

Moralès filosofija

SHAME AS AN EXPERIENCE OF LACK: TOWARD A NEW PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO SHAME

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Abstract. *The purpose of this paper is to give a sketch of a new phenomenological approach to shame. I claim that prevailing theories of shame are too narrow and reduce shame to a mere fear of social sanctions or to an intimate experience wherein a subject becomes an object of external social norms. Instead, I demonstrate that we should understand shame as an experience wherein an individual feels his incapability of meeting the standards of the ego-ideal, since he lacks something valuable. From this perspective shame is, on the one hand, a profoundly intimate experience wherein an individual evaluates herself negatively because she lacks something she thinks she requires. On the other hand, since lack reveals itself only through a process wherein an individual compares her real self to the ego-ideal, shame always has an ideological dimension since the ego-ideal reflects the shared ideological values an individual is attached to and constitute part of one's self-conception.*

Keywords: *shame, ideology, J-P Sartre, ego-ideal, phenomenology of the self*

Even though shame is one of the commonest experiences of a human being's everyday life, it is at the same time one of the most controversial. Indeed, there are scholars who claim that shame is an ugly emotion which causes depression, low self-esteem and an abusive behaviour but, at the same time, there are many notable scholars and thinkers who are convinced that shame is a valuable moral emotion and we still do not comprehend its real moral potential. There are theories according to which shame is so common a part of our self that we cannot even recognize it, but there are others which

suggest that shame is just a relic from the past and thus has lost its significance for the modern world.

These various interpretations of shame may lead one to a doubt whether shame is in some way misunderstood. Hence, the first purpose of this paper is to systematize the different approaches to shame. I claim that there are at least two main strategies for how shame has been analysed. I name the first strategy "external", the second one "internal". In the external strategy, attention is focused on the socio-cultural functions of shame, *viz.*, the question is

what functions does shame serve in a social field. The common hypothesis of this strategy, as we will see, is that shame is a moral sanction that is imposed when an individual does not follow the moral and behavioural standards of a concrete community.

Internal strategies, on the contrary, focus on the introspective aspects of shame. According to this strategy, one feels shame when her individual self is in danger, *i.e.*, most important in the experience of shame is not that one feels she has misbehaved (this emotion we call guilt), but rather that in shame a subject becomes the object of external standards.

Prima facie one may guess that these two strategies support and complete each other but, as we will see, the reality is quite opposite: these strategies do not only oppose but even denounce each other. What would be the reason? I claim that a difference and also a mistake of these two strategies lies not only in their definition of shame but in something even more profound: a mistake is that they both simplify the relation between an individual subject and the collective community to which an individual belongs. The external strategies, by concentrating on the external aspects of shame, tend to ignore a subjective pole of shame. Surely they can admit there are individual differences in experiencing shame but overall the cultural, religious and habitual standards regulate what one perceives as shameful and what not. As a result, the theories which follow the external strategy tend to think that the relation between the individual self and the external moral standards are normally harmonious which means that one feels painful emotions like shame or guilt when this

harmonious relation is disturbed, *viz.*, one feels shame when one cannot meet the external moral standards of community or one has disobeyed the moral rules.

The internal strategies, as I have suggested, concentrate on the perspective of individual self-consciousness and its phenomenological experience of shame, which means that these theories take very seriously the internal pole of shame that the external theories ignore. But exactly here is the reason why these two approaches reach completely different conclusions. Since only by ignoring the internal perspective can the external strategies assume that shame is merely a manifestation of discrepancy between an individual person and collective values. But the psychological research which follows the introspective methodology in order to analyze the experience of shame has reached the conclusion that in shame the self-consciousness does not focus on the collective moral rules she has broken but rather on the self, *i.e.*, shame is not the collectivistic but rather profoundly individualistic emotion in which the self-consciousness feels that its subjective self-image is in danger.

Thus, the external strategies tend to characterize shame as the collectivistic emotion since they suggest that an individual feels shame in a situation she has disobeyed the collective moral rules and feels that her social bonds are in danger. Hence, they conclude, shame defends the collective moral standards by punishing individuals who do not follow them. The internal strategies, on the contrary, claim that shame is the individualistic emotion since in shame an individual does not worry about the moral standards but rather about herself and how it is perceived by others.

As an answer to these two approaches, in the third part of the paper I will attempt to sketch my own phenomenological approach to shame. I agree that shame is related to self (*i.e.*, in shame self-consciousness evaluates itself as imperfect) and I admit that the self-consciousness evaluates the self following the external values. But there is one important aspect we cannot forget. Albeit the self-consciousness evaluates the self by following the external standards, it firstly must have *accepted* these standards, *i.e.*, the relation between the self-consciousness and the standards is never passive and harmonious but rather active and *dialectical*. It means that not only the external standards transform the individual self, but the individual self by approving or rejecting these standards already transforms the collective moral world it shares with others.

Secondly, if we agree that the relation between the individual self and the community is dialectical, we also should abandon the question whether shame is an individualistic or collectivistic emotion: it is both of them. Indeed, precisely in shame we can follow the dialectics between the collective other and the individual subject. Since if we agree the function of shame is to force each member of a community to conform to the moral collective standards then the relation between shame and the individual subject can never be positive but negative: an actual function of shame is to integrate an individual into society by reducing and repressing an unpredictable behaviour of an individual subject. But the singular subject by its definition can never completely lose its singularity and dissolve into the community (the individual can never become the ideal object

of shame), which means that the individual subject remains always reluctant and elusive to shame.

The Functions of Shame in Socio-Cultural Structure: Anthropological and Sociological Theories of Shame

Although many great philosophers have mentioned shame in their works (Aristotle, Plato, Spinoza, Nietzsche, to name some) the real interest in shame began in the 20th century. The first academic fields attempting to define the functions of shame were anthropology and sociology (especially American scholars).

But before we start a critical analysis we should try to understand what shame is or, even more crucially, what it is not. For example, sociologist Norbert Elias in his *The Civilizing Process* defines shame as a “form of displeasure or fear which arises characteristically on those occasions when a person who fears lapsing into inferiority can avert this danger neither by direct physical means nor by any her form of attack” (Elias 2000: 415).

Elias’s definition of shame as a form of fear in which an individual is afraid of another’s negative evaluation and public denouncement is quite widespread but can be misleading. I admit that fear can be the part of the experience of shame but it is a mistake to reduce shame merely to fear. Because, as I have emphasized above, shame requires an acceptance of the individual person, which means that, in spite of the fact that some behaviour in concrete society is perceived shameful, a concrete member of society may always think otherwise. For example, there can be a homo-

sexual man who hides his orientation, but not for the reason that he thinks his sexuality is immoral and shameful but because he fears the social ostracism and rejection which might follow if his orientation would become public.

Therefore, the accurate experience of shame requires the approval of a person since only then we can be certain that a person is really involved and actually feels shame and no other emotion. Unfortunately many theories of shame, especially those which analyse shame externally, reduce shame to mere social fear and anxiety.

Let us analyse then what are the consequences if we conceptualize shame as social fear. The first and the most profound consequence is the conclusion that shame is completely social and therefore a heteronomous emotion, *i.e.*, shame requires always an audience and one feels shame only *before* others' eyes.

Actually most theories of shame which conceptualize shame as a moral sanction are based on this presumption. Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1967) is significant here because of her distinction between shame culture and guilt culture, *viz.*, there are cultures in which the main social sanction is guilt and the others in which it is shame. By characterizing Japanese culture as a shame culture, Benedict writes:

Shame is a reaction to other people's criticism. A man is shamed either by being openly ridiculed and rejected or by fantasizing to himself that he has been made ridiculous. In either case it is a potent sanction. But it requires an audience or at least a man's fantasy of an audience. (Benedict 1967: 243)

As we can understand, for Benedict shame is a social sanction based on an in-

dividual's fear of being publicly ridiculed. But guilt, according to Benedict, is based on an internalized conviction of sin and therefore does not require any audience (Benedict 1967: 243).

Although Benedict's distinction between shame and guilt culture has been heavily criticized, her main definition of shame as a fear of social sanctions has remained untouched and we can find it in many anthropological studies. For example, Daniel Fessler in his *Shame in Two Cultures* also describes a classical shame event as an occasion in which a person "focuses on concern with others' actual or imagined negative evaluations; often stem[ming] from violation of relatively important social standards" (Fessler 2004: 218). Or American cultural anthropologist Paul G. Hiebert, who also defines shame as a reaction to other people's criticism and claims that in shame culture an individual is not concerned with what is right or wrong but rather with what is expected by others (Hiebert 1985: 212).

The second consequence is that if we define shame essentially as a fear of others' negative opinions, then we have already accepted the paradigm according to which human beings attempt in any case to build and maintain the harmonious social bonds with others and therefore avoid doing anything that could harm these bonds. This also explains why shame is so painful: in shame we feel that our social bonds with others are disturbed or even broken.

This paradigm has a very strong position in American sociology. For example, sociologist Thomas J. Scheff, by drawing on the research of psychotherapists Helen Block Lewis and Silvan Tompkins, defines shame as "the emotional aspect of discon-

nection between persons” (Scheff 1991: 27). Scheff aims to understand the function of emotions in the social structure. He claims that the function of emotions is to regulate a social interaction and to contribute to build and hold the secure social bonds (Scheff 1991: 64). Therefore, if our social relations are secure, we feel joy and satisfaction but if not, negative emotions like shame or guilt.

Shame then signifies an inadequate social bond. But what is peculiar in shame is that shame always involves the other since in shame the self concerns itself with other’s image of oneself. Therefore, in order to avoid a negative evaluation of others, which may lead to broken social bonds (shame), people monitor their self-presentations and expressive behavior in order to anticipate the potential criticism of others. In this way, shame functions also as a social sanction.

The Internal Strategies for Analysing Shame: Jean-Paul Sartre, Psychology

Yet there is rather different approach to shame that I have named internal. What then is the main difference between these two approaches? The first is perspective. Of course the external theories also mention the phenomenological aspects of shame like a feeling of inferiority or an isolation, but curiously they usually do not attempt to *explain* the reasons of these feelings (or if they do, then only for supporting their own theory).

Indeed, as we saw above, the external theories try to explain the functions of shame in the social structure but their psychological explanations tend to be limited.

For example, if we understand shame as a sign of broken social bonds, why should a person feel inferiority? Or if we describe shame as a fear to be ridiculed, why then, according to much psychological research, do people in shame feel anger and depression rather than merely fear?

To answer these questions the external theories of shame are clearly insufficient. But why? Do these theories ignore something important in the experience of shame? My suggestion is that they ignore or even deny the individuality. The external theories tend to think of shame as a profoundly heteronomous experience in which an individual is the passive subject of external laws of morality.

In their book *In Defence of Shame* (2011), three philosophers, Julien A. Deonna, Raffaele Rodogno, and Fabrice Teroni, have attempted to undermine this conception of shame that they label a dogma. According to them, an understanding that shame is a social feeling is so widespread that no one even has tried to criticize it (Deonna et al. 2011: 125).

But why should we ever doubt about it? Let us take an example from their study. There is a girl Milena who is mocked at school because of her foreign accent and manners (Deonna et al. 2011: 125). According to the external theories, which describe shame as heteronomous, Milena should feel shame because of the others’ negative judgement. Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni suggest a completely different explanation. First of all, they maintain that an individual feels shame when one perceives his or her values being threatened (Deonna et al. 2011: 130). Therefore, Milena feels shame not because of the negative opinion of her schoolmates but be-

cause she thinks that her reputation (which she values) is in danger (thus, if Milena had not valued her reputation, she would not feel shame).

Therefore, the argument of Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni is quite similar to my thesis that shame requires the acceptance of the individual, *i.e.*, shame is genuine only if an individual approves the external standards which define right and wrong. Without this internal acceptance an individual perceives herself as a mere object of moral laws but she cannot have an emotional reaction to them.

This experience, of being the mere object of others, is precisely described by Jean-Paul Sartre in his *Being and Nothingness* (2003). Curiously, Sartre names this experience shame. Why? In order to understand this, we first should get a brief overview of Sartre's phenomenological ontology. According to Sartre, there are two modes of being: being-in-itself and being-for-itself. The being-in-itself characterizes the non-conscious being which is solid and unchanging. The being-for-itself, on the contrary, is a self-conscious being. But the structure of self-consciousness, according to Sartre, is an internal stream of consciousness which changes ceaselessly (hence it is always wrong to use the expression "the self-conscious *is*"). Therefore self-consciousness does not have any concrete properties and characteristics.

But when self-consciousness meets another self-consciousness, then the other does not perceive the self-consciousness as the ceaselessly changing stream of consciousness but as a concrete person with solid properties. Therefore, there is a contradiction, *viz.*, the other does not recognize me as a subject but cancels my

subjectivity and reduces me to the level of mere thing-hood, or the being-in-itself. And this experience, an original fall from the subjectivity to the object-ness under the gaze of other, Sartre labels shame (Sartre 2003: 286).

Although Sartre's phenomenological description of shame relies heavily on his existential phenomenology, it reveals many important aspects of shame. Firstly, the object of shame is not, as the external theories maintain, the other, but an *ego*, *i.e.*, in shame, the self-consciousness does not turn outward but inward and starts to reflect itself (Sartre 2003: 246).

Here we must mention that Sartre does not understand the ego as we might customarily construe it, since if we understand the self-consciousness according to Sartre, *i.e.*, the ceaseless stream, then we cannot equate the self-consciousness with the ego. Indeed, already in his *The Transcendence of Ego*, Sartre criticized Husserl since the latter distinguishes an empirical self and the pure transcendental ego (Sartre 2004: 5-6). The empirical self should refer to the psychological "everyday" self, but the pure transcendental ego we achieve only after a phenomenological procedure, or *epoche*. The main difference between these two selves is that the psychological self lacks the unity and consistency, which is the reason we require the transcendental ego that would be then the consistent core of self-consciousness.

According to Sartre, we do not have any evidence that the pure transcendental ego exists and, therefore, we should understand the ego as the result of reflection, *i.e.*, the ego being constituted when the self-consciousness starts to reflect itself (the reflection is then the process wherein

the self-consciousness makes itself its object).

The ego then by its definition is not an autonomous and independent subject but just a mere object. But important here is that the other self-consciousness also identifies me as the ego and fails to recognize my true essence. Even in very close relationships (e.g., in love) I am for the other an object of love, i.e., even in close relationships we cannot overcome the objectness.

According to Sartre, shame emerges precisely from this experience: the kernel of shame is a conflict between two self-consciousnesses, a conflict issuing from the ontological fact that self-consciousnesses cannot recognize each other as a subject but reduce each other to mere objects.

For Sartre this conflict is insolvable and leads to ceaseless struggle for recognition. It could mean that the self-consciousness attempts to abolish its subjectivity by trying to make itself the pure object of the other (Sartre names this attitude masochism) (Sartre 2003: 386). Or, on the contrary, the self-consciousness attempts to capture completely the free subjectivity of other self-consciousness (accordingly, sadism) (Sartre 2003: 401). Of course, both of these attitudes are fruitless since the self-consciousness remains always already because of its ontological structure, free and autonomous.

Then, for the sociologist Scheff as well as for Sartre, shame signifies the broken social bond but in completely different sense. Since, while for Scheff an overcoming of shame leads to a rehabilitation of previously harmed relations, Sartre denies any harmonious social relations at all. Indeed, already in his analysis of Heidegger,

Sartre criticizes Heidegger's concept of *Mit-Sein*, because it presupposes some kind of solidarity (*Stimmung*) between people and portrays the relation between people as an oblique interdependence (Sartre 2003: 269). Therefore, the original relation between two self-consciousnesses in the intuition of Heidegger is not *me* and *you* but *us*. And thus Heidegger denies the importance of the individuality of self-consciousness and consequently reduces all individuals to one anonymous crew (Sartre 2003: 270).

Hence, according to Sartre, if we take seriously the individuality of every concrete self-consciousness, then the only valid ontological structure of intersubjectivity is the opposition. Certainly it does not mean that on the everyday level one could not argue that loyalty to his homeland or his best friend is a constitutive part of his concrete being, but on the ontological level there is no good reason why we should suppose that there is a constitutive solidarity between people.

After this short insight into Sartre's account of shame, one may consider Sartre's conclusions to be too pessimistic and radical. There is certainly a grain of truth in this opinion, but if we consider contemporary psychological studies on shame, we could notice that they also tend to portray shame as an ugly emotion which can spoil the life of a human being rather than improve it.

Why then are psychological approaches so hostile to shame? Although there are many different perspectives on shame in psychology, the ground-breaking approach was articulated in Lewis's *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis*. Lewis's thesis was quite simple:

The experience of shame is directly about self, which is the focus of evaluation. In guilt, the self is not the central object of negative evaluation, but rather the thing done or undone is the focus. (Lewis 1971: 30)

According to Lewis then, shame and guilt are phenomenologically quite different experiences. In shame, an individual experiences a feeling of inferiority and a sense of worthlessness or powerlessness since his actual self-image is in danger. In guilt, wherein the primary focus is on behaviour, people usually feel regret and remorse but they do not necessarily relate it to their personal self. Or, more accurately, they connect their personal self with a wrong deed but do not devalue their self as worthless.

Lewis's separation became paradigmatic in psychological studies of shame since much succeeding empirical research supported her ideas. Even more, because in shame the primary focus is on the self, studies have proved that people who are more sensitive to shame are also less empathic. But people who are more prone to guilt, also show more other-oriented empathy (Tangney and Dearing 2004: 83). Therefore, the psychological research suggests that shame-proneness characterizes people who are more hostile and less empathic to their fellows, which may find expression in aggressive behaviour and narcissism (which conceals low self-esteem).

But these discoveries are not the most important for our study. More important is the similarity between how psychologists and Sartre understand the experience of shame: they both describe shame as a process wherein an individual subject becomes an object. Although both guilt and shame are moral sanctions which strive for

a social conformism, in guilt the object of sanction is the person's behaviour, but in shame the individual self is attacked. Indeed, in shame a person is called to change his self in order to make it "normal" or "acceptable", which signifies that in shame the self becomes not just the object but a "problematic" object that must be transformed.

If we analyse from this perspective the external theories, then we realize that they also understand the experience of shame the same way, albeit they do not consider it a problem. In these theories the subject is already defined as a passive product of culture who internalizes within himself the moral standards of society and conforms to them. But the internal theories of shame, whose starting point of analysis is the first-perspective self, perceive shame as the process of objectification wherein the individual self is reduced to the mere object of the external standards of morality. Therefore, shame can become a great danger to a person's autonomy and even to herself-expression and hence shaming as a punishment should be avoided as much as possible.

Is shame an ugly emotion? Toward a new phenomenological theory of shame

After this long discussion and comparison of different theories, one may ask whether this all was just a philosophical abstraction or could it have any practical outcome? Or, more accurately, could we not already conclude that shame is an ugly emotion that we should abandon?

As I have attempted to demonstrate, both external and internal theories of

shame understand shame as the process of objectification wherein an individual subject becomes a passive object of external standards. But can be there any alternative strategy?

First of all, the critical point of these theories could be that their approach to shame is too mechanical and empirical, and, therefore, they completely ignore the symbolic and ideological dimensions of shame. Or, more precisely, they do not ignore the symbolic dimension but they do not take it seriously enough. Since it is obvious that a dividing line between what is shameful and what is not depends on the concrete symbolic structure and ideology of society. It is obvious that in the heteronormative society, for example, all different sexualities are shameful and in patriarchal society feminine features are suppressed. Thus, it seems we do not have to emphasize it separately.

Still, in what follows, I want to demonstrate how important the ideological dimension in shame is, or even more – shame is the ideological emotion *per se*. But, in order to demonstrate that, firstly we have to abandon the model wherein an individual is opposed to the external moral standards because exactly this model leads us to an understanding according to which in shame an active subject becomes a passive object of external moral laws.

What would be the alternative? I claim that this alternative can be found in Hegel's phenomenology of *Geist*. First of all, as is a well-known fact, there are various and controversial interpretations of Hegel's philosophy. In this study, I loosely follow Philip J. Kain's study *Hegel and the Other* (2005), which we can consider an anti-metaphysical interpretation of Hegel. Thus,

according to Kain, *Geist* is not an independent transcendental subject or even God, as metaphysical interpretations tend to portray it, but *Geist* is a socio-cultural construction which is constituted of the traditions, customs, and beliefs of concrete community (Kain 2005: 44). In this sense we can interpret every socio-cultural reality as *Geist* which for concrete members of this culture is the Absolute whereby they explain their everyday life (Kain 2005: 14).

For our purposes, the most important thing is to clarify the relation between the individual consciousness and the Absolute, since we should avoid falling again into an interpretation wherein the individual consciousness is understood as a mere object of the Absolute. What would be an alternative?

I follow here a description of the dialectical model that Sartre offers in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, wherein he describes a dialectical movement through a concept of totalisation. Totalisation should be understood as a form of existence which is essentially constituted dialectically or, in other words, as an experience wherein we are directly involved in a dialectical movement (Sartre 2004: 45).

Although the primary example of totalisation for Sartre is History, it is not wrong to say that we can interpret any socio-cultural construction, including *Geist*, as totalisation. But how can we define totalisation as the dialectical movement? Sartre, by borrowing from Hegel, explains totalisation as the negation of the negation (Sartre 2004: 46). This means that in totalisation every part of the whole negates all other parts and simultaneously every part as a part negates the whole. However, since every differentiated element is an

immediate expression of the whole, all elements are related to each other through a mediation of the whole.

Thus, totalization is a mediation between parts wherein each part is mediated by all in its relation to each; and each is a mediation between all. Negation as determination thus becomes a synthetic bond that links each part to every other and all parts to the whole (Sartre: 2004: 48). Thus, for example, in History, every human being perceives his individual life simultaneously as the whole and as part of the whole, as the bond between the part and the whole and as the radical negation of the Whole.

From the previous discussion, we may infer from Sartre that in totalisation the relation between the parts cannot be external but only internal or, more precisely, in the dialectical process the bonds of exteriority are themselves interiorised. In other words, Sartre wants to say that an internal change in one part (in the individual total-ity) incurs also an alterity in other parts, and therefore within the whole as a total-ity (Sartre 2004: 92). (In this way, Sartre attacks positivistic sciences, which focus only on the bonds of exteriority and are prone to describe the social bonds as arbitrary, atomistic, and without any internal integrity.)

But, turning back to our study of shame, we may ask, what would be the consequences if we investigated shame in the context of totalisation? At first, from this perspective we cannot conceptualise shame as a process of objectification, as we cannot understand the standards of morality as a mere collection of moral pre-description. Rather it would be more accurate to say that we live through or experience these moral standards or, to put it

in Sartre's language, the moral standards mediate through us.

However, we cannot forget that the process of totalisation consists of the negation of the negation, which means that every part, being singular, already opposes the moral standards which, by definition, always strive for a total unification. Here resides the reason why totalisation must be understood as a movement and why totalisation can never be complete: each singular part, in order to be singular, must negate the whole and each part but, simultaneously through these two negations each part is connected to each other and to the whole.

But let us test a concrete example and try to conceptualize shame as the process of totalization by returning to the example of Milena, who is mocked by her school-mates because of her different accent. Let us suppose also that Milena feels shame. A psychological theory would suggest that Milena feels shame since she does not perceive herself as normal or, to put it more abstractly, she feels shame because her social reputation and thus the social bonds are jeopardized.

From this point of view, shame is a radically heteronomous experience wherein Milena compares herself with the others and, as a result, perceives herself as inferior and worthless because of her difference. However, this explanation ignores an important aspect I have already emphasized: shame requires that Milena herself accept that her accent is something shameful. Without her acceptance we cannot claim that Milena feels genuine shame but rather fear or embarrassment. Thus, Milena may hide her different accent because she fears the mockery of others but from this we

cannot conclude that she feels shame.

Thence, if we accept that shame requires the acceptance of a person, then it demonstrates that a person in shame is not a passive object but an active subject, who simultaneously can share the values of others or oppose them. And here is the reason why we should understand shame as an experience of totalisation: in shame, we actively live through and experience the moral values and standards we have previously created and approved, since in shame we experience a failure to meet the standards we have imposed ourselves.

From this point of view it is misleading to oppose a subject to the external moral standard; instead, they form a mutual, although tense, totality. Since moral standards, without people who follow and accept them, would be void, a community without shared moral standards would be impossible. But, again, the relation between the moral standards and an individual is not merely external but internal. It means that every singular member of community can doubt the imposed moral rules and put them in question and so incur the social changes or at least instability.

However, one may ask why we still tend to characterise shame as heteronomous and ignore the autonomous part of shame? In order to answer this question we have to realize that we should not understand the acceptance in a Kantian way wherein a subject reaches moral maxims through a rational process. On the contrary, the reason why we may not notice the autonomous aspects of shame is that subjects themselves do not recognize it. Indeed, although subjects themselves create the moral standards they follow, subjects must be more or less estranged from these

moral standards in order to perceive them not as mere subjective pre-descriptions but as something objective.

There is nothing original in this idea. P. Kain in the study of Hegel to which I have referred above, claims that although we should understand *Geist* as a social construction, members of *Geist* perceive it as objective, real, and even inevitable. The reason for this is precisely alienation: individuals alienate themselves (i.e., they do not perceive themselves as creators of *Geist*) and abandon their autonomy (Kain 2005: 155). Alienation (*Entäusserung*), leads, according to Kain, to estrangement (*Entfremdung*), which means that by alienation subjects found objective and independent cultural, political, and moral institutions (state, God, moral norms) (Kain 2005: 157). Thus, there is a double movement: firstly, subjects are alienated and renounce their freedom and subject themselves to the external institutions, but additionally they estrange themselves from these institutions, viz., subjects seem to “forget” that the institutions which oppress them are actually created by them.

Of course sooner or later subjects may recognize their estrangement, which leads inevitably to crises. For example, the causes of the French revolution in 1789 were not economic or political but metaphysical: the subjects of the French king ceased to believe in their king and his absolute power. Thus, the servants recognized that the master can rule absolutely only because they themselves recognize his absolute power and this overcoming of estrangement led to the collapse of French political institutions.

It is not difficult to realize that shame also requires both alienation and estrange-

ment: an individual must perceive social norms as objective and real, even inevitable, in order to feel shame. It explains why one of the easiest ways to attack the social norms is to do something shameful only to demonstrate that those norms are arbitrary, relative, and socially constructed. Simultaneously, we should recognize then that in shame we are not mere objects of social norms but we ourselves have created them.

Shame as an Experience of Lack

Hitherto I have analysed what shame reveals about the relation between a community and its members. I have argued that a model wherein a subject is opposed to external social norms is misleading, and instead we should analyse social relations according to the model of totalisation. It means that even though each subject's relation to the whole and each other is negative, this negation of the negation leads to totalisation wherein each subject becomes a member of totality. I have claimed that shame could be a good example of totalisation since in shame a subject finds himself in a total experience where he is actively related to a social community as a whole and each member of this community.

However, the most important question – what is shame? – is still unanswered. I have already given a brief overview of anthropological, sociological, and psychological theories. Still, there are at least two theories which challenge these explanations by offering a new angle for analysing shame.

The first is Gerhart Piers's and Milton B. Singer's psychoanalytical or neo-Freudian study of shame wherein they claim that guilt is a negative reaction to a clash be-

tween the ego and the superego but shame is a reaction to a clash between the ego and the ego-ideal (Piers and Singer 1953: 11-12). In other words, one feels shame when one fails to achieve a goal or ideal that is a part of one's self-conception. But guilt is related to a transgression of social norms. (This distinction anticipates Lewis's hypothesis that the object of shame is the self, and the object of guilt is a behaviour. However, Singer's and Piers's theory was original precisely because it challenged the external explanations of shame that understood shame as a mere social sanction.)

Another theory I want to mention is Deonna, Rodogno and Teroni's explanation found in their *In Defense of Shame*. According to these authors, shame is a feeling of incapability of even minimally honouring the demands that self-relevant value imposes on one (Deonna et al. 2011: 125). In this sense, their argument is quite similar to Piers's and Singer's one, but Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni attempt to demonstrate the hidden moral potential of shame. Since if one cannot meet demands that one is attached to, it may lead one to self-reform and thus self-improvement. (Deonna et al. 2011: 183).

Secondly, this argument also demonstrates that shame is not a heteronomous but an autonomous emotion since an individual himself must be attached to a concrete value. Unfortunately, the authors do not explain in which way an individual finds the attachment to the values, in which way one chooses the values, and so on. Or, more abstractly, they understand shame as a deeply intimate experience but they tend to ignore the intersubjective aspects of shame.

As we can see, the main advantage of these theories is that they avoid a mistake

wherein shame is reduced to a mere social fear of the negative opinion of others. Still these theories are too vague and narrow in order to explain what is peculiarly special in the experience of shame. Since, if we claim that shame is a reaction to inability to meet the ideal standards, the probable result can be indeed negative self-esteem, but is this enough in order to call it shame? I mean, do we really experience a global, emotionally very hurtful emotion when we fail to fulfill the ideal norms we have imposed upon ourselves?

My suggestion is that these theories are right if they define shame as a clash between the real ego and the ego-ideal but they ignore a simple question: why one does not meet the standards one desires? The reason is that one lacks something in order to do it. Indeed, from this perspective, the real object of shame is actually mere lack, *i.e.*, I feel shame not because of what I have but because of what I lack (in order to meet the ideal standards).

Thus, for example, if my skin is black and I feel shame because of this, I do not feel shame because I have black skin but because I do not have white skin. Or when I am overweight, I feel shame not because I am overweight, but because I do not have a slim body, and so on. But again, all these examples require that an individual himself is convinced that black skin or obesity are something shameful. Without this personal conviction genuine shame is impossible.

Secondly, a concept of lack is only possible in the context of totality, *i.e.*, in something finite. There is a reason why we cannot find lack (and thus shame) in nature or in God and why shame is understandable only in culture: culture is a finite total-

ity, but nature and God are infinite. Even more, if we presume that every human being is capable of feeling shame, then we can conclude that the self-consciousness is actually constituted by lack. Or, as Sartre puts it in *Being and Nothingness*, “human reality arises as such in the presence of its own totality or self as a lack of that totality” (Sartre 2003: 110).

Therefore, every self-consciousness should be understood as an incomplete totality which strives for an ideal completeness it never achieves. And shame is an expression of incompleteness. Thus, I do not feel shame because of what I have but because of what I lack in order to achieve completeness. In this sense, it is right that shame is a reaction to a clash between the ego and the ego-ideal, but shame emerges not from this clash but from the lack of something I miss in order to meet the ego-ideal.

However, it may seem that it is not so different from claiming that one feels shame because one lacks something in order to meet the ego-ideal. Still, by claiming that the object of shame is lack, we can understand what is peculiar to shame. Since if we say that one feels shame because one is overweight or black, then it seems that shame is arbitrary, *viz.*, anything can be an object of shame. But if we define shame negatively as an expression of lack, then there can be only one real object of shame and it is the *lack* (of course, there can be variable things that one can lack, but the object of shame is still the lack itself).

Still we should continue to analyse the concept of lack. It is obvious that there are a thousands of things I lack but still I do not feel shame, *i.e.*, I feel shame only when I lack something valuable. But this leads us to a question, how is it that I know

I lack something? Here we can see the social and ideological dimension of lack since a singular person rarely creates values, but values usually anticipate the individual. Thus, even if an individual opposes concrete values or, like Nietzsche, tries to re-evaluate the values, he re-evaluates values which already exist.

Therefore, we can conclude that if the object of shame is a lack of something socially valuable, shame can never be a completely internal experience (even if one feels shame alone). On the other hand, it does not mean that an individual does not have freedom to oppose to values and to try to re-evaluate them, which inevitably leads to a crisis in the norms which dictate what is shameful and what is not.

This conclusion should lead us also to the model of totality wherein every culture and each member of this culture is understood as an incomplete totality. The ultimate purpose of each totality is to overcome the lack and achieve completeness. Therefore, lack is always perceived negatively, as a hindrance which precludes us from achieving the ideal I.

Shame is then an experience wherein I most directly and strongly perceive that I lack something valuable and required in order to meet the standards of the ego-ideal. Here we should understand the ego-ideal as Freud did (i.e., as someone I desire to be) but it is important to see that the ego-ideal has always an ideological dimension: the ego-ideal reflects the values one is attached to, but these values are socially shared and so anticipate a subject¹.

¹ Jacques Lacan famously distinguished the ideal-ego and the ego-ideal. The ideal-ego is associated with the imaginary state and is the ideal or perfection the ego strives for. The ego-ideal is associated with the symbo-

lic state and refers to how the ego wants to be seen by others. The idea of this distinction is the same as mine: to emphasize the social and ideological dimension of the ideal-ego.

Conclusions

Surely my previous discussion can be read only as a sketch. Even more, it would be better to interpret this paper as a critique of prevailing theories of shame which tend to understand shame too narrowly and thereby ignore many dimensions and aspects of shame. Secondly, these theories attempt to answer questions such as “what is shame?” or “how does shame function?” but it is also important to ask “what does shame reveal about us as human beings?”

I have started the paper by distinguishing between two strategies of how shame has been analysed. The first one I named “external,” the second one “internal”. In the external theories, shame is understood as a moral sanction which regulates social communication. In the internal theories, shame is analysed as an intimate experience wherein a subject becomes an object of external social norms and thus loses his inner freedom and autonomy.

However, I have argued that phenomenologically both these approaches were insufficient. Instead, by following Hegel and Sartre, I have claimed that a model of totalisation was more suitable. In the model

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of totalisation we abandon a model wherein social norms are understood as a mere collection of pre-description that subjects must follow. Instead, in the model of totalisation individual subjects and social norms form a dynamic totality: the subjects do not just follow the social norms but they live them through. It means that the subject is not a passive object of social norms but it always maintains the autonomy to oppose to norms and freedom to change them. In this sense, subjects ceaselessly modify social norms but by modifying the norms they also must change themselves.

How should we understand shame on this ground? I have defined shame as an experience of lack: in shame one feels that one is not capable of meeting the demands of the ideal-ego since one lacks something. The ideal-ego should be understood here as a being wherein nothing is lacking or, what is the same, the ideal-ego

is a point wherein the self-consciousness has achieved its completeness. Still, I have emphasized that the ideal-ego always has a social and ideological dimension since the ideal-ego reflects the ideological values one is attached to. Therefore it is ideology that dictates what one should have in order to be “normal” or “good”. But still an individual maintains freedom to oppose these values and modify them.

But the most radical conclusion we can make from the foregoing discussion is that each self-consciousness which is able to feel shame must already contain lack in itself. Or, in other words, every self-consciousness is determined by the lack of completeness. This explains precisely why we still have not got rid of shame. Since the overcoming of shame would mean that we have to overcome something that makes us human beings: the ability to feel our own imperfectness.

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GĖDA KAIP STOKOS PATYRIMAS: NAUJAS FENOMENOLOGINIS POŽIŪRIS

Martin Raba

Santrauka. Šio straipsnio tikslas yra pasiūlyti naujo fenomenologinio požiūrio į gėdą apmatų. Tvirtinama, jog dominuojančios gėdos teorijos yra pernelyg siauros ir gėdą supranta vien kaip socialinių sankcijų baime ar intymią patirtį, kai subjektas tampa išorinių socialinių normų objektu. Parodoma, kad gėdą reikėtų suprasti kaip individo išgyvenimą, jog jis nėra pajėgus pasiekti ego idealo standartų, nes stokoja kažko vertingo. Žvelgiant iš šios perspektyvos, gėda yra labai intymus išgyvenimas, kai individas vertina save neigiamai, nes esą stokoja to, kas, jo nuomone, jam reikalinga. Kita vertus, kadangi stoka pasireiškia tik individui lyginant realųjį savo Aš su ego idealu, gėda visuomet pasižymi ideologiniu aspektu, nes ego idealas atspindi bendras ideologines vertybes, prie kurių individas prisirišęs ir kurios sudaro dalį jo savipratos.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: gėda, ideologija, J.-P. Sartre, ego idealas, asmens fenomenologija

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