project could be developed diachronically to consider the role of shame and honor in later virtue ethics, in particular Stoic theories. The Stoics draw a sharp distinction between *aischunê*, or retrospective shame, and prospective *aidôs*, which they recognize as one of the *eupatheiai* of the sage. How does the Stoic conception of *aidôs* relate to the emotional disposition that both Plato and Aristotle exclude from their list of virtues? How does it compare to the sense of shame that apparently motivates Socrates to spend his life examining himself and others? Were the Stoics right to

reintroduce *aidôs* as a central ethical concept? Key sources for this study would include the *Discourses* of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*.

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