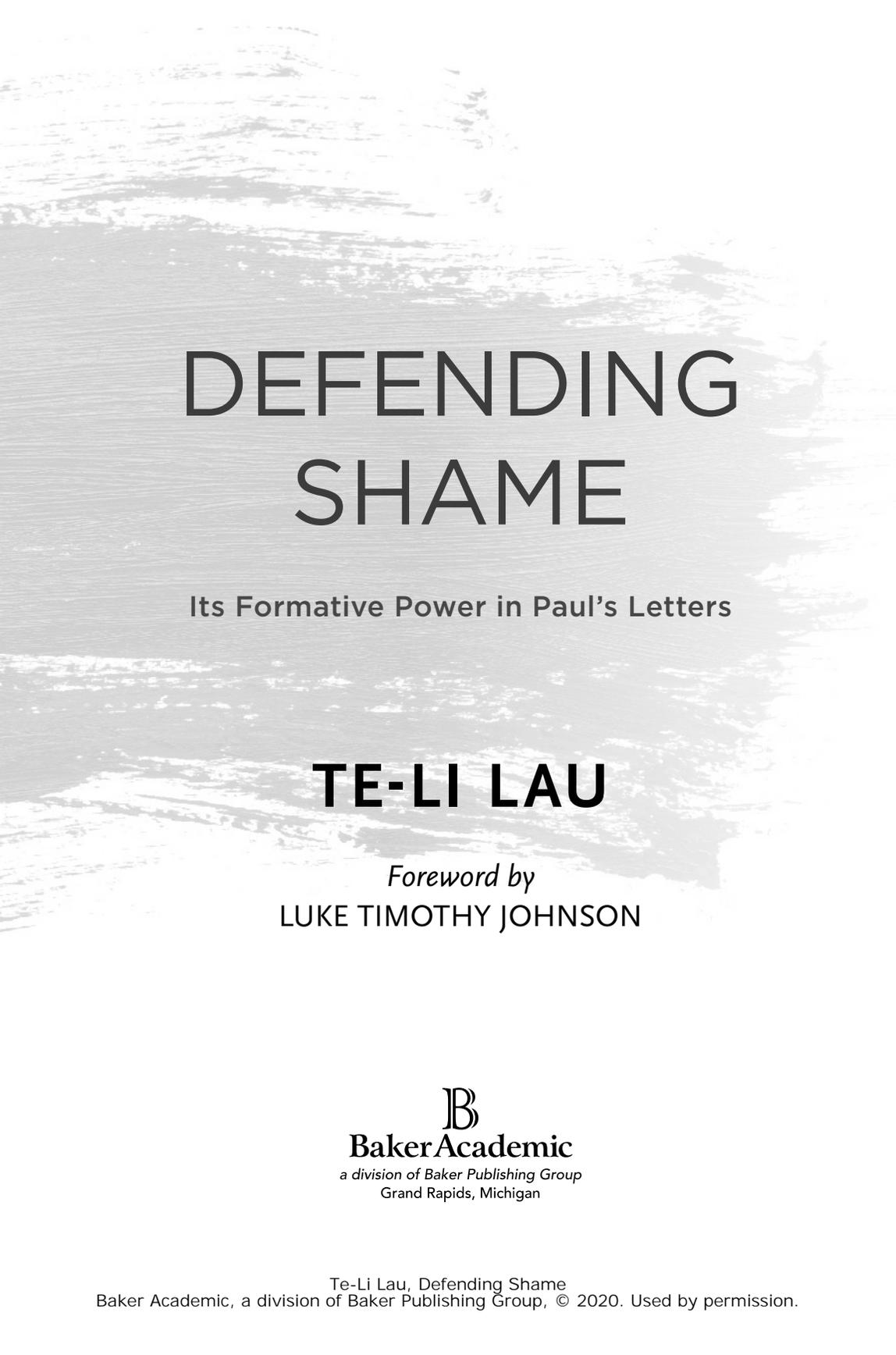


DEFENDING SHAME

Its Formative Power in Paul's Letters

Foreword by
LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON

TE-LI LAU



DEFENDING SHAME

Its Formative Power in Paul's Letters

TE-LI LAU

Foreword by
LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON

B
Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Contents

Foreword by *Luke Timothy Johnson* ix

Abbreviations xi

Introduction: *A Fractured Understanding of Shame* 1

PART 1 FRAMEWORK 11

1. Definitional Background 13
2. Greco-Roman Backgrounds 31
3. Jewish Backgrounds 61

PART 2 EXEGESIS 91

4. Paul's Use of Retrospective Shame 93
5. Paul's Use of Prospective Shame 123
6. Constructing Paul's Use of Shame 149

PART 3 CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT 173

7. Contemporary Contribution 175
8. Contemporary Challenges 205

Bibliography 235

Name Index 258

Scripture Index 263

Ancient Writings Index 268

Introduction

A Fractured Understanding of Shame

We live in a world with a fractured understanding of shame. Unlike other negative emotions, such as sorrow or anger, which may be cathartic when experienced and processed, we generally wish to avoid shame as much as possible. The psychotherapist Joseph Burgo wrote in the *Atlantic* that we live in an “anti-shame zeitgeist.”¹ Actors, psychologists, and social critics all consider shame to be the enemy that must be resisted and extirpated. Pop superstar Lady Gaga urges her fans toward self-love and confidence, never allowing themselves to be bullied or shamed. Her song “Born This Way” reminds her followers, “There’s nothin’ wrong with lovin’ who you are. . . . Don’t hide yourself in regret, Just love yourself and you’re set.” You should freely express your own individuality without fear of embarrassment or shame. In common parlance, you do you. American model Tyra Banks and actress Selena Gomez speak out vehemently against body shaming. Research professor Brené Brown appeared on *Super Soul Sunday* with Oprah Winfrey and declared, “I think shame is lethal, I think shame is destructive. And I think we are swimming in it deep.”² For Brown, shame is a pernicious emotion that serves no constructive purpose whatsoever.

This sentiment concerning shame is also extant in academic circles. Shame is perceived as the primitive precursor to guilt, and its value as a moral emotion has been severely discredited.³ Shame is heteronomous and responds to

1. Burgo, “Challenging the Anti-Shame Zeitgeist.”

2. “Dr. Brené Brown.”

3. Gilbert (“Evolution,” 1225) writes, “Guilt but not shame is regarded as a moral emotion because shame is ultimately about punishment, is self-focused and ‘wired into’ the defense system. Shaming people can lead to various unhelpful defensive emotions, such as anger or debilitating anxiety, concealment or destructive conformity. Guilt, however, is outward focused

the opinions and judgments of others, making it unfit for a Kantian system of morality. Guilt, however, responds to the inner judgments and sensibilities of the autonomous self. Beginning at a later stage in human development than shame, guilt is perceived to be more advanced and better than shame.⁴

University campuses are also not exempt. In the name of emotional well-being and individual self-fulfillment, fragile undergraduates demand trigger warnings on reading assignments that might be provocative or upsetting. They also push campus administrators to create “safe spaces” that will shield them from frank speech and uncomfortable ideas. These spaces allow full self-expression without fear of shame and discomfort. Eric Cartman, one of the main characters in the animated sitcom *South Park*, expresses this idea succinctly in a particular episode when he sings, “There is no shame in my safe space.”⁵

The anti-shame zeitgeist is nourished in part by the current ethos of therapeutic individualism. In this ethos, the individual self is the sole arbiter of authentic moral knowledge, and personal growth is the central purpose of human existence. External forms of authority are no longer structures to which the self must conform; rather, they are something from which the self must be liberated. Moral obligations are no longer disciplines that must be maintained; rather, they are chains that must be shaken off so as to attain maximal happiness and positive self-esteem. The individual self or psyche is the preoccupying focus of attention in this ethos. Individual emotional fulfillment or self-actualization is not just a personal good but a social obligation. Needless to say, shaming criticism of one’s failings is taboo.⁶

The aversion toward shame also arises because we all recognize its potential to be destructive. Toxic shame plays a prominent role in the dynamics that lead to suicidal thoughts and behavior.⁷ The shame of sexual assault can break a person’s sense of self-worth and may even push some to kill themselves, especially if photos of the attack are circulated on social media. Honor or shame killings are also endemic in parts of the world. The killing of the

and is about responsibility and caring feelings for others. Moreover, in a shame system people can behave very immorally in order to court favor with their superiors and avoid being rejected for not complying with requests or orders. Prestige seeking and shame avoidance can lead to some very destructive behaviors indeed.”

4. See Tangney and Dearing, *Shame and Guilt*.

5. “Safe Space,” episode 5 of season 19 of *South Park*, directed by Trey Parker, aired October 21, 2015.

6. For more information on the therapeutic culture, see Rieff, *Triumph of the Therapeutic*; Polsky, *Rise of the Therapeutic State*; Nolan, *Therapeutic State*; Moskowitz, *In Therapy We Trust*; Sommers and Satel, *One Nation under Therapy*; Aubry and Travis, *Rethinking Therapeutic Culture*.

7. Martínez de Pisón, *Death by Despair*.

Pakistani social media star Qandeel Baloch in 2016 is one such example. In a defiant press conference, her brother claimed that he was proud to kill her because she brought shame on their family with her provocative Facebook posts. Shame *has the capacity* to push us toward unhealthy, self-destructive, and violent patterns of behavior. Whether shame is *necessarily* destructive is a question that needs to be probed.

Despite the aversion to shame, we nonetheless witness how segments of our society have a primal urge to shame others. We see how people are pilloried savagely for posting an ill-conceived comment on social media.⁸ The pronouncement of collective judgment is swift and furious, and the online shaming quickly devolves into a voyeuristic spectator sport as each accuser calls for a pound of flesh. The intent of the shaming is generally punitive rather than redemptive, and the gleeful brutality of the punishment in no way matches the severity of the crime. The virtual targets of such shaming often lose their jobs. They are also permanently traumatized as their poorly conceived tweets and respective backlashes live on forever in the blogosphere.

Despite the aversion to shame, we also see government entities using shame to encourage tax scofflaws to pay their taxes. The tax boards of states such as California, Vermont, and Delaware publish the names, addresses, and amount owed by tax delinquents on their respective websites. Removal of this humiliating information is pursuant to the full payment of taxes owed. Just the threat of being listed is sufficient in most cases to get reluctant taxpayers to pay. More creative ways to shame delinquents are adopted by government entities in other countries. In one of the suburbs of the Indian commercial capital of Mumbai, officials found that posting the names of delinquent taxpayers was not sufficiently effective since their websites were not heavily trafficked. They then decided on a more unorthodox approach. They employed drummers to accompany tax collectors to the homes of delinquent taxpayers. When the musicians arrived banging on their instruments, neighbors peered outside and gawked at the racket. Since the introduction of these percussionists, collection of property tax revenues has jumped 20 percent.⁹

The fractured and conflicting understanding of shame also percolates in the church. Many churches follow the anti-shame zeitgeist of mainstream society and adopt the therapeutic ethos of the larger culture. Therapy informs the calling and identity of ministers to the extent that Christian ministers and secular therapists perform many similar roles.¹⁰ Churches prefer to “stay

8. See Ronson, “One Stupid Tweet.”

9. Parussini, “If You Don’t Pay.”

10. For a defense of the psychotherapeutic ethos within the church, see Muravchik, *American Protestantism*.

positive” in their teaching, pastors proclaim the gospel in therapeutic idioms, and few churches practice formal discipline. According to the sociologist Christian Smith, the dominant religion among Christian American teenagers is a Christianized version of moralistic therapeutic deism—a system in which “God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other” and in which “the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.”¹¹ This is not a religion of sin, righteousness, justice, holiness, and repentance but a religion of feeling good and inner peace. The language of remorse, rebuke, shame, discipleship, and the cross is replaced by the feckless language of happiness and niceness.

The movement away from shame is also fueled by the recognition that some within the church suffer from chronic shame. Many people experience shame only for a short span of time, but those who suffer from chronic shame develop ingrained patterns of seeing themselves as shameful and unworthy. The sociologist Julius Rubin provocatively argues that certain forms of Protestant pietism gave rise to “religious melancholy,” a distinctive psychopathology that induced a neurotic personality haunted by shame, guilt, and anxiety.¹² While the causal relationship of Rubin’s thesis is not convincing, we are nonetheless aware of individuals who are weighed down by chronic shame and are unable to accept the gracious forgiveness that God provides. Women who have had abortions fall dangerously within this group. They regret their actions and experience emotional trauma. Given the church’s stance on the sanctity of human life, such women are plagued by shame. They are afraid to tell others what they consider to be a shameful secret, and some are hesitant to join recovery groups lest their identities be known. Consequently, they do not receive the healing they desperately need. Their shame continues to fester.

On the other extreme, we see some segments of the church embracing shaming techniques that stigmatize and destroy. Most infamous in this regard is Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas. The church is well known for its picketing and hateful vitriol, and the church’s URL (www.godhatesfags.com) unabashedly parades their contempt for LGBTQ people. The use of shame is also clearly seen in historical sources. John Demos notes that public humiliation was the primary instrument of moral and social control among the early Puritans. Some of the favorite punishments, with occasional refinements, were “sitting in the stocks; standing on a pillory; wearing a so-called ‘badge of infamy’ (in the manner of Hawthorne’s scarlet letter) or a simple ‘paper’ describing the offense in question; branding (in effect, a way of making

11. Smith, *Soul Searching*, 162–63.

12. Rubin, *Religious Melancholy*.

the ‘badge’ permanent); being dragged through the streets, tied to a ‘cart’s tail’; standing in the gallows with a rope tied around one’s neck.”¹³ The common element that connects all the above is public exposure.

While some segments of Christianity may not actively shame others, they nevertheless find themselves shamed by the larger society. This arises because they affirm values that run counter to the liberal conventional ethos. The reigning political and social authority therefore shames these Christian segments so as to destroy their resolve to hold these values. For example, LGBTQ activist groups urge the government to publish a “shame list” of faith-based institutions that request Title IX exemption from transgender rules.¹⁴ The Department of Education agreed to publish such a list in 2016. These activist groups also urge the NCAA to divest from all faith-based colleges that sought such waivers; the NCAA has, however, declined to take any action, for now.

In a world with a fractured understanding of shame, we possess a deep antagonism to shame. It shrivels our self-esteem and pushes us to hide from humanity. Yet we intuitively recognize that shame is fundamental to moral character, for none of us wish to be absolutely shameless. And if the nature of shame has a certain positive valence, what about the appropriateness of using shame as a means to reform behavior or punish misdemeanors? And if shaming is apt, how should such acts be conducted and by whom? These are difficult questions. Shame presents us with a hornet’s nest of issues.

A Way Forward

The extirpation of shame is ill-advised, if not impossible. As a human emotion, shame is part of who we are. It is an inevitable aspect of the human experience, just as fear, sadness, and joy are. “To extirpate shame is to cripple our humanity.”¹⁵ As a moral emotion, shame functions as a critical component of our moral apparatus. It helps us discern what is noble and base and provides the motivational energy that impels us to do good and to avoid doing bad. As a social emotion, shame is the glue that holds relationships and communities together. It has the potential to construct a decorous and harmonious society—a society in which individuals are sensitive to the social norms of the community and who respect the honor of others. What we need is not the extirpation of shame but a nuanced understanding of the

13. Demos, “Shame and Guilt,” 71.

14. This shaming and ostracizing strategy follows the propaganda campaign advocated by Kirk and Madsen, *After the Ball*.

15. Schneider, *Shame, Exposure, and Privacy*, xv.

complexity of shame that leads to human flourishing. The apostle Paul can help us point the way.

Paul sets before us a model in which shame can be meaningfully employed to bring one to ethical and spiritual maturity. He considers shame as a necessary element in moral formation, and he clearly understands certain behavior to be shameful. In line with Jewish sentiments of his day, Paul considers homosexual acts as shameless acts that arise from degrading passions (Rom. 1:26–27). He also castigates those who are shameless and who indulge in every sordid debauchery and impurity (Eph. 4:19).¹⁶ Their behavior is so deplorable that Paul considers it shameful even to mention what they do in secret (Eph. 5:12). In contrast to those whose god is their belly and whose glory is their shame, Paul exhorts his readers to live carefully since their true citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:19–20). By cultivating a proper sense of shame, they will live lives that are prudent and self-controlled (1 Tim. 2:9; 2 Tim. 1:7; Titus 2:2, 5, 6, 12).

The classification of certain behavior as “shameful” is understandable, but Paul’s views on *acts of shaming* need further clarification. On the one hand, Paul criticizes the use of shaming rhetoric as practiced by some of his readers. He berates them for using civil litigation to accrue honor on themselves and to shame their opponents (1 Cor. 6:1–11). He rebukes the wealthy Corinthians for humiliating, in the Lord’s Supper, those who have nothing (1 Cor. 11:22). He also warns the church not to show disdain or contempt to those who are young (1 Tim. 4:12; Titus 2:15).

On the other hand, Paul himself engages in shaming rhetoric. He rebukes and shames believers when they do not walk in line with the gospel. When the morals of the Corinthians deteriorated to such an extent that there were litigations among themselves and hedonistic overindulgence, Paul explicitly rebukes them, saying, “I say this to your shame” (1 Cor. 6:5; 15:34). When the Galatian church abandoned the gospel for the law, Paul rebukes and shames them with pointed rhetorical questions: “You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? . . . Are you so foolish? . . . Did you experience so much for nothing?” (Gal. 3:1–4). Paul does not only shame his converts; he also has no qualms about shaming other apostles when their actions compromise the

16. In contrast to the major scholarly opinion that the disputed Pauline letters are pseudonymous, I assume Paul either authored or supervised the writing of these letters. Even if these letters are inauthentic, they are nevertheless Pauline in character. They therefore cannot be ignored in any attempt to reconstruct the theological ethics of the apostle in whose name they are written. For a brief defense of the authorship of the various Pauline letters, see Johnson, *Writings of the New Testament*. Arguments for each specific letter can be found in various monographs and articles, such as Roon, *Authenticity of Ephesians*; van Nes, *Pauline Language*.

gospel. When Peter came to Antioch and stopped eating with the gentiles because he was afraid of the circumcision group, Paul confronts Peter “to his face” (Gal. 2:11). He points out Peter’s hypocrisy “in front of everyone” (Gal. 2:14). The public nature of Paul’s confrontation would be perceived as a shaming experience by all who were present.

Paul’s shaming rhetoric and action is not an apostolic prerogative. Paul intends it to be part of the disciplinary measures that the church is to enact against its errant members. Thus, in 2 Thessalonians 3:14, Paul tells the Thessalonian church to take special note of those who do not heed the moral teaching presented in his letter. Having identified them, the church is not to associate with them in order that they may be shamed. Such shaming action is not meant to be punitive but redemptive. For Paul quickly reminds the church not to regard the errant as enemies; rather, the church is to admonish them as they would a brother or sister (2 Thess. 3:15). In 1 Timothy 5:20, the church is to confront elders who persist in sin, rebuking them before everyone so that the rest of the elders will be afraid and not follow their sinful behavior.

Apart from actively shaming others, Paul also encourages his readers to live exemplary lives, full of integrity and gracious loving so that their enemies might be ashamed of their animosity toward believers. In Romans 12:20, Paul tells the church to respond practically to the needs of their enemies, giving them food and water when they are hungry and thirsty. Such actions will heap “burning coals” on the heads of their enemies; that is, their enemies will experience the burning pangs of shame. In Titus 2:7–8, Paul instructs his protégé Titus to show himself to be a model of good works and to demonstrate integrity, gravity, and sound speech in his teaching so that his opponents might be ashamed.

The above examples show that certain acts of shaming are prohibited, but others are necessary. In the latter case, Paul and the church not only actively shame by word or action but also passively shame others through their good conduct. The rationale for such actions must be that Paul considers the shame experience to be salutary for shaping one’s identity and behavior. He appeals to shame and recognizes its value as a moral emotion. But certain questions are not so easily resolved. How does Paul envision his shaming rhetoric to function? What is the relationship between shame and moral formation? What is the relationship between shame, as an emotion, and moral beliefs? Are there limits to the use of shame? How do Paul’s religious convictions affect his use of shame? Does the Holy Spirit play any role in this process? What is the relationship between shame and moral conscience? These questions have not been vigorously pursued in the history of interpretation of Pauline ethics.

Lacunae in Pauline Studies

Despite the presence of shame in the Pauline Letters, surprisingly little has been written regarding Paul's use of shame for transforming one's identity and behavior. There are books that deal with Pauline ethics and books that emphasize Paul's use of shame; I am, however, unaware of any monograph-length work that constructs a Pauline ethic of shame. Books on Pauline ethics scarcely discuss Paul's moral psychology. They do not examine his use of emotions, let alone shame, for moral formation. For example, the word "shame" only appears once or twice in the main texts of Victor Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (1968); Brian Rosner, *Understanding Paul's Ethics* (1995); or James Thompson, *Moral Formation according to Paul* (2011). The situation is only marginally better in Daniel Harrington and James Keenan, *Paul and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (2010), and David Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics* (2016). Nevertheless, the word still appears less than ten times. These authors do not index shame as a category, nor do they examine it extensively.

Studies that recognize the theme of shame in Paul, on the other hand, do not *adequately* emphasize its use for moral formation. Such studies employ cultural and anthropological models of honor and shame, defining shame vis-à-vis honor and understanding both as social values. Bruce Malina defines honor as "the value of a person in his or her own eyes (that is, one's claim to worth) *plus* that person's value in the eyes of his or her social group. Honor is a claim to worth along with the social acknowledgment of worth."¹⁷ Shame is divided into two categories. On the one hand, to "have shame" (positive shame) or a sense of shame means "sensitivity about one's own reputation, sensitivity to the opinion of others."¹⁸ Honor and shame are synonymous in this context (honor and shame-as-honor). On the other hand, to "be shamed" (negative shame) or dishonored refers to "the state of publicly known loss of honor."¹⁹ Honor and shame are opposites in this context (honor vis-à-vis shame-as-dishonor).

There are recognized hazards in the application of cultural and anthropological models to New Testament texts.²⁰ Nevertheless, when the necessary correctives are put in place, the application of honor and shame categories can yield fruitful results by helping us understand the social world of the

17. Malina, *New Testament World*, 30.

18. Malina, *New Testament World*, 47.

19. Malina and Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary*, 370.

20. See deSilva, *Despising Shame*, 11–23.

texts. The relevance to moral formation is also readily apparent. Since concern for honor permeates every aspect of life, the pivotal social value of honor leads one to adopt certain mannerisms, postures, and actions, while the pivotal social sanction of shame for noncompliance directs one to avoid others. Honor and shame are used strategically as instruments of moral persuasion, and the vocabulary of praise and blame are viewed as social sanctions for moral behavior. At the same time, the recognition that honor and shame are social constructs reminds us that what is disgraceful within one group may be considered honorable in another. For example, while crucifixion is seen as a horrifying and humiliating death within the larger Greco-Roman world, Paul construes a crucified Messiah as God's power and wisdom for the church (1 Cor. 1:22–25).²¹ Counter-definitions of what constitutes the honorable and shameful show how subgroups within a dominant culture construct an alternative court of reputation to prevent its members from conforming to values of the wider society.²²

There are nevertheless limitations to this line of study. An honor-shame approach defines shame vis-à-vis honor and understands both of them primarily as social values. It does not focus on the shame experience, nor does it understand shame as a moral emotion. It may explain how a community maintains social control, but it does not focus on how an individual such as Paul brings about moral reformation in his converts via the practice of psychagogy.²³ It may discuss the strategic use of honor and shame as external instruments of persuasion, but, in doing so, it does not explain *how* shame can internally reform the individual mind and conscience. Honor and shame studies thus negatively predispose us to consider shame to be heteronomous rather than autonomous or theonomous. An honor-shame approach also does not locate Paul's use of shame within the moral psychology of his day. Finally, given their focus on the social dimension, honor and shame studies do not address the role of the Spirit in moral formation. In summary, an honor-shame approach has benefits, but it is not sufficiently refined to examine the

21. See also Neyrey, "Despising the Shame of the Cross," 114, who notes that the Fourth Gospel portrays Jesus's crucifixion as a "status elevation ritual" rather than a "status degradation ritual." He remarks, "The gospel inculcates an ironic point of view that death and shame mean glory and honor. The mock coronation of Jesus, which in the eyes of outsiders means shame, truly betokens honor from the viewpoint of insiders" (126).

22. For the construction of an alternative court of reputation in Hebrews, see deSilva, *Despising Shame*, 276–313.

23. Psychagogy, or "guidance of the soul," centers on "care for the young" (Epictetus, *Diatr.* 3.21.18). It describes the practice whereby a mature guide brings about moral transformation in a novice by shaping the novice's view of himself and the world. For studies on Pauline psychagogy, see Glad, *Paul and Philodemus*; Vegge, *2 Corinthians*.

role of shame for moral formation. My study builds on the contributions of the honor-shame approach but seeks to rectify its deficiencies. I understand shame primarily as a moral emotion and focus on the ethical significance of the shame experience in Pauline texts.

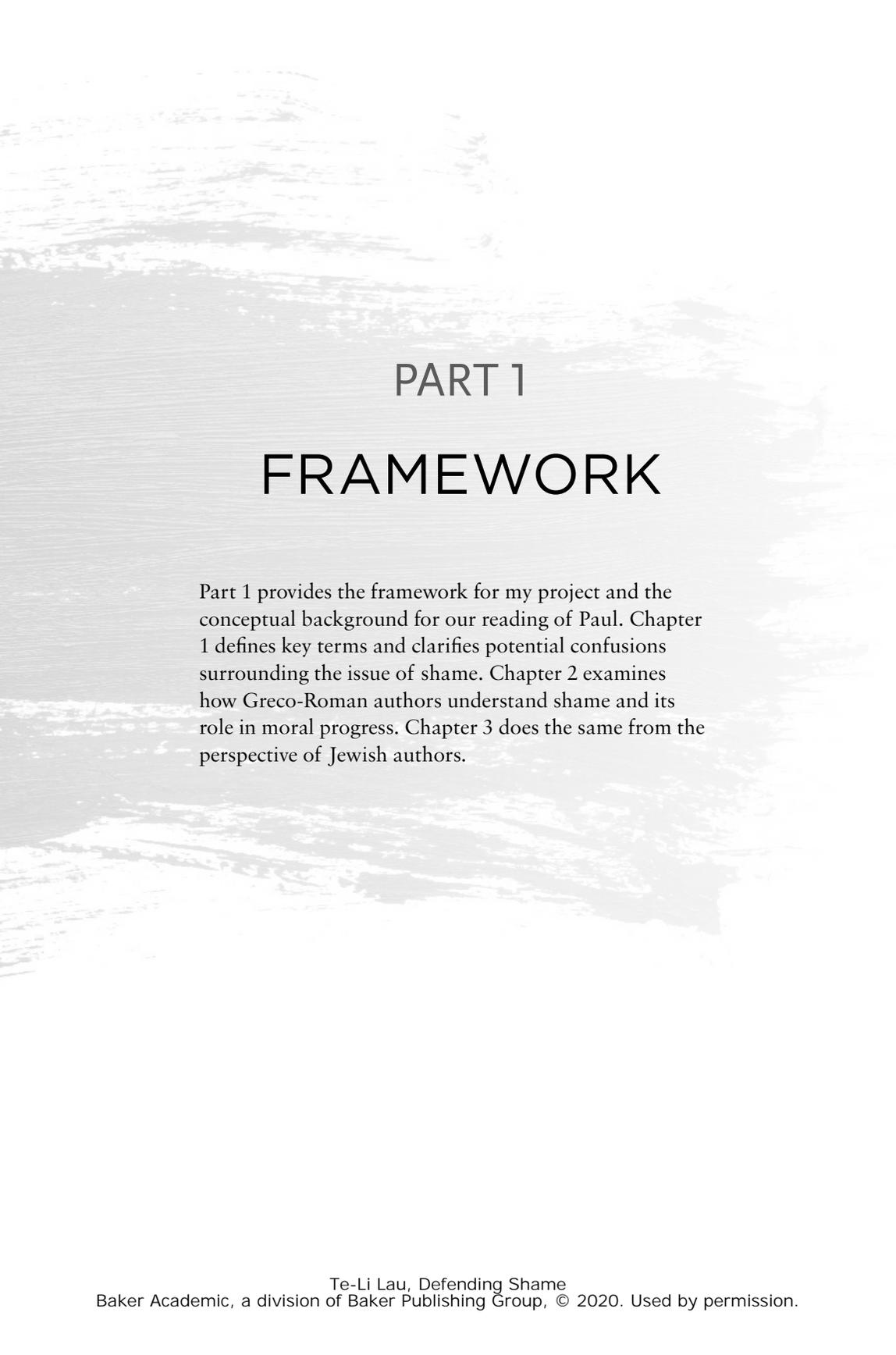
My Project

This study examines Paul's use of shame for Christic formation within his Jewish and Greco-Roman context and compares it with various contemporary perspectives. Specifically, I argue that Paul uses shame as a pedagogical tool to admonish and transform the minds of his readers into the mind of Christ and that his rationale can best be grasped through comparison with analogous perspectives, both within and without his cultural context. Unlike Aristotle or the Stoics, Paul does not present us with a systematic analysis of the relationship between shame and moral beliefs. Nevertheless, one can discern from his various writings a pattern that effectively functions as the basis for constructing a Pauline ethic of shame. My interest lies in the ethical significance of shame, not so much in the phenomenology, sociology, or psychology of shame. These other approaches will be examined only insofar as it helps to elucidate the rationale underlying Paul's use of shame for Christic formation. I examine not only how Paul uses the category of shame to inculcate a Christian identity and ethos but also how and why he shames others when they fail to conduct their lives in a manner worthy of the gospel.

This study on Paul's use of shame for moral formation proceeds in three parts: framework, exegesis, and engagement. Part 1 provides the framework and background that informs our reading of Paul. Chapter 1 defines key terms and lays out the presuppositions of this project. Chapter 2 examines the role of shame in various theories of moral progress promoted by various Greco-Roman authors. Chapter 3 examines the same topic in several Jewish writings.

Part 2 is the exegetical task. Chapter 4 examines how Paul explicitly and implicitly shames others in 1 Corinthians and Galatians. Chapter 5 examines how Paul uses honor and shame categories to instill in his readers a proper sense of shame so that they might live worthy of the gospel. The texts in focus are Philippians and Philemon. Chapter 6 synthesizes the exegetical data and constructs a coherent understanding of Paul's use of shame for moral formation.

Part 3 engages Paul's vision with contemporary perspectives. Chapter 7 brings Paul into conversation with minority voices in our world that advocate a positive role for shame. Chapter 8 does the same with contemporary challenges to a positive use of shame.



PART 1

FRAMEWORK

Part 1 provides the framework for my project and the conceptual background for our reading of Paul. Chapter 1 defines key terms and clarifies potential confusions surrounding the issue of shame. Chapter 2 examines how Greco-Roman authors understand shame and its role in moral progress. Chapter 3 does the same from the perspective of Jewish authors.

1

Definitional Background

The literature on shame is vast, and the study of shame has been approached from different disciplines: political science, education, philosophy, literature, ethics, history, neuroscience, psychology, psychoanalysis, cultural anthropology, social anthropology, sociology, law, and criminology. In this chapter, I present my understanding of the nature and character of shame. Shame can broadly denote the objective reality of disgrace or the subjective experience of pain that arises from falling short of some standard. Studies on honor and shame have adequately covered the former; I focus on the latter here. I examine how shame is an emotion and refine my understanding of shame by differentiating it from humiliation, embarrassment, and guilt. I then highlight certain conceptual confusions that surround the study of shame and define various terms so as to clear away this fog. I give some necessary precautions in a cross-cultural examination of shame. I then conclude with a succinct definition of shame.

Shame and Emotion

I take it to be uncontroversial that shame is an emotion. There is no definite consensus on how to define emotions, and this is not the place to give a detailed account of the nature of emotions. Nevertheless, some general observations that will orient us to the task ahead are in order.

Emotions are hard to define. On the one hand, William James defines emotions as the bodily feeling that arises from physiological changes that

follow the perception of some exciting fact.¹ They are the raw sensations of visceral disturbances due to the stimulation of the nervous system. On the other hand, Robert Solomon defines emotions as judgments about ourselves.² Anger is the judgment that someone has wronged me; shame is the judgment that I am responsible for an inappropriate or offensive situation.

Such simplistic binaries fail to capture the complex nature of emotions. A much more promising definition of emotion is suggested by the philosopher Aaron Ben-Ze'ev. He writes, "An emotion is something that is generated by perceived changes; its focus of concern is personal and comparative; its major characteristics are instability, great intensity, partiality, and brief duration; and its basic components are cognition, evaluation, motivation, and feelings."³ We can examine the basic components of emotion: *cognition* consists of information concerning the event or situation; *evaluation* appraises the personal significance of the event or situation; *motivation* addresses the action tendencies, desires, or readiness to act in these circumstances; and *feelings* are the consciousness of our bodily state.⁴

Ben Ze'ev's definition that emotions are generated by perceived changes and that they are personal reminds us that the emotion cannot be abstracted from the conditions that elicit it, from the evaluation of those conditions, and from the feelings and desires that stir within us. An emotion cannot be relegated to one of its components; it is the whole story, the entire script, the unfolding experience of its basic components. Theorists disagree about which specific components should be included.⁵ Ben Ze'ev lists four, but "five appear in most theories in one form or another: (1) objects, causes, precipitating events, (2) appraisal, (3) physiological changes, (4) action tendencies/action/expression, and (5) regulation."⁶

1. James ("What Is an Emotion?," 189–90) writes, "My thesis . . . is that *the bodily changes follow directly the PERCEPTION of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion.*"

2. Solomon (*Passions*, 183) writes, "What is an emotion? An emotion is a *judgment* (or a set of judgments), something we *do*. An emotion is a (set of) judgment(s) which constitute our world, our surreality, and its 'intentional objects.' An emotion is a basic judgment about our Selves and our place in our world, the projection of the values and ideals, structures and mythologies, according to which we live and through which we experience our lives."

3. Ben-Ze'ev, "Thing Called Emotion," 56.

4. It is debated whether emotions necessarily involve noncognitive *feelings*. For arguments that they do not, see Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 56–64; Roberts, *Emotions*, 65–69.

5. For some samples, see Kleinginna and Kleinginna, "Emotion Definitions"; Mesquita and Frijda, "Cultural Variations in Emotions"; Scherer, "What Are Emotions?"

6. Planalp, *Communicating Emotion*, 11 (italics removed). The first four components in the list are self-explanatory. Regulation is the inhibitory control or voluntary enhancement of the emotion. It can affect all four other components of the emotional process. Planalp gives the following example on p. 31. We regulate emotion (e.g., fear) by dealing with the object

Of the above five components, those that are most culturally sensitive and dependent would be the precipitating event, the action tendencies, and the regulation of that emotion. But what is essential and constitutive of the emotional experience is the appraisal or evaluative component.⁷ The evaluative element makes the emotional experience what it is, differentiating it (e.g., anger) from other states (e.g., jealousy or pride). Moreover, the evaluative element is also causally responsible for the emotion and gives the reason for a person to be in that particular state. To be afraid is to evaluate or appraise a situation, object, or event to be dangerous with a significant degree of probability; to be overcome by grief is to realize that someone to whom I am deeply attached and who is irreplaceable has been permanently taken from me. Emotion words are not just labels for bodily sensations. An experience of fear, grief, or anger relates to the external world, and emotions are ways of perceiving and responding to changes in that world. To experience an emotion thus is to construe a personally significant event or situation in a particular way. In essence, emotions or emotion lexemes are the interpretive schemes of various script-like or narrative forms that give meaning and shape to the human experience of some self-relevant condition.⁸

When we apply the five components of an emotional experience to shame, we discover the following. The *precipitating event* can vary widely. It includes being seen doing bad things, being associated with people of ill repute, being rejected in an electoral venue, or failing an academic exam. It is important to note that shame is not produced by any specific event, for the same event can happen to two different people with two different emotional responses. As

(avoiding the car in my path), managing the appraisal (telling myself I have plenty of room to spare), regulating the physiological change (deep breathing), and managing the action tendency (screaming will not help).

7. See Taylor, *Pride, Shame, and Guilt*, 1–5; Cairns, *Aidōs*, 5–14; Kaster, *Emotion, Restraint, and Community*, 8–9. The importance of appraisals is also seen in Roberts, *Emotions*, 60–179, who defines emotions as concern-based construals. In his view, construals are akin to perceptions, and they can have the same immediacy as sense perceptions. Although they are interpretations, the interpretation is built into the experience. Experientially, “a construal is not an interpretation laid over a neutrally perceived object, but a characterization of the object, a way the *object* presents itself” (80). Roberts’s analysis is helpful in showing that the evaluation can be deliberate or immediate. In some instances, the evaluation (e.g., my evaluation that a snake right beside my feet is dangerous) need not enter consciousness. It can happen so fast (perhaps accelerated by past evaluations that lead me to believe that snakes are dangerous) that it can be seen as an instinctual reflex.

8. Shweder, “You’re Not Sick,” 32–33. Kaster (*Emotion, Restraint, and Community*, 8) similarly writes, “Any emotion-term is just the lexicalized residue of what happens when the data of life are processed in a particular way—through a sequence of perception (sensing, imagining), evaluation (believing, judging, desiring), and response (bodily, affective, pragmatic, expressive)—to produce a particular kind of emotionalized consciousness, a particular set of thoughts and feelings.”

discussed above, what is central is the individual's *interpretation and appraisal* of that event. In shame, the constitutive element is negative self-evaluation, the awareness of being seen to fall short of some perceived standard or ideal. The presence of an other may be the catalyst, but the evaluation constitutive of shame still depends on the self. As Douglas Cairns remarks, "In every case shame is a matter of the self's judging the self in terms of some ideal that is one's own."⁹ The discomforting and perplexing experience of shame may have physiological, behavioral, and evaluative elements, but what distinguishes shame from other emotions is the evaluative component. The *physiological changes* may include an increased heart rate or the sensation of feeling hot. The *action tendency* may be to avert one's gaze and hang one's head. The *regulation* of the shame emotion may be denial, laughing about one's transgressions, or embracing the criticism and seeking to do better the next time.

Shame, Humiliation, and Embarrassment

In the above section, I noted that the fundamental and constitutive element of shame is the negative self-evaluation brought about by the awareness of being seen to fall short of some standard, ideal, or goal. This can be sharpened by comparing shame with two closely related emotions, embarrassment and humiliation.

Andrew Morrison argues that embarrassment, shame, and humiliation are almost interchangeable and that they differ primarily in intensity.¹⁰ Humiliation is the most intense and embarrassment the least intense version of interpersonal shame. Embarrassment, shame, and humiliation can be accompanied by the same physiological symptoms (blushing, feeling hot, perspiration, trembling, or increased heart rate) and behavioral signs (pursed lips, squirming, a desire to hide or be alone, averting one's gaze, bowing or lowering of the head). But I think what differentiates them definitively is the appropriate evaluative criteria, even if it is the case that the relevant evaluative criteria for humiliation make it the most intense and for embarrassment the least intense of the three emotions.¹¹

Humiliation is elicited when the self perceives that an other displays an attitude of disgust and contempt for the self. Both shame and humiliation see the self as falling short of some ideal or standard. Central to humiliation, however, is not this self-reflection but the unjust experience of being put into that state by a contemptuous other. It does not consider the self as blameworthy.

9. Cairns, *Aidōs*, 16.

10. Morrison, *Culture of Shame*, 40–41.

11. So also Tarnopolsky, *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants*, 156.

Rather, it focuses on the external attribution of this negative evaluation so that there are tendencies toward revenge.¹² Shame may be brought on by an external other, but it focuses more on the internal attribution of the negative evaluation, involving primarily the self reflecting on the self.

In contrast to humiliation, shame and embarrassment are not prompted by a contemptuous assessment of the self, and one can feel shame or embarrassment before an other who displays a significantly less negative attitude. Both shame and embarrassment are related to exposure. Some assert that shame involves a violation of a moral norm and embarrassment a social norm or etiquette. It is, however, misleading to limit shame to a breach of a moral norm. For one can experience shame as a result of one's dyslexia or stutter, but we would never assert that one is morally culpable for one's dyslexia. A more fruitful criterion for distinguishing shame and embarrassment is the evaluation whether, in the moment of exposure, a significant character flaw has been revealed (shame) or merely an apparent flaw (embarrassment).¹³ Moreover, one may experience embarrassment simply for being the center of attention even when no apparent flaw is revealed. I provide two examples. First, imagine a situation where I am introduced before giving an after-dinner speech at a conference. The person introducing me extols my credentials and expertise. The emotion I might experience in this moment of exposure is probably embarrassment rather than shame since no character flaw, real or apparent, has been revealed. Now, imagine that as I give my speech, I suddenly notice that there is a piece of spinach stuck between my teeth. I enter a state of fluster and feel exposed. If I believe that a discrediting fact of my character has been truly revealed (I am a careless sloven), I would describe myself as ashamed. However, if I believe that the situation does not truly reflect a flaw of my character, although everyone's attention is on the piece of spinach and I can imagine how the audience might think it to be a flaw, I would describe myself as embarrassed rather than ashamed.

Shame and Guilt

Many consider shame and guilt to be different emotions, but the specific factors that differentiate them are strongly debated. Attempts to distinguish

12. Gilbert, "What Is Shame?," 9–11.

13. Sabini, Garvey, and Hall ("Shame and Embarrassment Revisited," 104) write, "People refer to themselves as experiencing shame when they believe that a real flaw of their self has been revealed, they refer to themselves as experiencing embarrassment when they believe that others have reason to think a flaw has been revealed."

shame and guilt generally fall into three categories: (1) distinction based on the degree the person focuses either on the self or the behavior, (2) distinction based on the public and private nature of the transgression, and (3) distinction based on the nature of the eliciting event.¹⁴ These approaches are not mutually exclusive, and some adopt a mix of them. I assess these approaches and conclude with some remarks about their relevance to my project.

Distinction 1: Self or Behavior

The dominant approach for distinguishing shame and guilt centers on the degree to which the person construes the emotion-eliciting event as a failure either of self or of behavior. In her landmark work *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis*, the psychoanalyst Helen Lewis argues that the key difference between shame and guilt centers on the role of the self in these experiences. Both shame and guilt are self-conscious emotions, emotions that have as components “consciousness of the self . . . and evaluation of the self against some standard.”¹⁵ Nevertheless, the specific evaluation is what differentiates shame from guilt. Specifically, the focus of evaluation in shame is the *self*, while the focus in guilt is the *thing* done.¹⁶ This differential emphasis on self (“*I* did that horrible thing”) vis-à-vis behavior (“*I did* that horrible *thing*”) leads to different phenomenological experiences. Shame is a painful experience that is accompanied by the desire to shrink, to withdraw, and to hide. With its acute awareness of one’s flawed self, shame is accompanied by a sense of worthlessness and powerlessness. Guilt, although painful, is nevertheless a less devastating experience as it does not affect one’s core identity. Rather, people who experience guilt focus on the transgression, wishing they could undo or seeking to make amends for their actions.¹⁷

It is, however, doubtful whether these distinctions between shame and guilt can be so clearly discerned. Cairns writes, “It may be tidy to claim that shame involves thoughts like ‘What a terrible person I am!’ and guilt thoughts like

14. Tangney, Stuewig, and Mashek, “Moral Emotions,” 348.

15. Fischer and Tangney, “Self-Conscious Emotions,” 14.

16. H. Lewis (*Shame and Guilt in Neurosis*, 30) writes, “Shame . . . involves more self-consciousness and more self-imaging than guilt. The experience of shame is directly about the *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. In guilt, the self is negatively evaluated in connection with something but is not itself the focus of the experience.” Similarly, Nathanson (*Shame and Pride*, 19) writes, “Whereas shame is about the *quality* of our person or self, guilt is the painful emotion triggered when we become aware that we have acted in a way to bring harm to another person or to violate some important code. Guilt is about *action* and laws. Whenever we feel guilty, we can pay for the damage inflicted.” See also M. Lewis, “Self-Conscious Emotions.”

17. See Tangney and Dearing, *Shame and Guilt*, 10–25.

‘What a terrible thing to do!’ and to argue that ‘What a terrible person I am to do such a terrible thing!’ indicates a concurrence of shame and guilt, but it is unlikely that the real world can admit such a sharp conceptual distinction. . . . Quite simply, self-image will constantly be called into question by specific acts, and in such situations the sharp distinction between shame and guilt will begin to disappear.”¹⁸

This does not necessarily mean that shame and guilt are identical. Bernard Williams suggests that shame and guilt can be evoked by the same action.¹⁹ Nonetheless, shame and guilt focus primarily on different directions of an emotional response to an action. Williams writes, “The action stands between the inner world of disposition, feeling, and decision and an outer world of harm and wrong. *What I have done* points in one direction toward what has happened to others, in another direction to what I am. Guilt looks primarily in the first direction. . . . Shame looks to what I am.”²⁰ Shame is not a general negative evaluation of the self but a negative evaluation in light of some specific shortcoming. When the shortcoming is dependent on some action that is contrary to one’s moral standards, shame invariably references both conduct and self-image. Similarly, guilt that is caused by a specific act is nevertheless caused by a specific act that runs counter to an ideal self. Guilt must therefore also reference both an ideal self and conduct. The distinction between self and conduct may be possible to draw in the abstract, but it is difficult to maintain in practice. Shame and guilt reflect the reciprocal relation between self and action, and shame and guilt interweave as we construct and assess our identity in relation to others.

Distinction 2: Public or Private

The second approach distinguishes shame and guilt on the basis of the public or private locus of the negative evaluation. Shame arises from public exposure of one’s shortcoming, but guilt stems from private self-reproach that arises from one’s conscience. David Ausubel clarifies, “Shame may be defined as an unpleasant emotion by an individual to an actual or presumed negative judgment of himself by others resulting in self-depreciation vis-à-vis the group,” and “guilt may be conceptualized as a special kind of negative

18. Cairns, *Aidōs*, 24. Kaufman (*Psychology of Shame*, 6) likewise writes, “The assumption that we feel guilty about deeds but feel shame about self is equally in error. The target of shame can be either the self or the self’s actions, just as one can feel guilty about deeds or else feel essentially guilt-ridden as a person. From the perspective of affect theory, one can feel shameful about deeds as well as guilty about self.”

19. So also Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 445.

20. Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, 92–93.

self-evaluation which occurs when an individual acknowledges that his behavior is at variance with a given moral value to which he feels obligated to conform.”²¹

This distinction between shame and guilt was not only applied to individual emotional experiences; it was also applied to cultures. According to these theorists, the distinction between shame and guilt cultures relies on a distinction between internal and external sanctions. Shame is caused by fear of external sanctions, especially the disapproval of others; guilt relies on internal sanctions that stem from one’s individual conscience, especially one’s own disapproval of oneself. Ruth Benedict writes,

A society that inculcates absolute standards of morality and relies on men’s developing a conscience is a guilt culture by definition. . . . True shame cultures rely on external sanctions for good behavior, not, as true guilt cultures do, on an internalized conviction of sin. 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. Guilt does not. In a nation where honor means living up to one’s own picture of oneself, a man may suffer from guilt though no man knows of his misdeed and a man’s feeling of guilt may actually be relieved by confessing his sin.²²

With these criteria, Benedict considers Japan to have primarily a shame culture and America a guilt culture.²³ E. R. Dodds uses Benedict’s terminology and suggests that the transition from Homeric Greece to Archaic Greece represents a shift from a shame culture to a guilt culture.²⁴ Although Dodds uses the terms only as descriptions without assuming any theory of cultural

21. Ausubel, “Relationships between Shame and Guilt,” 382, 379. Gehm and Scherer (“Situation Evaluation,” 74) argue that “shame is usually dependent on the public exposure of one’s frailty or failing, whereas guilt may be something that remains secret with us, no one else knowing of our breach of social norms or of our responsibility for an immoral act.” See also Smith et al. (“Role of Public Exposure,” 145), who write, “The results . . . provide evidence that public exposure is more associated with shame than with guilt. The manipulation of public exposure had a strong effect on the explicit measure of shame, whereas it had no effect on the corresponding measure of guilt.”

22. Benedict, *Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, 222–23.

23. Lebra (“Shame and Guilt,” 193) considers both shame and guilt to be “allocentric in that they are based upon the actor’s ability in empathy to ‘take the role of other’ . . . or to be aware of his self as an object of sanction. . . . In the case of shame, others are visualized as audience or spectators, whereas in the case of guilt they appear as victims of or sufferers from one’s action.” Using these definitions, she reverses Benedict’s position regarding Japanese emotions. She argues that “guilt is anchored more firmly than shame in the Japanese moral system, and that shame emotions, therefore, are often translated into guilt terms” (207).

24. Dodds, *Greeks and the Irrational*, 28–63.

change, those influenced by social Darwinism will assume that the shift from a shame culture to a guilt culture marks a sign of progress.

It appears valid that shame should reference the concept of an external audience. There are nevertheless difficulties with this approach since one can feel shame even when alone. If we resort to the weaker claim that shame only requires an imaginary audience to bring it about, we must then affirm that this kind of shame depends less on the expected judgments of the audience than on the discrepancy one sees between the self and some ideal standard. The fear of shame has then in effect been internalized, and the public-private distinction between shame and guilt falls apart. Gabriele Taylor considers the role of an audience as a catalyst for self-evaluation, but it is self-evaluation that is constitutive of shame, not the presence of a real or imagined audience.²⁵ Shame still requires the presence of an audience or an *other*, but the *other* may be internalized such that one can be an *other* to oneself. Consequently, the distinction that shame is heteronomous while guilt is autonomous falls apart.

If the public-private criterion cannot be used to distinguish shame from guilt, then Benedict's assessment that external-internal sanctions form the differentiating factor between shame and guilt cultures is also open to criticism. Millie Creighton defends Benedict against others who wrongly critique her for assuming that guilt was absent in Japan. She, however, writes that "the one area in which it is valid to severely criticize Benedict involves her designation of shame cultures as relying on external sanctions of control while guilt cultures rely on internal sanctions of control."²⁶ If both shame and guilt share a certain degree of internalization, then the sharp antithesis between shame and guilt disappears, and with it the antithesis between shame and guilt cultures. This is not to say that there is no such thing as a shame culture or a guilt culture. Rather, the difference between a shame culture and a guilt culture must be one of degree and emphasis rather than of kind.²⁷ Similarly, this is not to say that there are no differences between Japanese and American societies, nor between ancient Greek societies and ours. Rather, it is a caricature to label Japan a shame culture and the United States a guilt culture. A caricature may capture the prominent features of its subject and present it in an easily understandable form to others, but it is inappropriate to suggest that a caricature delivers all the subtle variations and complex distinctions that are present in reality.

25. Taylor, *Pride, Shame, and Guilt*, 57–68.

26. Creighton, "Revisiting Shame and Guilt Cultures," 282.

27. See Cairns, *Aidōs*, 27–47; Gill, *Greek Thought*, 20–27.

Distinction 3: Nonmoral or Moral

The third approach distinguishes shame and guilt on the nature of the eliciting event.²⁸ Shame is invoked by moral and nonmoral failures, while guilt arises from moral transgressions. There are at least two implications of this approach. First, since shame is invoked by moral and nonmoral failures, there is a tendency to differentiate between two kinds of shame on the basis of the moral and amoral nature of the failure.²⁹ On the one hand, moral shame stems from a failure that reveals a character flaw (e.g., someone who is caught shoplifting). On the other hand, amoral shame stems from a failure that does not reveal a character flaw (e.g., someone who is dyslexic and stumbles through a public reading of Scripture in a church service). In the case of the dyslexic, amoral shame is clearly distinguished from guilt as we would not want to imply that the person is responsible for his dyslexia. Second, since both moral shame and guilt can be invoked by moral failures, psychologists who adopt this approach also use one or two of the other approaches to distinguish shame and guilt. For example, some distinguish shame and guilt not only on the nature of the situational antecedent but also on the private-public locus of the negative evaluation.

Assessment

The multiplicity of approaches to distinguish shame and guilt suggests the difficulty of differentiating these two moral emotions despite our intuitive sense that they are different. The words “shame” and “guilt” are sometimes used interchangeably, and research subjects in psychological experiments are at times not able to distinguish them.³⁰ Moreover, the psychometric scales that are used to measure shame and guilt at times fail to distinguish them adequately.³¹ Stephen Pattison remarks, “It is probably futile to try and make any absolute distinction between these two concepts or states in terms of common parlance.”³² Part of this confusion may arise because shame and guilt experiences overlap or co-occur at the same time, and people use both shame and guilt to cover the full range of their experience without

28. Psychologists who adopt this approach include Ferguson, Stegge, and Damhuis, “Children’s Understanding”; Olthof et al., “Shame and Guilt in Children”; Smith et al., “Role of Public Exposure.”

29. Ausubel, “Relationships between Shame and Guilt,” 382.

30. N. Harris, “Dimensionality of the Moral Emotions.”

31. See Kugler and Jones, “Conceptualizing and Assessing Guilt,” 324; Blum, “Shame and Guilt,” 91.

32. Pattison, *Shame*, 43.

being able to articulate the different facets that give rise to each emotion separately.³³

The overlap between shame and guilt may be explained by the argument that guilt is not an emotion in itself. Contrary to most researchers, Andrew Ortony argues that guilt is not an emotion; it is a socio-legal condition, an external objective description.³⁴ The reason why many wrongly think that guilt is an emotion is because they do not pay careful attention to the distinction between *feeling* X and *being* X. The failure to note this difference “can result in inadvertently attributing to non-affective conditions properties that belong, not to the conditions themselves, but only to the associate (affective) *feeling* conditions.”³⁵ For true emotions, both of the statements “I feel X” and “I am X” will refer to emotional states and will be roughly equivalent (e.g., “I feel angry” and “I am angry”). For non-emotions, both statements will not refer to emotional states and both will not be equivalent. Thus, “I feel guilty” refers to an emotional state, but not “I am guilty.” The latter is the external description of the socio-legal condition of a person. The former is a matter of feeling what a guilty person feels, and that might include shame, sadness, fear, regret, and remorse.³⁶ Thus, while shame is a unitary affect, guilt is a socio-legal state that elicits multiple affects.

The assertion that guilt is not an emotion is also borne out in the second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*). The *OED* defines guilt primarily as “a failure of duty, delinquency; offence, crime, sin.”³⁷ The definitions *OED* gives focus on acts, responsibility, and state of culpability. There is no mention of emotion or feeling in any of the dictionary definitions except for entry 5d, which notes that guilt is “misused for ‘sense of guilt.’” The *OED* also recognizes an implicit connection between shame and guilt in defining *sense of shame* as “the consciousness of this emotion, guilty feeling.”³⁸ Since one source of shame is the consciousness of having done something wrong, the socio-legal condition of being guilty would elicit shame.

It is beyond the scope of this project to adjudicate whether guilt is an emotion, but the above discussion concerning the difficulty of distinguishing shame and guilt has several implications. First, since both guilt and shame share a certain degree of internalization, our study and analysis of shame should not commit us to focus only on external sanctions without any appreciation of

33. Smith et al., “Role of Public Exposure,” 140.

34. Ortony, “Is Guilt an Emotion?” See also Elison, “Shame and Guilt.”

35. Ortony, “Is Guilt an Emotion?,” 285.

36. Sabini and Silver, “Emotion Names and Experiences,” 6–7.

37. *OED*, s.v. “guilt,” *sb.* 1.

38. *OED*, s.v. “shame,” *sb.* I.1.c.

some internalized standard. Second, even though emotion lexemes in other cultures and languages may be quickly glossed in English as “shame,” a careful study of these lexemes should not preclude their characterization in terms of guilt. Third, many psychologists have a decidedly negative view toward shame vis-à-vis guilt; they consider shame to be maladaptive. June Tangney and Ronda Dearing write, “The literature strongly suggests that shame is the more problematic emotion, linked to a range of psychological symptoms. In contrast, ‘pure’ guilt, uncomplicated by shame, does not lead to psychological symptoms and can, in fact, be quite adaptive.”³⁹ The difficulty of absolutely distinguishing shame and guilt should lead us to question the validity of such statements. Moreover, it should caution us not to allow simplistic distinctions to cloud our understanding of the material that follows and should prompt us to consider the possibility that shame can play a positive role in moral formation.

Conceptual Clarifications

Much conceptual confusion surrounds the issue of shame. This arises out of the different ways in which shame lexemes work not only in the English language but also in other languages. When someone says, “Don’t you have any shame?” and another retorts, “I don’t need any more shame!” they may be referring to different types of shame. In order to clarify this confusion, we need to distinguish between the occurrent experience of shame, dispositional shame, retrospective shame, prospective shame, and acts of shaming.

The *occurrent experience of shame* is the discomfiting and painful emotion that arises when one is aware of certain inadequacies of the self under the gaze of an other. As an occurrent emotion, it is an emotion experienced as actually occurring at the present moment and is typically accompanied by the affective behavior of blushing, pursed lips, constricted posture, gaze aversion, and hanging the head.⁴⁰

Dispositional shame (sense of shame or shamefastness) is the disposition, inclination, and inhibition that restrains one from pursuing certain actions that are shameful without implication that shame is actually being experienced by the person. For example, the statement “I am ashamed of being seen as a coward” informs you not about an occurrence of shame in me but about a disposition of mine to experience shame in that particular situation. I take it as obvious that the occurrent experience of shame must be

39. Tangney and Dearing, *Shame and Guilt*, 127.

40. See Keltner and Harker, “Nonverbal Signal of Shame.”

prior to the dispositional sense, for the statement “I will not do X lest I be shamed” implies a previous occurrence of shame and an inhibition toward future occurrences.⁴¹

Some consider the understanding of shame as sense of shame or shamefastness to be quite distinct from the understanding of shame as an emotion: one is a disposition to experience shame, and the other is the occurrent experience of shame; one is considered an ethical trait, the other an emotion; one has a positive connection, the other negative.⁴² It should, however, be noted that the distinction between the dispositional and the occurrent senses of the emotion is not sharp.⁴³ For the disposition must quickly lead to the occurrence of the emotion, given the right stimuli. Since the disposition so readily leads to the embodied experience of the emotion, the dispositional shamefast person habitually lives with a foretaste of shame at the back of the throat.⁴⁴ It is this habituation with the prospect of the occurrent experience of shame that gives dispositional shame the power to restrain. Without the proleptic emotive component inherent in its structure, dispositional shame lacks the inner strength to circumscribe inappropriate behavior and ceases to be an ethical trait.

The tight relationship between the dispositional and the occurrent senses of shame is mitigated in English, for we typically differentiate between the two using different words: “sense of shame/modesty/shamefastness” and “shame.” The ancient Greeks and Romans, however, used the same lexeme (αἰσχύνη, αἰδώς, *pudor*) for the dispositional and the occurrent understandings of shame. Thus, the relationship between them appears seamless and uniform.

Retrospective shame and *prospective shame* refer respectively to situations where the evil that makes one feel shame is either in the past/present or in

41. This understanding of occurrent and dispositional shame corresponds to the first two definitions of *shame* in the second edition of the *OED*: “1.a. The painful emotion arising from the consciousness of something dishonouring, ridiculous, or indecorous in one’s own conduct or circumstances (or in those of others whose honour or disgrace one regards as one’s own), or of being in a situation which offends one’s sense of modesty or decency. . . . 2. Fear of offence against propriety or decency, operating as a restraint on behaviour; modesty, shamefastness.” The distinction between occurrent and dispositional senses of an emotion is found also in the Greco-Roman world. Cairns (*Aidōs*, 398) notes that Aristotle “has a developed terminology which makes similar distinctions: a *pathos* is an affect, and is always occurrent, but behind *pathē* lies capacities (*dunameis*), and settled states (*hexeis*), both of which may involve some kind of non-occurrent disposition towards the various emotions.”

42. Miller (*Anatomy of Disgust*, 34) writes, “The shame doing the inhibiting is not the emotion shame, but the sense of shame, the sense of modesty and propriety that keeps us from being shamed.”

43. Cairns, *Aidōs*, 158.

44. Kaster, *Emotion, Restraint, and Community*, 16–17.

the future. The former is a kind of shame that is consequent upon having done bad acts (either in the past or present); the latter looks to the future and restrains one from performing bad acts. Note that there is some ambiguity in prospective shame. It can refer either to (1) the prospect of shame (or sense of shame) that restricts one's behavior or (2) the occurrent experience of shame at a prospective blow to one's honor.⁴⁵ Given this ambiguity, the distinction between retrospective and prospective shame does not exactly map onto the difference between the occurrent experience of shame and the dispositional sense of shame.⁴⁶

Acts of shaming are what an individual or collective agent does to bring about the occurrent experience of shame in an individual or collective group. This can be mediated through words, actions, or a combination of both. How a self responds to the occurrent experience of shame brought about by an other's act of shaming depends on a variety of factors. They include the intensity of the affective experience; the social relationship between the self and the other; how the self views the attitude and intent of the other; the social context in which the act of shaming occurs; the self's experience of previous shaming incidents; the intrapsychic shame scripts that run in that individual's mind; and the ways in which other parties or social scripts tell the self how it should respond to such acts of shaming. The multiplicity of factors suggests that any attempt to shame a person for some supposed good may lead to an indeterminate response. This does not necessarily mean that shaming should not be used as a pedagogical tool for moral formation. Rather, any use of it must be framed in a way that minimizes misunderstanding and be accompanied with full awareness of the potential harm that it can inflict.

Cross-Cultural Examination of Shame

This study is focused not on shame per se but on the use of shame for moral formation. Nevertheless, we need to examine briefly how the different authors we engage understand shame. As we are interacting with texts in multiple languages, we cannot take it for granted that the emotional lexemes in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and Chinese correspond exactly to contemporary English terminology.⁴⁷ This assertion immediately raises several questions. How can

45. Nieuwenburg, "Learning to Deliberate," 466n16.

46. Tarnopolsky, *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants*, 58n8.

47. W. Harris (*Restraining Rage*, 36) remarks, "The study of classical emotions has been seriously impeded by our failure to realize . . . that the relevant Greek and Latin terminology is very unlikely to correspond neatly to modern English usage."

we meaningfully examine the emotion-talk of another culture, especially one that is removed from us in time?⁴⁸ Are the emotions of the Greeks, Romans, Jews, and Chinese the same as ours? Is there a universal set of emotions that is experienced by every culture?

In *The Expression of Emotions*, Darwin extended his idea of evolution to the emotional life of humans, suggesting that certain expressive features are innate and universal. Neo-Darwinists such as Paul Ekman build on Darwin's work and devise experiments to prove that there is a basic set of emotions that are universally shared and that can be universally recognized from facial expressions regardless of language and culture.⁴⁹ This principle can be articulated as follows: "There is considerable evidence indicating distinct, prototypical facial signals that across a variety of cultures can be reliably recognized as corresponding to at least six different emotions (happiness, sadness, surprise, disgust, anger, and fear), and possibly others, including interest, shame, and contempt."⁵⁰ The work of Ekman has not gone unchallenged. Anthropologists argue that human behavior and emotions are decisively determined by one's respective culture. Drawing on her work among the Ifaluk people, Catherine Lutz claims that "emotional experience is not precultural but *preeminently* cultural. . . . The complex meaning of each emotion word is the result of the important role those words play in articulating the full range of a people's cultural values, social relations, and economic circumstances."⁵¹ The linguist Anna Wierzbicka also challenges Ekman's categorization of basic emotions in English lexical categories. She notes that "the speakers of other languages in fact think about human experience in terms of other, non-matching, conceptual categories . . . ; they do not 'read' any human faces as 'angry,' 'sad,' or 'fearful,' but rather interpret them in terms of their own language-specific categories."⁵²

The views adopted by universalists and social constructivists should not be construed as mutually exclusive and exhaustive.⁵³ Robert Solomon remarks, "There is nothing in the nature of emotion . . . that assures universality, but

48. For discussions of methodological issues, see C. Barton, *Roman Honor*, 1–17; Cairns, "Ethics, Ethology, Terminology"; Kaster, *Emotion, Restraint, and Community*, 6–12; Konstan, *Motions of the Ancient Greeks*, 3–40.

49. See Ekman, *Emotion in the Human Face*.

50. Smith and Scott, "Componential Approach," 229 (references removed).

51. Lutz, *Unnatural Emotions*, 5–6.

52. Wierzbicka, *Emotions across Languages and Cultures*, 169.

53. Mallon and Stich ("Odd Couple") reconcile the two views by noting the confusion in the meaning and reference of emotion terms. Social constructivists employ a "thick" description of the emotion term, paying attention to the antecedent conditions as well as the socially learned response that varies from culture to culture. Universalists, on the other hand, employ a narrow view of the meaning and reference of the emotion term, focusing on a core element or an innate emotion prototype.

neither is it so obvious that emotions differ so much from place to place either.”⁵⁴ Emotions have universal and culture-specific aspects, making dialogue between other cultures and our own possible. Although the nuances of emotional lexemes may be socially constructed, we are still able to make some sense of them. If it were not so, contemporary readers would not be able to make sense of the emotions found in an English translation of the *Iliad* or the “Rasādhyāya” (the sixth chapter of *Nāṭyaśāstra*, a Sanskrit text written between the third and fifth centuries CE).⁵⁵ Cultural psychologists recognize this phenomenon, noting that “contemporary non-Hindu researchers in the United States and Europe are likely to find the account of the ‘basic emotions’ in the ‘Rasādhyāya’ both familiar and strange.” A comparison of the Sanskrit list of nine basic emotions with those that Ekman derived from facial expressions shows that “the two lists do not seem . . . to be closely coordinated, although they are not totally disjoint either.”⁵⁶

Given this similarity and dissimilarity between emotional lexemes in different languages and cultures, what is the minimal mandatory meaning that shame must have? What is the abstract idea or underlying concept that sets a mandatory limit on all instances of shame lexemes? Cultural psychologist and anthropologist Richard Shweder proposes this definition: “Shame is the deeply felt and highly motivating experience of the fear of being judged defective.”⁵⁷ Such a definition is fundamentally in line with our earlier statement that the constitutive element of shame is negative self-evaluation, the awareness of being seen to fall short of some ideal or goal. Having articulated the abstract idea that undergirds every cultural-specific definition of shame, we should not lull ourselves into thinking that the shame that another culture experiences is the same as ours, for we do not experience the abstract idea of shame in itself. Every mental state that we experience is never the abstract concept but the more substantive, full-bodied, and cultural-specific manifestation of that abstract idea, colored with its local meaning.

As we examine the shame lexemes of different sets of texts, we must be mindful of how a particular culture concretizes the abstract concept with its

54. Solomon, “Philosophy of Emotions,” 14.

55. Williams (*Shame and Necessity*, 88) also recognizes this: “In [my] discussion, I have been using the English word ‘shame’ in two ways. It has translated certain Greek words, in particular *aidōs*. It has also had its usual modern meaning. I have been able to use it in both these ways without its falling apart, and this shows something significant. What we have discovered about the Greeks’ understanding of these reactions . . . applies equally well to what we recognize in our own world as shame. If it were not so, the translation could not have delivered so much that is familiar to us from our acquaintance with what we call ‘shame.’”

56. Shweder et al., “Cultural Psychology of the Emotions,” 411.

57. Shweder, “Deep Cultural Psychology of Shame,” 1115 (italics removed).

distinctive character and meaning. This can be done by noting how members of various cultural groups are alike or different with respect to the components of the shame experience. This approach minimizes the danger of simplification (where we simply assume that Greek or Hebrew emotional lexemes map directly onto their English equivalents) and helps us appreciate how shame may be understood differently in the Jewish, Greco-Roman, and Chinese worlds.

Conclusion: What Is Shame?

I first defined emotion as a script comprising five components: (1) precipitating event, (2) appraisal, (3) physiological change, (4) action tendency, and (5) regulation. Of these five components, the appraisal element differentiates one emotional experience from another.

Applying the above five components to the emotional experience of shame, I noted that precipitating events, action tendencies, or even physiological changes in the shame experience may differ for different individuals and even different episodes in the same individual. Nonetheless, the central constitutive element of the shame experience is the negative appraisal or self-evaluation by the individual. I thus define shame as *the painful emotion that arises from an awareness that one has fallen short of some standard, ideal, or goal.*