

The Role of Guilt in the Development of Virtue

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Guilt is far from valorized in contemporary Western culture. The generation that came of age in the 60s and 70s, as part and parcel of the youth revolution, saw it as part of their task to get over their feelings of guilt and to raise their own children using positive reinforcement rather than either punishment or guilt. They ushered in a culture of individual self-realization and discovery, freed from the dead hand of tradition and communal expectations. The popular notions of “Catholic guilt” and “Jewish Guilt” enshrine the idea that members of particular religious groups suffer from unhealthy, excess guilt. Empirical research in this area suggests that neither Jews nor Catholics experience more intense guilt than members of other U.S. religious groups, although religiosity does correlate positively with guilt (Vaisey and Smith, 2008; Demaria and Kassinove 1988). We might even speculate that one factor in the decline in institutional religious affiliation in the U.S. may be widely shared views that guilt is unproductive or unhealthy. Beyond these negative popular attitudes toward guilt, there are other reasons, specific to trends in various disciplines within the academy, from philosophy and theology to psychology, for the demotion of guilt. In the past several decades, as greater attention has been devoted to the role of emotion in ethical perception and judgment, guilt has begun to receive more scholarly attention. Still, because guilt is associated with deontic moral concepts, and virtue theorists have tended to emphasize the role of emotion while discounting the significance of deontic moral concepts, guilt has been insufficiently theorized within virtue ethics.

In what follows, I briefly explore these developments before going on to discuss empirical research that lends support to the notion that guilt can play a positive role in the development of virtuous character. First, guilt can enhance empathy and thereby foster the development of a stable disposition of benevolence; while those experiencing guilt sometimes help out of the self-interested motivation of alleviating their own guilt, guilt can also elicit reflection on a wrongful action, perspective-taking with the one injured, and empathy that results in concern for them for their own sake. This contrasts with shame, which involves a negative evaluation of the global self and is associated with rumination, withdrawal, anger, and defensiveness. Second, while moralistic motivations for assisting others strike us as an inappropriate stand-in for direct concern for the other, we should not conclude that the desire to do the right thing, and the associated disposition to feel guilty when one does not, are incompatible with genuinely virtuous motives. While a perfectly virtuous agent would have no occasion to feel guilty, she does find it good that persons be responsive to properly assigned blame. Appreciating this will help us see that responsiveness to moral obligations is an integral part of respect for second-personal relationships with others, not something merely impersonal.

Both shame and guilt have traditionally been employed in moral education. We might conclude that while guilt has won the right to remain, shame should be ushered out the door. But this would be too quick. After all, shame is a feature of our experience, and not easily eliminated. More importantly, negative evaluations of the global self are not always inappropriate. In closing, I will glance briefly toward traditional Christian understandings of sin and redemption, in which shame, I will suggest, is given a necessary but dynamic and transformative place. There is wisdom here that can incorporate, while also transcending, the view of shame as maladaptive.

The demotion of guilt

Guilt is associated with the deontic family of concepts, with having committed some offense, or having failed in some duty or obligation, such that one is now culpable. However, the retrieval of virtue ethics is associated with a shift away from a preoccupation with deontic categories. Those philosophers and theological ethicists who have done the most to revive interest in the virtues and their cultivation have typically insisted that acting out of a sense of duty is a lesser motive, not the sort of motive characteristic of the virtuous. Elizabeth Anscombe went even farther, arguing influentially that “the concepts of obligation, and duty—moral obligation and moral duty, that is to say—and of what is morally right and wrong, and of the moral sense of ‘ought’ ought to be jettisoned if this is psychologically possible; because they are survivals, or derivatives from survivals, from an earlier conceptions of ethics which no longer generally survives, and are only harmful without it” (Anscombe 1958: 1). Anscombe explicitly associates the moral ought with the concepts of guilt, culpability, and sin (5), and argues that these make sense only given belief in a divine lawgiver. Hence, deontic concepts are not just associated with lesser motives, but ought to be left behind altogether by non-theists. Bernard Williams, meanwhile, argued that we would be better off without what he called “the morality system,” closely associated with the moral ought, and noted that “remorse or self-reproach or guilt . . . is the characteristic first-personal reaction within the system, and if an agent never felt such sentiments, he would not belong to the morality system” (1985: 174, 177). If we would be better off without the morality system, it would seem that we would be better off without feelings of guilt and remorse. Virtue ethicists have often argued that we can do without the notion of moral obligation, that it reflects a thinning-out of the rich conceptual vocabulary of the virtues. The virtuous agent does not act out of a sense of duty or in order to avoid guilt or blame. Rather, on a broadly Aristotelian picture, the desires of the virtuous agent have been habituated to harmonize with reason’s judgments concerning how best to act in a particular situation, and the virtuous agent, rather than acting in accord with duty rather than inclination, or by controlling his or her inclinations, acts as she desires, in responsiveness to the situation.

If we look towards empirical work in moral psychology, we find similar judgments concerning guilt. Christian Miller, for instance, reviewing a wide range of relevant empirical studies, has concluded that while guilt feelings do enhance helping behaviors, those whose helping actions are driven by a sense of guilt do not possess the dispositions that we would expect of the virtuous (Miller 2013, 30). While psychologists have developed different motivational models in order to account for the observed correlation between guilt-feelings and helping behaviors, the leading model holds quite

simply that guilty helpers are motivated by a desire to eliminate or reduce their guilt-feelings, and that helping is a common and effective way of accomplishing this (Miller 2013, 39). If this is so, it means that the motivations of guilty helpers are self-referential; they do not help simply in order to respond to the need of the other, doing the helpful action for its own sake. Miller puts the point more strongly; guilty helpers have a self-interested, selfish, or egoistic as opposed to an altruistic motivation. The other person is treated as a means to providing the guilty helper with relief for his or her feelings of guilt (Miller 2013, 48). Were the person not feeling guilty, she would be significantly less likely to help. Someone who possesses the virtue of compassion or benevolence, in contrast, would help directly out of concern for the good of those in need of help and her motivation would not rely on enhancers such as guilt. Guilt is thus seen as a source of motivation that enhances helping behavior, but does not express virtuous character. In the context of Miller's broader project, this conclusion is adduced in support of the broader conclusion that "most of us do not have the virtues, in this case the virtue of compassion" (Miller 2013, xiii).

Of course, we do not expect virtuous character to be a statistical norm. Rather, virtue is an ideal, a state of character we admire and toward which we aspire. So we shouldn't find it surprising that many do not possess the dispositions or motivations characteristic of the virtuous. This suggests that it might be fruitful to pursue a different question: Is guilt appropriate for those on the way to virtue? And can it play a role in the acquisition of genuinely virtuous dispositions? Or does guilt merely reinforce selfishness or egoism and block virtues such as compassion from developing? Recent empirical work suggests a positive answer to the place of guilt in virtue acquisition. After we pursue this question, we can circle back to inquire again whether there is a sense in which a disposition to feel guilty can itself form part of a genuinely virtuous disposition. I will want to argue that it can.

Guilt and Shame in Moral Education

We deliberately employ shame and guilt mechanisms in moral education. Is this just a mistake? Does evoking these negative moral emotions encourage the agent to focus on him or herself just when what we ought to be doing is to encourage the agent to focus on others? The notion that a sense of guilt blocks rather than enables moral transformation is not simply a contemporary idea: Martin Luther eloquently voiced this concern. Wracked with guilt at his inability to live up to the demands of God's law in both the Ten Commandments and the Gospels, he found no peace in the sacrament of confession, remaining always fearful that he had failed to identify and confess every sin: "For my case was this," he writes: "however irreproachable my life as a monk, I felt myself in the presence of God to be a sinner with a most unquiet conscience, nor could I believe him to be appeased by the satisfaction I could offer." For Luther, the breakthrough came with the realization that fulfillment of the law could be achieved by Jesus Christ alone, and that the task of Christians was to accept in faith that their justification before God was already secured by Christ (Autobiographical Fragment, 1545). Only in accepting justification as a gift rather than as something earned through one's own efforts, argued Luther, could one be freed from self-absorption for spontaneous love and service to the neighbor. Luther was no friend of Aristotle's ethics. But contemporary Protestant ethicists interested in the project of reclaiming virtue ethics

have nevertheless often echoed the worry that a focus on cultivating the virtues could encourage an obsession with oneself and one's own character that might short-circuit the development of the virtues (e.g., Meilaender 1984, Hauerwas and Pinches 1997). The fact that the virtue of neighbor-love or benevolence is so prominent within Christianity can heighten the sense that there is a direct competition between attention to self and attention to other, a sense further entrenched by modern tendencies to reduce virtue to altruism and vice to egoism.

Luther's insistence that it is being freed rather than convicted of guilt that makes it possible to care for others for their own sake resonates down through the centuries. Nevertheless, moral education continues in part to aim at evoking shame and guilt, even within communities deeply influenced by Luther and committed to his understanding of justification as a gift. Self-examination of oneself and one's moral failings, a kind of practice of the cultivation of guilt, has been a central spiritual exercise from the Stoics up through the Puritans and beyond (Hadot 1995, Herdt 2008). What are we to make of this?

While Aristotle, unlike the Stoics, does not detail practices of self-examination, he did think that shame had an important role to play in the development of the virtues. He noted that only someone who has had a sound early formation will even be subject to feelings of shame, which he understands as a fear of disgrace. Such a person wants to be virtuous, has already acquired an experiential grasp of the goodness of acting well, and enjoys so acting for its own sake, but also has passions that have not yet been educated by this reasoned desire for the good. Hence, the learner sometimes acts badly, according to passions—anger, desire for pleasure—not yet shaped by reason. When the learner fails in this way, she experiences shame, for she grasps her failure to act well, understands that she has failed to act according to her own sense of what is really worth going for. On the Aristotelian model, shame thus provides the learner with additional motivation to curb the next potentially hasty and distracted action, sapping the attractiveness of instantly gratified passion and so reinforcing a more reflective grasp of the good (Aristotle 1985: 1128b10; Herdt, 2008, 30-32; Burnyeat 1980). Is there anything in this model that we can continue to find useful today?

In the mid-20th century, a distinction invented by cultural anthropologist E.R. Dodds, that between guilt societies and shame societies, took hold and became popular currency (Dodds 1951). The theory was that societies could be differentiated according to the emotional means employed for purposes of social control: in shame societies, it was thought, control is exercised by way of social perceptions of behavior, whereas in guilt societies, norms are internalized and their violation elicits feelings of guilt. Shame societies, further, are characterized by a concern for honor and reputation, and guilt societies by a concern for a clean conscience. Irresistible as the hypothesis was for explaining certain cultural differences, its untenability was soon recognized: both shame and guilt involve internalized norms; and in societies in which guarding one's honor is a central concern, the preoccupation is both with one's reputation in the eyes of others and with one's own self-image and self-assessment (Cairns 1993).

Contemporary Accounts of Shame and Guilt

Current psychological research on the moral emotions has offered a new model for distinguishing between shame and guilt; work in this area by June Tangney and her

associates has been particularly important in this regard. Tangney classes shame and guilt together with embarrassment and pride as “emotions evoked by self-reflection and self-evaluation” (Tangney, Stuewig & Mashek 2007, 347). Examining respondents’ use of the terms shame and guilt to describe their reactions to various situations, Tangney found that shame was invoked in relation to the global self, while guilt was related to a specific action or behavior. Further, when respondents discussed shame-inducing situations, they focused on other’s negative evaluations of the self, whereas when they discussed guilt, they focused on the negative effects of their actions on others. Tangney thus describes shame as “egocentric” and guilt as “other-oriented” in its concerns (349; Lewis 1971). Both emotions are painful, but shame leads to an intensified focus on the self, whereas guilt is “decentered” given its preoccupation with what has been done, and often thus with harms to other persons. A mounting body of empirical work suggests further that the two moral emotions foster very different action tendencies: shame corresponds with attempts at denial, hiding, or escape, while guilt corresponds with efforts at confession, apology, and reparation (Ketelaar & Au 2003; Tangney et al. 1996; Wallbott & Scherer 1995). Substantial evidence suggests further that shame is associated with a host of psychological, physiological, and interpersonal problems, ranging from anger, externalization of blame, to depression, anxiety, and suicidal tendencies (Tangney, Stuewig & Mashek 2007). Of course, speaking of “guilt with an overlay of shame” muddies the waters of the tidy separation of these two emotions, reminding us of the reality that often components of both negative global self-assessment and negative assessment of individual actions are both present in a given individual. In Luther’s case, for instance, we might say that while the Catholic penitential system focused on individual acts and hence might generally be seen as more likely to elicit guilt rather than shame, Luther’s fear that he had not identified and confessed his guilt for each individual sinful act resulted in a global sense of being offensive in the sight of God, i.e., in what Tangney calls shame.

How might we relate these findings to Miller’s conclusion that, as discussed above, those experiencing guilt help others out of a self-interested or egoistic, not an altruistic motivation? Might it be the case, that guilt, if not shame, can nevertheless play a role in fostering a more developed capacity to respond to the needs of others for their own sake? One of the most significant findings in this regard has been that guilt correlates positively with other-oriented empathy, while shame disrupts empathy (Joireman 2004; Miller 2013, 53n54; Tangney, Stuewig & Mashek 2007, 350). Guilt focuses on the harm or injustice done to the other, and this can elicit empathetic concern whenever it involves perspective-taking, imagining what the other is going through. This is noteworthy because empathy turns out to be a source of desires that, at least according to the best evidence currently available, are directed to the good of the other person, not to the agent’s own good. Focusing on another person’s distress, and on what she or he is feeling, can evoke similar feelings, together with a desire to find ways to eliminate that person’s distress.

Empathy and Helping Behavior

It is important here to delineate carefully what is meant by empathy, as Miller has helpfully done (Miller 2013, 103-106). The term empathy is sometimes used to refer to emotional contagion, in which a mood or feeling of one person is picked up by another,

often unconsciously. This is distinct from forms of empathy that require perspective-taking. But perspective-taking itself can involve either trying to imagine what *I* would feel if I were in your situation (projective empathy), or trying to imagine what you are feeling in your situation. By empathy, we most often mean the latter form of perspective-taking, together with coming to experience feelings that are in some way similar to those being experienced by the one with whom one is empathizing. Thus, we say that I empathize with you if I imagine how you are feeling about the loss of your beloved pet and come to have similar feelings of sadness and loss. Empathy in this sense (what Miller terms “empathy proper”) is a form of sharing in feeling that comes about by way of perspective-taking. (Further complicating matters, eighteenth-century discussions of sympathy, as in Adam Smith, David Hume, and others mean by that terms something much closer to what today is meant by empathy, Herdt 1997, 29-30, 146-47). This empathy may lead, although it does not necessarily lead, to sympathy, or care and concern for the other person, and/or efforts to help the other person (Miller 2013, 106). In contrast, emotional contagion and projective empathy appear to be more likely to elicit feelings of personal distress, rather than sympathy.

In thirty-one experiments conducted over the course of two decades, C. Daniel Batson and his associates have worked to develop experimental ways of differentiating between actions determined primarily by a desire to escape the distress that empathy creates and actions determined primarily by a desire to help alleviate the other’s suffering (Batson 2011, 110). Batson has thought of the distinction between forms of empathy (emotional contagion, projective empathy) that elicit personal distress and forms of empathy that elicit sympathetic concern as a distinction of magnitude: low empathy versus high empathy. Even if the distinction is better understood as a distinction of kind rather than magnitude, Batson’s experiments have been invaluable in differentiating among different motivations for helping. In discussing this body of research, I will for simplicity’s sake adopt their terminological distinction between “low” and “high” empathy. Batson and his associates have argued that where empathy is high, agents will seek to help others even when simply exiting the situation would be easier to do. Batson’s altruism studies are carefully designed to clarify agents’ motivations for acting in a particular situation. Batson is not interested merely in showing a correlation between empathy and helping, since empathic concern can produce motivation to help that is not altruistic, not a helping of the other for her own sake. Empathy-induced helping typically benefits both the helper and the one helped, so the bare fact of the helping does not tease out motivation. One could help in order to escape personal distress caused by emotional infection or projective empathy. One could help in order to experience vicariously the joy of the one helped, or the joy of being the sort of person who helps. Or one could help in order not to be evaluated negatively by others, or by oneself; in order to avoid shame and guilt (Batson 2011, 71-2).

Batson rightly noted that these different motivations can be distinguished from one another by introducing situational variations. For instance, if persons help merely in order to alleviate feelings of distress induced by the suffering of another, then offering an easy escape route from those feelings of distress would be expected to result escape rather than helping. And indeed this is the case, for individuals experiencing low empathy—but not for those experiencing high empathy (Batson 2011, 111-113). Similarly, if persons help merely in order to avoid negative appraisal by others, then

ensuring that no such negative appraisal will follow (for instance, that neither the experimenter nor the one in need of assistance knows whether help is given) would be expected to result in decreased rates of helping. And it does, but again, for low-empathy but *not* for high-empathy subjects (Batson 2011, 115-117). What about the hypothesis that individuals help in order to avoid negative self-evaluation? Here Batson reasoned that if someone were concerned to help in order to avoid a sense of guilt or shame, she would not feel badly if her efforts to help failed through no fault of her own. In contrast, if someone were concerned to help the other for the other's own sake, she would feel badly that the effort had failed. And this is what the experiments found—for high empathy subjects (Batson 2011, 120-121). Batson even devised ways to test the hypothesis that empathy-induced helping is driven by a desire to experience positive emotions derived from having helped another or from knowing that the other feels better. In this case, those who seek to help the other in order to experience empathy-specific rewards will be disappointed if the opportunity to help is removed before they have been able to help. Those who seek to help the other for the other's own sake, in contrast, will simply be glad that the other's need has been addressed, even if they were not the agent of that relief. Once again, the evidence gathered by Batson supports the conclusion that individuals experience high empathy wish to help the other for the other's own sake (Batson 2011, 122-125).

What, though, differentiated the high-empathy subjects from low-empathy subjects? In some cases, experimenters simply confronted subject with a story or situation involving someone's suffering or need, and then asked about their feelings. Those who reported feelings of personal distress, i.e., feeling "upset, anxious, disturbed" were assigned to the low empathy group, while those reporting feeling "sympathetic, compassionate, tender, etc.," were assigned to the high empathy group (Batson 2011, 112). In other cases, experimenters manipulated perspective-taking by asking subjects either to imagine, while listening to a story, how the sufferer was feeling, or by asking them to remain objective and dispassionate while listening to the story (Batson 2011, 277). Here, experimenters sought to elicit "high empathy" by encouraging the appropriate form of (non-projective) perspective-taking. Even if we reject the quantitative distinction between "low" and "high" empathy, substantial evidence supports the conclusion that those in the "high empathy" group, that is, those who engage in perspective-taking that elicits empathetic concern do, at rates that are statistically significant, seek to assist others for others' sake, not simply for their own. Or, more cautiously stated, at least the evidence does not support any of the existing hypotheses that would offer egoistic explanations for these responses.

Feelings of shame are correlated with self-rumination and forms of empathy that elicit personal distress. Joireman's results support the conclusion that shame and self-rumination reciprocally feed one another, heightening personal distress and blocking the perspective-taking that fosters empathetic concern (Joireman 2004, 234). Guilt feelings, in contrast, heighten empathetic concern for others, perhaps because a focus on the particular action also fosters a focus on the harms caused to others by his or her wrong action. This shifts the attention of the agent away from herself and her guilty feelings to the other and his or her suffering or need. Thus, instead of helping merely in order to alleviate her own guilt feelings, she becomes potentially capable of helping the other for his or her own sake. Guilt encourages rumination on the misdeed, including a mental

rehearsal of everything about its surrounding context, while shame encourages a preoccupation on the part of the agent with herself and her own negative feelings.

It is worth noting that increased concern for others for their own sake does not require a decreased awareness of oneself. Rather, self-awareness and a capacity for other-concern go hand in hand, since empathy proper, as opposed to emotional infection, requires a distinction between self and other such that the other's situation and needs can be identified involves perspective-taking. Only then does targeted helping become possible, as in hominoid primates (de Waal 2006, 36). The primate research of Frans de Waal and others is directed at identifying basic emotional and cognitive capacities and the ways these are phylogenetically layered. But it suggests more generally that *certain* forms of attention to or awareness of self can foster rather than displace attention to and concern for others. In particular, the self-rumination associated with feelings of shame, with a failure or inadequacy of the global self, blocks empathy proper and thus blocks this avenue to concern for others for their own sake; awareness of misdeeds performed by the self, associated with guilt-feelings, can actually enhance empathetic concern.

Guilt and the Reasons of the Virtuous

There is, then, considerable evidence that guilt feelings can play a positive role in fostering concern for others for their own sake. While helping other in order to alleviate my sense of guilt is a self-interested motivation, helping others because guilt feelings have elicited reflection on my wrongful action and on harms done to others, perspective-taking, and empathetic concern for them and their situation does result in concern for others for their own sake. But there is another question here. As I noted at the outset, guilt belongs among the deontic family of moral concepts. Hence, we would expect guilt to be associated not simply with the desire to alleviate one's sense of guilt, nor simply via empathy with concern for others for their own sake, but also with a more impersonal concern to repair a wrong or to do the right thing. And in fact this is at times the case. How should we assess moralistic motivations? How do these relate to the reasons that virtuous persons have for acting? Are the reasons of the virtuous agent purely altruistic? How does concern for the quality of one's own character relate to self-interest on the one hand and care for others on the other hand?

When the motivation to help another person is purely moralistic in character, that is, helping out of duty or respect for principle, this strikes us as inappropriate (Miller 2013, 53; 100). We do not expect the virtuous person to stop to ask whether she is doing her duty before she stops to help someone in need. As Michael Stocker has argued, what seems to be missing in such cases is "simply—or not so simply—the other person . . . these ways are dehumanizing" (1976: 71-2; cited by Miller 2013, 100). On the other hand, we would do well to recall Kant's critique of sympathy as a motive; empathetic other-concern may motivate helping that is altruistic, but altruistic helping is not always appropriate; helping itself is not always the right or even the best thing to do (Kant 1964, 66). There are things that we ought to allow others to do for themselves, out of respect for their agency; there are times when some other obligation we are under prevents us from helping; there are times when our own needs properly claim our attention. (Hursthouse 1999, 102; Batson 2011, 114). Even the purest altruism can fail to be good and just. If we focus narrowly on a small set of situations in which altruistic helping is precisely what we expect from the virtuous, we are left with a distorted and

oversimplified picture of virtuous motivation. Miller certainly recognizes this in his discussion, but focuses on traits associated with helping in order to keep the discussion concrete, and to provide a template from which he hopes to generalize to other character traits (2013, 29). It is also the case that doing so lends one a large body of empirical research with which to work, since psychologists have been particularly interested in this area of the moral life. This, in turn, has to do with a widespread tendency to think that the moral life has most especially to do with altruism, selfless devotion to others. But however important the virtue of benevolence and its close allies, virtuous character requires sensitivity to a host of competing considerations and so the development of a host of virtues. This is why practical wisdom plays such a central role in the Aristotelian tradition; without practical wisdom, one cannot truly be said to possess any other virtue.

Where does this leave moralistic motivation, the desire to do what is right and good for its own sake? Miller argues that “if a person performs a morally appropriate and helpful action, but does so only as a result of one or more ultimate desires whose main concern is with the satisfaction of impersonal moral requirements (such as a desire to do the right thing or to repair past wrongs in general), then the action does not result from virtuous motives” (2013, 49). In this connection he refers to Rosalind Hursthouse’s discussion of how a virtue theorist might make sense of what is involved in doing something because one thinks it is right, one’s duty, or what one ought to do. Hursthouse’s point, though, is not that doing something because it is right is somehow a second-best, less than genuinely virtuous motivation. Rather, she argues that what is needed here is a better understanding of what it means to do something because it is right. There is a sense in which virtuous agents do what they ought, do what is right, etc., which is not at all less good than helping others because we grasp that they need help, since it is simply a special way of describing the reasons for which the virtuous act. To be sure, someone who “visits a friend, jumps into the river to save her child, contradicts a lie, for the consciously formulated reason ‘This is required by principle A’, or ‘This would be the right thing to do’, or ‘This is my duty’, is repellently self-righteous or self-conscious” (Hursthouse 1999, 132). In order to get a handle on the virtuous agent’s reasons for acting, we need above all to attend to their particularity and variety. We can affirm that the virtuous agent chooses virtuous actions for their own sake, but what this means is that “the virtuous agent chooses virtuous actions for at least one of a certain type or range of reasons, X,” where “‘the type or range X’ is typical of, and differs according to, whichever virtue is in question” (127-8). The reasons indicate what the virtuous person finds salient in a given situation: “because she was cold,” “because I had promised,” “because I was already full,” “because I was the only one there.” There are times when we reach for a shorthand, and when we do, we can properly say that the virtuous agent acted as she did in these cases “because it was the right thing to do.” So the virtue theorist can translate Kantian claims about acting from duty, because it is right, on principle, rather than rejecting such expressions as inappropriate or as expressing a special second-best sort of motivation, so long as they are understood as a kind of shorthand reference rather than as a special kind of motivation that operates *instead of* a direct response to the salient features of a situation.

Hursthouse’s point is invaluable; just because someone says, “I stopped to help because it was the right thing to do” does not necessarily mean that she did not help simply because she noticed that help was needed and appropriate and she was well-

situated to offer it; it can simply be a generic way of expressing just that. On the other hand, there does seem to be something that Hursthouse's analysis leaves out. It does not seem to capture the distinction between 'the right thing to do' as the *best* thing to do under these particular circumstances and the thing one is *morally obliged* to do, on pain of being culpable. An action can fail to be maximally virtuous without incurring guilt or blame, but it is a distinctive feature of some failures that they *do* properly incur guilt and blame. Failing to jump into a raging river to try to save you is not blameworthy, particularly if I am a non-swimmer; taunting you as you go down certainly is. The language of moral obligation marks out this feature (Adams 2006, 7-9; Darwall 2006, 6). J.S. Mill identified this clearly, even if he focused on punishment rather than blame: "It is part of the notion of Duty in every one of its forms that a person may rightfully be compelled to fulfill it . . . There are other things . . . which we wish that people should do, which we like or admire them for doing, perhaps dislike or despise them for not doing, but yet admit that they are not bound to do; it is not a case of moral obligation; we do not blame them, that is, we do not think that they are proper objects of punishment" (Mill 1998, 5.14). This has precisely to do with the territory of guilt and the special category of moral obligation, with what Stephen Darwall has identified as second-personal reasons. I speak of "properly" incurring guilt or blame because the logic of the concepts does admit the possibility that those around me could wrongly assign blame. In such a case, I am not really under a moral obligation; I am blamed, but not blameworthy. The language of moral obligation is an essential way of expressing our responsibility to others, the fact that we encounter one another as standing in relationships of answerability for our actions.

Can we capture this specific territory of moral obligation in the language of virtue? We can, and Linda Zagzebski offers a possible definition that accomplishes this. A morally obligatory act is one that the virtuous person 1) characteristically does not perform, and 2) would feel guilty were she (uncharacteristically) to do it) (2004, 141). However, this definition presupposes the intelligibility of guilt, so it does not offer a reduction of moral obligation concepts to virtue concepts (Adams 2006, 8). We could also add that the *perfectly* virtuous person would not do anything worthy of blame, even uncharacteristically. Moral obligation is more salient for the rest of us, who do blameworthy things with some regularity, and whose very partial virtue disposes us at least to register this fact by feeling guilty when we do.

One of the helpful features of Hursthouse's account of moral motivation, despite the fact that she does not capture the distinctive features of moral obligation, is that it reminds us that reasons belong in the context of reason-giving social practices. When we attend to the concrete particulars of such practices, we see that it is usually the case that many different reasons are usually perfectly acceptable. When we ask someone for their reasons, we are not usually hunting for some *particular* form of expression, which we take to express some *particular* mental or emotional state that we can pick out as the reason. 'Why did you stop to pick up those papers?' 'Well, no one else was around;' "She looked a bit frantic;" "I wasn't doing anything very pressing at the time." Even in a case where we would reflectively judge that she was morally obliged to stop and help someone pick up a stack of dropped papers, we are not looking for a determinate verbal expression or mental state that captures the recognition of moral obligation. We capture this better in terms of a disposition (on the part, at least, of the virtuous) to reject as

inadequate reasons offered for failing to help: ‘I was in a hurry.’ ‘I thought someone else would probably come along soon.’ ‘After all, I didn’t know her.’ And we must specify further, for it is not just that we reject the reasons that are offered, but we reject them in a specific way. We might in a gentle teaching mode reject a reason offered by a child, without genuinely blaming him: ‘I know you really liked the cake, but . . .’ Or we might reject a reason because we fail to grasp its relevance, and thus require from the agent a fuller account: “you hung up that picture because it would make the beans grow faster?” here blame is premature because we remain uncomprehending.

Nicholas Wolterstorff has suggested that duty is a kind of “fall-back position” when it comes to care and assistance for others:

All of us find that there are ‘neighbors’ who fall outside the orbit of the care evoked by our natural dynamics of attachment, attraction, compassion, identification, and the like. Our natural dynamics leave us indifferent to their good. In such cases, our care about them will have to be out of duty (2011, 116).

We should not *always* care out of duty; there are many and various motivations for care. Where all of these fail, the duty to care fills the gap; one helps because it is the right thing to do, that which it would be blameworthy not to do, and for which one would rightly feel guilty for failing to do.

We should add to this that the *fully* virtuous person would not need to care for and help others out of duty, because she has not relied simply on the “natural dynamics of attachment, attraction, compassion, identification, and the like,” but has developed her capacities for compassion and identification with others. Her second nature supplants the need the rest of us have to care at times merely out of duty. This is the most important sense in which duty is a fall-back position. We can, though, nevertheless properly say that the virtuous person cares about what is morally obligatory, in the sense that she finds it good that persons be responsive to properly assigned blame, and rightly rejects reasons that indicate a failure of proper responsiveness. There is, then, still an important sense in which she is responsive to her moral obligations, as part and parcel of her respect for her second-personal relationships with others. So we can affirm what Adams calls the virtue of conscientiousness as “the virtue of excellent responsiveness to obligations one really has to other persons” (2006, 34). This is not a problematically self-regarding disposition, not a concern for one’s own moral purity that competes with concern for others for their own sake. Nor is it a failure to care for others. For responsiveness to obligation is responsiveness to second-personal reasons, to the justified demands that we make on one another as fellow persons, to the fact that we inhabit the world together with other agents who can hold us responsible, to whom we are accountable for what we do. It is a special form that care for others can take. In the fully virtuous agent, this sensitivity is perfectly developed, even if it need not be manifested either in occurrent thoughts concerning the avoidance of blame or in the experience of guilt.

Guilt, Shame, and Redemption

As self-conscious agents, we become aware of ourselves in relation to others, of ourselves as inhabiting a network of agency and accountability, in which we are responsible to others for our responsiveness to all of the needs around us. Our attention is sometimes quite justifiably directed towards care for self and for those near and dear. The Augustinian Christian tradition theorized this in terms of the *ordo amoris*, the order

of loves, which takes into consideration both degree of relationship and degree of need. We should not unduly privilege altruism or allow it to colonize the ethical life in its entirety. Often, though, our attention is unjustifiably limited to ourselves and those closely related to us. We act in blameworthy ways toward both our near and distant neighbors. The disposition to feel guilty when we do is not merely self-referential; it sensitizes us to the deontic realm of second-personal reasons. These should not be seen as an impersonal displacement of proper responsiveness to others, but an embodiment of proper responsiveness. Even the perfectly virtuous can be said to have a disposition to feel guilty insofar as they are rightly responsive to second-personal reasons, although they do not need to rely on guilt as a fall-back motivation, but rather are directly committed to the good of others for its own sake. Those of us with imperfect virtue act from mixed motives. Among our reasons for acting are various self-referential motives, together with moral motivations: we aspire to be praiseworthy, to be virtuous; we long to be free of guilt and shame; to be the sorts of persons who do not do anything blameworthy. We also empathize with others in their suffering, and seek to help them for their own sake. Our experience of guilt directly reflects our sense of responsibility for the quality of our own agency, and indirectly disposes us to empathy with others. We are capable of caring for others for their own sake, just as we care for ourselves for our own sake. So guilt does not merely serve to enhance helping behavior among the non-virtuous, while leaving their characters just as vitiated; it also helps to foster the development of more robust virtues.

A preoccupation with one's own virtue and opportunities to burnish it are not the motivation we look for in the virtuous. Introducing a third-person point of view into the deliberative process can distort or short-circuit it, as the agent's focus shifts away from the circumstances of the situation to himself and his character. However, this is not to say that there is no proper place in the moral life for reflection on one's own character. Traditional religious practices for the examination of character (deriving from ancient schools of philosophy), confession, and repentance are removed from the immediacy of deliberation and action. In this context, agents form judgments on their own character and actions, identifying ways in which they have failed to be generous, kind, courageous, forgiving, etc. Their reflections are more global and retrospective/prospective in character, rather than deliberative and focused on the immediate context of action (O'Donovan 1994, 224). We take a step back and reflect on our habitual modes of action and response and the ways in which these affect others, asking what has become of us and how we might change. We would expect the whole range of self-conscious emotions to come naturally into play here, including both shame and guilt.

As we have seen, while guilt fosters the development of the virtues, shame arrests this process. Forms of reflection on our blameworthy actions that dispose us to empathetic concern may be displaced by an obsessive rumination that reinforces feelings of worthlessness and despair. As Tangney remarks, "shame—and shame-fused guilt—offers little opportunity for redemption. It is a daunting challenge to transform a self that is defective at its core" (2007, 353). If we seek to foster the development of the virtues, it seems clear that we ought to cultivate guilt and eradicate shame. But we should also ask whether there are instances where shame is nevertheless an appropriate moral emotion even if it is maladaptive. And if so, might there be inappropriate as well as appropriate ways of eradicating shame?

Probably most would acknowledge that we do well at times to engage in reflection on the global self, not simply on discrete actions or behaviors. After all, we regard ourselves as selves, as unified centers of agencies, not simply as a source of individual actions. Is a negative evaluation of the global self never warranted? Psychotherapy often remains neutral about whether a response is warranted, focusing solely on whether a response is adaptive or maladaptive. This is presumably because the latter judgment is seen as more objective. Whether or not this is the case is controversial, but I will not pursue it here. I want just to note that practices of repentance, atonement, and reconciliation work to enable persons to acknowledge the failures of the global self, not simply specific offenses, while also helping to shift them from an immobilizing, self-obsessed shame to a productive sense of guilt and beyond. Traditionally, religious practices have played a particularly important role in this regard, and with good reason. I will glance briefly in closing toward Christianity, although analogous things might well be said with respect to other religious traditions.

Christian doctrine and practice situate the global assessment of character within the context not just of human-human relationship, but also of divine-human relationship. H.B. Lewis (1971) described shame as involving a split of self-functioning, with an observing self that passes judgment on a focal self as unworthy and reprehensible. In a Christian context, the observing self anticipates the judgment of God, as a perfectly informed, perfectly just observer. To feel shame is to feel exposed before God as globally unworthy and bad. But since God is understood not simply as perfectly just but also as perfectly loving, and indeed as having become incarnate in order to overcome human estrangement from God, shame before God does not have the last word. In different ways, various Christian traditions affirm both that humans have failed globally to meet the moral standard and thus that shame is appropriate, and that we are nevertheless accepted and loved by God and so freed to pursue the restoration of relationship with one another. Shame is not eradicated, suppressed, or denied, but is set within a broader context of global affirmation and acceptance that makes possible a shift of attention away from global defect to individual offence and restoration. Empirical psychological research on shame and guilt, together with philosophical reflection on guilt and deontic moral concepts, can offer useful lenses for theological reflection on the traditional Christian doctrines of justification (being made acceptable before God) and sanctification (being made good or holy). And an appreciation for how religious doctrines and practices work together with our natural dispositions towards shame and guilt can also inform psychological and philosophical reflection on the challenges involved in the task of cultivating the virtues, and in particular of drawing in good and productive ways on our tendencies toward both shame and guilt.

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