Shame, Vulnerability, and Change

ABSTRACT: *Shame is frequently viewed as a destructive emotion; but it can also be understood in terms of change and growth. This essay highlights the problematic values that cause pervasive and frequent shame and the importance of resisting and changing these values. Using Confucian insights, I situate shame in an interactive process between the individual's values and that of their society, thus, being vulnerable to shame represents both one's connection to a community and an openness to others' negative feedback. This process provides an important arena where personal values interact with communal ones. The Confucian tradition, I argue, affords individuals a degree of autonomy in internalization through urging them to cultivate and maintain a keen sense of shame. My discussion also offers resources for understanding the various aspects of this interactive process—how individuals with similar experiences of shame may, through channeling their experiences, influence social values and propel moral progress.*

Shame is frequently viewed as a destructive emotion that leaves lasting scars; a sickness of the soul that has no place in the discourse of morality (Nussbaum 2004; Tomkins 1963: 118; Gilbert 2003: 1225; Lamb 1983; Kekes 1988). Yet it is also an important emotion that is integral to an individual's moral identity and intrinsic to our understanding of the social practice of morality (Williams 1993; Seok 2017; Calhoun 2004; Maibom 2010; Thomason 2018; Zhao 2018). This essay reconciles this contradiction by demonstrating the dynamic relationship between the self and the community in the social practice of shame. This relationship is often viewed as a one-way process in which individuals passively react to external values imposed upon them and are at the mercy of the power that shame wields against them. However, the self has far more autonomy in shame-related practices than some accounts purport—that is, the individuals can not only reject incidents of shame but also manage what they do and do not feel shame over. I include discussion of one's management and regulation of shame (and a sense of shame) in my discussion, and when I claim that shame represents an open system permitting interaction between individual and communal values,

the focus of my argument is not on the moral value of *the experience of episodes of shame*; instead, my claim is about the process of regulating and exercising shame related capacities and their relationship to our moral lives. It is important to keep in mind that all these, such as the experience of shame, the source of shame, a sense of shame, and one's capacity to manage and evade shame, are sometimes referred to by the term 'shame' in the English language.

Some writers point out that shame cannot be viewed within a framework in which the self is insulated from the negative views of other community members (Williams 1993; Calhoun 2004). I further this line of thought and call attention to the internalization process. The term *internalization* might be misleading because it is not always a one-way process, nor am I using it in the sense Bernard Williams (1993) uses it in 'internalized others'. Instead, *internalization* highlights the dynamic negotiating process that individuals have with external values. Individuals are not passive victims awaiting rescue; in fact, they may challenge the current values that deem certain behaviors or situations as shameful. This essay highlights the autonomous aspect of shame by using Confucian insights on gaining control over one's sense of appropriateness—or a sense of shame. I argue that the internalization process, which is rarely discussed in the current literature on shame, is key to understanding some of shame's biggest theoretical problems: Why do we feel shame for things we regard as unproblematic? How do we understand our vulnerability to others' shaming criticisms? This essay reconciles one's vulnerability to shame and one's control of her own moral life by stressing two important factors: one's connectedness to one's community and one's proactiveness in honing one's sense of shame.

1. Individual Values and Social Conformity

Many remain wary of shame not only because of the distress, isolation, and diminishing feelings it brings but also what some consider its immoral nature—shame seems to not fit into certain core concepts in moral philosophy (Nussbaum 2004; Lamb 1983; Kekes 1988). Martha Nussbaum's take on shame is illustrative of this position: she argues that we should eradicate shame, as this 'normatively distorted' emotion is an attack to one's dignity and leads to inevitable self-destruction combined with aggression toward others. She further claims, given her psychoanalytic understanding of the relationship between shame and infantile narcissism, that shame is born into the fact that we can never live up to the standard of being 'complete', given our inherent 'incompleteness' (Nussbaum 2004: 219).

The view that shame results from falling short of certain standards is in accordance with a number of philosophers (Rawls 1971; Taylor 1985; Kekes 1988; Mason 2010) whose accounts of shame are categorized by Stephen Bero (2020: 1287) as the 'personal-ideals' accounts and by Heidi Maibom (2010: 588) as the 'agent-centered' views. Typically, personal-ideals accounts suggest that shame is an emotion one experiences when falling short of a standard, ideal, or norm. In Nussbaum's case, the standard of 'completeness', which is built into shame as an inherent part, appears to be questionable and may in fact be the real issue here. Nussbaum's mistake, it seems to me, lies in her suggestion to eschew

shame instead of considering the possibility of changing societal values, thereby addressing the symptom rather than the disease. When the standards are beyond realistic, morally dubious, or problematic in other ways (such as unhealthy and unrealistic body image), shame can lead to deeply problematic consequences. But in those cases, shame is the symptom of a deeper problem of imposing suppressive standards. At the end of the day, the solution to these dreadful situations seems to be to fight back to change those standards and refuse to feel shame about them (that is, to reclaim the experience of shame). Furthermore, calling for a stop to the shaming behavior will not fully address the problem because shame is frequently caused by seemingly trivial comments that do not mean to induce shame. When Julie felt ashamed for revealing her natural colored teeth while smiling in front of her colleagues, it was not because her colleagues tried to shame her but because her dentist and the commercials had her thinking that only those with 'sparkling white' teeth could smile with confidence. The shame that individuals experience, as we see from Julie's case, cannot be fully addressed without examining and changing the values causing them.

As Krista Thomason (2018) points out, eschewing shame altogether leads to a decompartmentalizing approach to moral psychology; it also risks further dissociating individuals from social interactions. Even though Julien Deonna, Raffaele Rodogno, and Fabrice Teroni (2012) argue that shame is essentially not a social emotion, its social nature is well supported by many. For example, Cheshire Calhoun claims that our vulnerability to shame is connected to the very practice of morality: 'To attempt to make oneself invulnerable to all shaming criticisms except those that mirror one's own autonomous judgments or that invoke ethical standards one respects is to refuse to take seriously the social practice of morality' (Calhoun 2004: 145).

Calhoun is emphasizing that the social practice of morality does not permit an account where individuals are invulnerable to all shaming criticisms. Indeed, an individual's moral life cannot be detached from that of their community; this, of course, does not mean individuals must have the same values and norms as everyone else in their community. As noted above, by dissociating individuals from society's collective values, we are risking further isolating them and giving up the chance to challenge and change social norms. Those standards need not stay the same. They can change and progress, as seen in the literature on the discussion of moral progress (Buchanan and Powell 2016, 2018; Luco 2019; Hu and Robertson 2020), and in reality. Social norms can be challenged and changed on the societal level through collective deliberation; at the same time, they can also be rejected on the individual level. One may abandon unhealthy standards as an individual or, as one of many individuals, push society to desert them.

Admittedly, it is not always easy or safe for one to challenge or reject social values. For example, in a society where an individual's values are closely tied to social values such that their dignity and social recognition are inseparable, individuals lose their critical stance against the social values. Such a society does not allow individuals to distance themselves from, or criticize, the set of values that affords them their membership in said society. When one falls short of these values and fails as a member in this society, one fails in her own eyes and loses her dignity. Gabriele

Taylor categorizes the above as features of a highly conforming culture, 'public esteem . . . depends on that individual's success or failure judged on the basis of some code which embodies that society's values. Whoever fails to meet the categoric demands engendered by that code ruins his reputation and loses the esteem of the other members of that group' (1985: 54). In such a society, individuals lose their critical stance towards social values and wholeheartedly endorse the society's set of values. Their personal identity, as a result, is tied up in the very values that they are evaluated against such that—in Taylor's words—'[s]elf-respect and public respect stand and fall together' (Taylor 1985: 55). When shame attacks, they cannot resist it as their own values are identical to those of their society.

In a response to Nussbaum, Richard Arneson (2007) points out that one's membership in a community and one's basic human dignity are distinct. He observes that the line between the two concepts appears to be blurry in Nussbaum's account, '"[y]ou are not a member in good standing of democratic community" is not equivalent to "you are not a full human person." The former is an earned and forfeitable status; the latter, we can agree, is not' (Arneson 2007: 52). Arneson is right that one's membership in a community and one's basic dignity are not identical. Equating the two reflects an implicit theoretical commitment to the idea that all societies are like the highly conforming societies Taylor describes. Even though we may worry from time to time that our society is pushing for conformity, the kind of highly conforming society Taylor describes is not a common condition. In fact, many ethical theories stress the importance for individuals to maintain a critical stance towards social values—in the Confucian texts, for example, individuals are frequently urged to distance their own ethical values from those of society.

2. Autonomous Shame?

The above discussion leads to an important question: How much liberty does an individual have in her experience of shame, the regulative capacity concerning shame, and in formulating her internalized values? One way to 'own' shame is to say we 'own' the values or standards that cause shame—shame is the manifestation of one realizing one is falling short of one's own values. In this account, the theoretical function of 'others' is superfluous—a reminder that urges one to look at oneself in a critical and reflective way at most. Shame is, in this view, an emotion we feel when we deviate from *our own* standards—in other words, we only experience shame for violating standards/norms that we as individuals accept. Justin Tiwald (2017) for example, coined the term 'autonomous shame' when discussing the Confucian ideal of shame. According to Tiwald, 'a person's sense of shame is autonomous if and only if it is elicited by one's own views about what's shameful' (Tiwald 2017: 48). This autonomous sense of shame can be compared with 'a sense of shame that tracks other peoples' views—especially popular views—of what's shameful and is elicited by the belief that others regard something about oneself as shameful' (Tiwald 2017: 48). The idea of an 'autonomous shame' seems like a comforting view, as it promises that

we only react with shame to negative opinions that fit into what we as moral agents have already approved. For example, Jay feels shame for consuming bottled water for convenience because doing do is against his value about being environmentally responsible.

This idea of autonomous shame, or what Calhoun (2004: 129) calls 'shame of the moral pioneer', however, cannot explain the common experience of feeling shame for values that one does not yet have or has rejected, as Maibom (2010) points out. Maibom further questions whether shame is *an autonomous emotion* or *a heteronomous emotion*—in that an individual is regulated by others' opinions. Here, we should pay special attention to both *episodic shame* and the effect of prolonged, *pervasive shame* in which episodic shame is embedded. Accounts of shame that focus on the role of the audience frequently fail to look beyond episodic shame and analyze only isolated incidents of shame that involve one being judged adversely by an audience—whether imagined or actual—thus overlooking the pervasive conditions that make one susceptible to shame (for example, Bero 2020). As recent writers have pointed out, problematic and exploitative values are causing long-term, pervasive shame in marginalized and vulnerable individuals. Many critical race, feminist, and disability theorists point out that women, racial minorities, people with disabilities, and others with nonnormative bodies frequently experience shame without having committed morally questionable actions or behaviors; for these individuals, shame is like a birthmark (Lorde 1984: 116; Weiss 2018: 542; Fanon 2008; Bartky 1990; Garland-Thomson 1997). Bonnie Mann states that for the feminized subject, shame is ubiquitous—a constant background condition; it is not just a belief or a temporary state from which one can easily emerge, as in episodic shame (Mann 2018: 410). Thus, the long-term and pervasive shame caused by problematic, exploitative values in society are all the more important for us to investigate, especially given the fact that individuals who do not endorse racist or sexist values are nonetheless vulnerable to experience shame because of them.

In what follows, I investigate the liberty that individuals within a community have in their moral deliberation and value acquisition to determine whether the standards that make us susceptible to shame can be rejected on the individual level and identify the possible ways that individuals may take control through the internalization process. I am not suggesting that individuals bear sole responsibility over their experience of shame, nor am I suggesting that they have the full authority to determine what values they will endorse, reject, or internalize; indeed, there are situations where this is practically impossible (Lorde 1984: 282; Weiss 2018: 542; Fanon 2008; Bartky 1990; Garland-Thomson 1997). Rather, I apply the rich insights from the Confucian tradition—more specifically, the notion of moral cultivation, which recognizes a proper sense of shame as an intrinsic part of the process of moral cultivation—to challenge the idea that wronged, shamed, or silenced individuals are merely passive victims of communal values, and to take into account their agency to combat or regulate shame actively regardless of whether or not they are successful in these efforts.

3. Confucian Shame

In the early Confucian texts, there exists a rich philosophical literature on shame and the benefit of cultivating a sense of shame for the purpose of ensuring the relative security and liberty of the individual in an ethical system centered on reflective emotions, including shame and guilt. Some note that the Confucian shame vocabulary is a system of reflective emotions in which guilt is an integral part (among them Seok 2017; Zhao 2018; Shun 1997; Cua 2003). For example, the characters *can* and *kui*, which are frequently translated into *guilt* are frequently used in conjunction with shame. The Confucian morally exemplary persons do not become moral because of their immersion in the feeling of shame. Instead, they cultivate their moral character through learning, honing their sense of shame, and exercising the reflective emotion of shame itself. They are not conformists; on the contrary, they enjoy autonomy through purposeful learning and careful reflection of their own emotions, values, behaviors, and relationships, as Tiwald (2017) points out, which enables them to be responsible for a large range of things related to their moral character, including their relationship with others, their political practices, and their social images. Bongrae Seok puts this point especially well: 'Confucian shame has its own unique moral potential. It brings the inner self-reflective moral conscience to the mind of a moral agent, not from the perspective of the abstract and solipsistic sense of one's duty to universal moral principles but from the perspective of the moral agent's concrete sense of appropriateness in her relation to others in an actual or ideal community' (2017: 21).

It is in this light that the early Confucian texts afford a particularly helpful account of how to combat and manage shame that is not available in principle-based moral systems that exclude shame from morality (Lamb 1983; Kekes 1988). The Confucian tradition sees shame (and a sense of shame) as an intricate part of one's moral cultivation and moral life. By focusing on one's internal motivation (instead of public opinion) and one's reflection in acquiring external values, the Confucian account allows one to be self-determining in shame—indeed, the more one focuses on one's moral learning and cultivation the more liberty one enjoys in shaping one's internal values—this liberty is actualized by one's control over the internalization process. In the early Confucian accounts, shame is portrayed as proactive and as the manifestation of an autonomous moral self instead of a suppressive mechanism. Tiwald (2017) illustrates that the acquisition and cultivation of an autonomous shame allows individuals to adhere to moral standards of their own, even if these differ from the majority's. Antonio Cua (2003) points out that *chi* (one of its translation is to regard something as shameful) is an internal motivator that demonstrates one's moral commitment. Jingyi Jenny Zhao highlights the importance of shame in moral education and moral progress, noting that 'a sense of shame calls for the overcoming of a "falling short of something" and makes moral progress possible' (Zhao 2018: 127). On the other hand, Seok points out the other-governing aspect of shame—that shame can allow ideas like moral responsibility, for example, to regain traction lost from psychological biases that tend to shield us from self-blame (Seok 2017: 72–73). In other words, shame enjoys the merits of a heteronomous mechanism such that the views of others, even those that we do not

agree with, do have an impact on our moral life. Indeed, important thinkers like Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi repeatedly stress the importance of developing an internal sense of shame to avoid feeling shame due to superficial matters, such as appearances, lack of material possessions, or populist opinions. The Confucian account of shame has something that is lacking in all the accounts I discussed in section 2: shame appears to possess features of both an *autonomous* and *heteronomous* emotion.

Before moving forward, I note that even though I draw from a number of Confucian texts such as the *Analects*, *Mencius*, *Xunzi*, and *Book of Rites*, I do not assume that there is a coherent theory of shame in this collection of texts, nor am I presenting a comprehensive theory of Confucian shame. In fact, many discuss the notable differences in Mencius and Xunzi's understanding of *chi* and *ru* (Cua 2003). But I believe that the commonalities in the understanding of shame in these texts and their common themes offer us insights that can help illustrate the interaction between the values of the individual and those of their community. It is also important to note that there is a body of vocabularies associated with shame in the Confucian tradition that does not correspond neatly with what the English word *shame* denotes (and connotes)—for example, some of these terms mean having a hypersensitivity for what is shameful, or the ability to feel shame. As shown below, Seok (2017), Shun (1997), and Cua (2003) offer great discussions on these terms.

4. Rejecting Shame

In *Mencius*, there is an interesting passage depicting the rejection of shame that is imposed by others. Frequently discussed, this case of shame and shame-like responses involves a beggar who insists on conducting himself with dignity and refuses abuse, even when his own survival is at stake: 'Here is a basketful of rice and a bowlful of soup. Getting them will mean life; not getting them will mean death. When these are given with abuse, even a wayfarer would not accept them; when these are given after being trampled upon, even a beggar would not accept them. Yet when it comes to ten thousand bushels of grain one is supposed to accept without asking if it is in accordance with the rites or if it is right to do so. What benefit are ten thousand bushels of grain to me?' (*Mencius* 6A10, Lau 2003: 253).

The text uses the term *bu xie* (does not care for), but it depicts a situation in which a party imposes shame on another by providing food in an abusive way: the beggar does not care for the food since such treatment is beneath him. Bryan Van Norden states that this passage describes one of the important virtues of Mencian philosophy—the sprout of *yi* (righteousness), which indicates that one has 'the disposition that drives us to avoid disgrace, even at the cost of our lives' (2002: 49). Indeed, Mencius goes on to compare the beggar, who upholds his dignity, to corrupted officers, who compromise their moral integrity for money, luxury lodging, or the service of wives and concubines. When compared to those who are unable to uphold their moral integrity and ignore their sense of shame by succumbing to their materialistic desires, the beggar's insistence on being treated with basic decency demonstrates his moral commitment.

Despite his severe vulnerability—not only does the beggar lack the means for sustenance, but his social position is inferior to that of the food-giver's—Mencius emphasizes the choice he has in facing the shame that others try to cast upon him. The point of this story is to express dismay toward those who would accept bribes and other unethical income. As Mencius notes in disappointment, the reality is that those in power frequently gain wealth and privilege by forgoing their sense of shame, compromising their moral integrity for material gains. To Mencius, not only *can* one reject the shame that others attempt to impose upon them, but in some cases, one is expected to do so to safeguard one's own moral integrity.

The beggar appears to be keenly aware of what accepting the food means. He is not deceived by this seemingly magnanimous gesture and is able to recognize the provider's abusive manner as an insult to his dignity as a person. Compared to those who accept bribes or unethical benefits in concealed or subtle ways (while fooling themselves into thinking their moral integrity is intact), the beggar exhibits a high level of both self-understanding and understanding of the situation. As Sarkissian (2010) points out, small gestures can lead to major changes in our moral life, and the Confucians therefore pay special attention to small discrepancies between one's behavior and what is appropriate.

Of course, not all shame can be easily rejected, especially in the case of ubiquitous shame, as Mann (2018) points out, or in cases where the receiver is in a particularly vulnerable state such that they lack the adequate resources to understand the situation as one that brings shame to them—for example, someone who suffers from hermeneutic injustice and cannot put their experience into adequate words to help them process the experience. Miranda Fricker defines hermeneutical injustice as 'the injustice of having some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resources' (2007: 155). My attempt to draw attention to the internalization process deals with similar issues, specifically, looking into the practices to reduce hermeneutical injustice on a personal level. It is thus encouraging to see the beggar demonstrating his moral agency facing forthcoming shame brought by the food provider.

5. Resisting Public Opinion

The case in *Mencius* (6A10, Lau 2003: 253) illustrates that it is important to have a clear and robust sense of what is shameful and what is not, so one can reject what one considers to be shameful. This importance is seen in the *Analects* too. Confucius states that it is not worth engaging in discussion with someone who is ashamed of the wrong things—rude clothing and coarse food (instead of moral shortcomings) (*Analects* 4.9, Ames and Rosemont 1999: 91). In contrast, for someone who acts with a proper sense of shame, Confucius is confident that they will behave themselves and fulfill their commission when sent to distant areas (*Analects* 13.20, Ames and Rosemont 1999: 167–68). But how do we achieve this adequate sense of shame? The early Confucians list a number of common things that an exemplary person should feel ashamed of, most of them having to do with the notion of a mismatch between one's values and one's behaviors or intentions. A

famous passage in the *Analects* highlights one such mismatch between one's disguised ill will and friendly appearance: 'The Master said, "Glib speech, an obsequious countenance, and excessive solicitude—Zuoqiu Ming thought this kind of conduct shameless (*chi zhi*) and so do I. To seek out someone's friendship while harboring ill will towards them—Zuoqiu Ming thought this kind of conduct shameless, and so do I"' (*Analects* 5.25, Ames and Rosemont 1999: 101).

The passage illustrates that inconsistent behavior, such as glib speech, obsequious countenance, and excessive solicitude that does not match with one's true intentions is viewed as shameful, as are friendly gestures coupled with ill will. In another passage, Confucius states that the morally exemplary person 'is ashamed when the words he utters outstrip his deeds' (*Analects* 14.27, Ames and Rosemont 1999: 178); and in Mencius, a morally exemplary person is 'ashamed of an exaggerated reputation' (*Mencius* 4B18, Lau 2003: 179). In another core Confucian text, *The Book of Rites*, inconsistency of some sort is credited as the source of shame: 'Hence the exemplary person is ashamed to wear the robes, and not have the demeanor; ashamed to have the demeanor, and not the style of speech; ashamed to have the style of speech, and not the virtues; ashamed to have the virtues, and not the conduct proper to them' (*Book of Rites*, Biao Ji 21[1]). The importance of the consistency between one's inner moral qualities and their external manifestation is highlighted in this passage. This consistency is extended to the ethical practice and political sphere—not only are one's virtues expected to manifest themselves through words and conducts but also in one's performance in public life. For example, Mencius laments those occupying high office without putting the Confucian political vision of benevolent ruling into practice. 'To talk about lofty matters when in a low position is a crime. But it is equally shameful to take one's place at the court of a prince without putting the Way into effect' (*Mencius* 5B5, Lau 2003: 231). Bearing these teachings in mind, to avoid finding themselves in shameful situation and experiencing shame, Confucian students thus need to be wary of such inconsistencies in their moral pursuit and react *before* a sign of shame and disgrace (*ru*, *chi*) becomes evident. As Seok observes, 'Internal shame is not necessarily caused by actual wrongdoing or violations either. It is simply caused by one's inner awareness and commitment to one's moral integrity' (2017: 37). Seok's words illustrate a hypersensitivity to shame and the early signs of shame, which further expresses one's moral commitment and disapproval of shameful behaviors.

What one should be ashamed of is not prescribed—for example, the inconsistencies could be between one's behavior and words, or one's intention and behavior—the only thing clearly articulated is that one should not give in to public opinions and be ashamed of appearances and material possessions. Jane Geaney (2004) points out that the Confucian idea of shame has to do with overstepping or blurring moral boundaries. Sometimes, however, being consistent with one's authentic emotions and the values embedded in them appears to be more important than observing clearly articulated rules or boundaries (Olberding

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[1] All translations from the *Book of Rites* are mine, based on that by Yang (2004) and the parallel Chinese and English text at the Chinese Text Project (2006–2021), which uses a reprint of Legge's 1885 English translation: James Legge, trans. [1885] (2004) The Li Ki. Whitefish: Kessinger.

2016). For example, when they discuss shame caused by deviating from proper rules or rituals, Confucians explain that such deviations show a lack of authentic emotions required by the rituals, or reflect certain emotional inconsistency within the person. When Xunzi suggests that stingy burial practices and hasty funerals are a source of shame, it may seem to be a complaint about the format and size of the funeral—but Xunzi further explains that stingy burial services in place of a proper funeral ceremony reveal an inconsistency of one's affection and respect for the deceased (*Xunzi* 19/17, Cua 2003). He states, 'To treat people generously while alive but stingily when dead is to show respect to those with awareness and to show arrogance to those without awareness. This is the way of a vile person and is an attitude of betrayal' (*Xunzi* 19/17, Hutton 2014: 206–8). It is the inconsistent behavior—which amounts to a sense of betrayal—that causes shame, not merely the violation of certain ritual rules. On the other hand, extravagant funerals that do not fit one's status or that celebrate ancestors for virtues they did not possess are also viewed as a source of shame in the *Book of Rites*: 'If descendants who maintain their ancestral temples and the altars to the spirits of the land and grain, praised their ancestors for good qualities that they did not possess, that was falsehood; if they did not take knowledge of the good qualities that they did possess, that showed their want of intelligence; if they knew them and did not transmit them (by their inscriptions), that showed a want of virtue—these are three things of which an exemplary person would be ashamed' (*Book of Rites*, Ji Tong 32).

These examples of what was regarded as shameful in *Xunzi* and the *Book of Rites* demonstrate that it is not the case that the more extravagant a funeral the better but that the service must correspond with the respect and affection that survivors owe to the deceased. One's internal values and emotions need to match one's external manifestation in one's behavior, words, reputation, governing style, and achievements. Instead of specifying what norms one should accept, early Confucians focus on making it a responsibility and a priority to maintain consistency between their internal values and external manifestations.

The above observation echoes a very interesting tendency within the Chinese philosophical literature—shame and shame related processes are frequently used to encourage one to *take control of* their moral character, to gain and establish their moral beliefs, and to strive to protect their moral integrity. The morally cultivated person is expected not only to have a good sense of shame but also to own and exert control over it—that is, not allowing themselves to be shamed or to feel ashamed with respect to things that are irrelevant to moral character, such as low status or a lack of luxury goods. How they appear to others does not matter, for it is one's true moral character that matters. As Xunzi puts it, 'Morally exemplary persons are ashamed of not changing their behavior when they are wrong, not of being perceived as (morally) tainted; they are ashamed of not being trustworthy, not of being perceived as untrustworthy; they are ashamed of being incompetent, not of being perceived as incompetent. Therefore, they are not tempted by praises, nor are they fearful of criticism; they walk the Dao straightforwardly and spontaneously, carry themselves adequately without deviation: such is a true morally exemplary person' (*Xunzi* 6.14, my translation).

According to Xunzi, one should feel shame only for one's own true moral character, never for how one appears to be to others. This does not mean that one should insulate oneself from others' feedback, especially negative feedback; it means that one's ethical commitment should not be swayed by others. In Xunzi's account, the individual is still in dialogue with others from their society and responsive to others' negative judgments, but it is the responsibility of the individual to reflect on and ultimately decide whether these judgments speak to the individual's true moral character. If these judgments point to one's ethical shortcomings (flattery words sometimes can be warning signs too), one ought to improve and change. If these negative opinions are about superficial traits that do not speak to one's true moral character, one should try one's best to reject them. This view gives us a lot of power in defending ourselves against unfriendly and exploitative values that aim to evoke shame.

6. Norm-Adopting

It might seem that Xunzi's view is similar to the 'shame of the moral pioneer' view (Calhoun 2004: 129)—the idea that one has autonomy to choose which standards they endorse and will feel shame only if their own standards are violated. The problem with these accounts, as I point out above in section 2, is that they cannot explain why we feel shame for deviating from norms we do not accept or no longer endorse—and this is precisely the problem facing shame, according to Calhoun. She writes 'the problem with shame, then, is that vulnerability to being shamed appears to signal the agent's failure to sustain her own autonomous judgment about what morality requires' (Calhoun 2004: 128). Indeed, if others can make us feel shame for things we do not regard as shameful, one's autonomy in her moral life is in question. A closer look at the process that is frequently called *internalization*, which the Confucians put great emphasis on, will help resolve the tension between our vulnerability to others' shaming criticism and our autonomy over our moral life.

First, what we mean by 'accepting a norm' or 'holding a standard' in the personal-ideals accounts need to be further examined. In other words, in shame or other moral practices, we do not simply accept, adopt, or endorse a value at our will. We *accustom, incorporate, accommodate, combat with, reject, or change* external values in a process that is situated in our interaction with other members of a community. Here is where personal-ideals accounts (Rawls 1971; Kekes 1988) run into trouble—they are known to fail at theoretically distinguishing the difference between shame and disappointment over violating a person ideal; they cannot explain why sometimes we respond to our moral failure with shame and sometimes with disappointment (Bero 2020; Thomason 2015). In other words, can we tell the experience of feeling shame over falling short of certain standards apart from the experience of feeling disappointment over such a failure in theory? In addition, personal-ideals accounts also cannot explain why we sometimes feel shame over values we no longer have, or never had. Examples of this include a LGBTQ activist who feels residual shame for their sexual orientation; victims of sexual harassment who feel shame for their experience despite knowing they are

not at fault; or a foreigner who feels shame without *accepting* the cultural norms of their new environment. Maibom offers this example: 'In India, a common expression of friendship for men is to walk hand in hand. Being transported to the USA and continuing the practice would likely result in them being ashamed, given the widespread disapproval that they would encounter. The fact that they do not already accept the relevant standards does not insulate them against shame' (Maibom 2010: 573).[2] Maibom therefore suggests using submission, which she believes is an essential part of shame, to explain such situations—which would lead to the conclusion that shame is more heteronomous than autonomous. However, as someone from a culture where friends walk hand-in-hand quite frequently, I can testify that once I got used to North American norms around hand-holding, the very act of hand holding between friends started to look strange and wrong even when I was back in a culture where such behavior is socially accepted. My point is that the fact that one starts to feel shame for holding hands with friends is the beginning of a process in which an individual's internal values interact with and change in response to the external values of this new culture. In my case, after interacting with North American values, I have adopted as my own the value that hand-holding is reserved for romantic relationships. My personal beliefs and their implications have changed as a result of this interaction. Imagine that my friend Tam, with whom I used to hold hands, refuses to internalize this value after arriving in North America even though she conforms with the custom, and she is relieved when returning to a culture where friends hold hands. Both Tam and I experienced shame for holding hands, or perhaps just being different or acting in a way that some consider inappropriate, when we first arrived in North America, but our interactions with the external value of hand-holding went differently: whereas I internalized the value, Tam eventually rejected it.

It takes a long time, sometimes years, to internalize new norms fully, and some, like Tam, may never internalize them at all. My point in these examples is that feeling shame for having deviated from a social norm does not always indicate that one has accepted or internalized the norms. Instead, it may indicate that one is in the process of internalizing or interacting with them. What the personal-ideals accounts on shame sometimes fail to articulate is that accepting an external value is not an act but a dynamic process that one needs to monitor and reflect upon. Fricker offers a very good example of such 'residual internalization':

> Imagine, for example, a woman who has freed herself of sexist beliefs—a card-carrying feminist, as they say—and yet her psychology remains such that in many contexts she is influenced by a stereotype of women as lacking the requisite authority for political office, so that she tends not to take the words of female political candidates as seriously as that of their male counterparts. Such a conflicted figure exemplifies the

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[2] One may think that this feeling is *embarrassment*, not shame, at behaving differently than social custom expects. While some might consider such a deviation to be a source of humor (a funny anecdote to relate later) when they violate social customs, it is easy to imagine that someone in a position of disadvantage due to pervasive shame (discussed in section 2) would experience genuine shame.

> phenomenon of (what we might call) residual internalization, whereby a member of a subordinated group continues as host to a sort of half-life for the oppressive ideology, even when her beliefs have genuinely moved on. Sometimes this might simply be a matter of the person's affective states lagging behind their beliefs (a lapsed Catholic's guilty conscience, a gay rights activist's feeling of shame). But other times it can be that cognitive commitments held in our imaginations retain their impact on how we perceive the social world even after any correlative beliefs have faded away. (Fricker 2007: 37)

Interestingly, what Fricker describes is quite the reverse of what coming to interact with a new societal value and practice, illustrated by the example of friends holding hands in public. In the case of 'residual internalization', one is on her way *out* of a certain belief and practice system but has not yet become invulnerable to the shame caused by those old values. In this context, feeling shame over something does not mean that one has already internalized these views as their personal ideals or is currently committing to certain values; it indicates that one is aware of and is interacting with these values in a particular way. Indeed, shame is sometimes used as a tool to *initiate or accelerate one's internalization* of certain values, as is evident in propaganda campaigns that attempt to feminize an entire group of people through shame (İbrahimhakkioğ 2018).[3] Maibom seems to have overlooked the fact that the internalization process itself is intertwined with shame. When one starts to experience shame over something, it may signal that one is acquiring new knowledge about what is acceptable and what is not in a society, even if one has not accepted these values prior to the shame experience. Shame can be a heated episode of the very process of internalization. In other words, after taking into account the internalization as a process, personal-ideal accounts may be saved from the criticisms that Maibom (2010), Thomason (2015), and Bero (2020) raise.

7. Hypersensitivity and Proactiveness in Shame and Relevant Internalization

The focus on internalization can create a buffer zone between other-induced shame and one's inner reflective sense of shame, therefore enabling one to reject some shame as superficial (shame induced by values one does not endorse) and accept some as true (shame induced by values one endorses). A number of Confucian texts highlight the importance of cautiously managing the internalization process, thus making shame proactive (an indicator of moral right and wrong) rather than reactive (a response to others' criticisms).

An additional factor that needs to be taken into consideration is the Confucian focus on the relationships one has with members of one's family and community. When drawing the similarities between Confucian philosophy and the feminist trend with respect to the self as situated, Karyn Lai notes, 'Confucian personhood

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[3] Interestingly, using the case of Turkey, which tries to shame the Kurdish resistance movement, Fulden İbrahimhakkioğ (2018) also demonstrates that shame can be transformed into honor and resistance.

is not conceived of in abstract or universalizable terms; a person's identity may only be fully understood in terms of how he or she stands in relation to significant others. In this way, the Confucian self is a concrete, located self' (2016: 111). In other words, in Confucian ethics, given how individuals are essentially seen in terms of their relationships, to insulate them from shame is not a theoretical possibility—nor is it possible in reality. Being sensitive to this reality and to the theoretical commitment to a communal understanding of individuals, Confucian ethics suggests using a hypersensitivity to shame as a way to protect individuals from the experience of shame and avoid situations that may induce shame and the internalization of unwanted values. In other words, Confucian followers are reminded both to not overstep and to be reflective of their own sense of shame. While an individual's sense of shame cannot be detached from the community's norms and values, it does not mean they have to be the same—individuals are encouraged to gain more control and understanding of their own sense of shame and remain skeptical of public opinion.

Further, as Kwong-loi Shun explains, the Confucian tradition frames *ru* (shame or disgrace) as something that can 'taint' one's moral character (Shun 1997: 59; Shun 2013: 276). The encouragement to distance oneself from potential sources of shame is thus linked to the protection of one's moral integrity—not only so that one may avoid experiencing shame but also so that one can flex one's emotional muscles and be vigilant in thinking and reflecting about whether a discrepancy between one's values and behaviors is at risk of developing. In other words, the Confucian practice of regulating and acquiring an adequate sense of shame advocates developing a hypersensitive attitude and resolution to act early and preemptively to avoid shameful situations and to make sure that one's emotions, values, and behaviors are consistent so as to avoid discrepancies that could warrant shame to develop.

The early Confucians stress the importance of self-determination in shame, which can be cultivated through a reflective and watchful attitude toward mismatches in qualities of moral character. Nussbaum's account, in comparison, portrays shame as a fateful struggle and assumes that we lack the strength to guard ourselves against pressure from others and social pressure both in episodes of shame and the process in which we acquire a sense of shame. I am not suggesting our self-determining sense of shame will always prevail—there are difficult and impossible situations for individuals to navigate. However, we cannot simply assume that we are either fully autonomous or mere passive objects of social conformity. We may also note that in the Confucian tradition, one is responsible for a larger scope of things, including one's feelings, one's relationship with others (Im 1999; *Mencius* 4B33, Lau 2003: 191). One aims to eliminate these kinds of mismatches in one's ethical cultivation—the horrid shame Nussbaum illustrates is expected to be solved before it has a chance to develop. As noted above, Maibom (2010) points out that shame has to do with subordination, as can be observed in other mammals. I think this is a valuable perspective although hardly the full picture. For example, shame may also have to do with the primitive biological mechanisms of disgust and fear, and our pursuit of purity (that is, staying away from things that could bring shame). Nonetheless, it is important to see shame's

function in changing people's values. The internalization of values and shame are quite intertwined in the sense that they sometimes can be the same process—one may feel shame and at the same time internalize the value that deemed the situation she is in as shameful.

Shame is frequently seen as the exposure of our vulnerability, but it also represents an openness to external input. Others' disapproval naturally evokes self-examination, but this self-examination can be owned and used to reflect upon one's moral character with respect to one's moral standards. Shame is therefore a communicative channel between the self and external values, between the moral spheres of the community and the moral life of the individual. It is only when one's moral life is situated in and connected to the community's moral practice that we can understand the process of internalization—how external values interact with personal values. In this framework, we can also recognize the communicative channel that shame as a mechanism is associated with. Viewing all incidents of shame as threats to our autonomy does little to explain the interaction of communal and personal values, and doing so thus fails to account for how such interactions can lead to moral change.

The learning and openness that shame-related processes facilitate speak to the importance these processes have both in the Confucian tradition and in practice. Having a sense of shame—the ability to feel shame—is viewed as an integral part of a person's character. A person who has no regard for their moral character is sometimes called *shameless* and is deemed hopeless in the moral domain. Mencius specifically mentions that such a person is no better than a beast (2A6, 7A6, 7A7, Lau 2003: 73, 247, 249, respectively). The reason for the Confucian sage's harsh lament is that, without a sense of right and wrong and a responsiveness to what is shameful and what is not, one cannot establish a communicative channel between oneself and others; in contrast, such a responsiveness opens the door to moral improvement and change, which the individual can moderate according to her own standards.

A morally cultivated person will, because of their moral excellence, entertain little chance of experiencing shame. However, what distinguishes them from the shameless is their responsiveness to shame. The morally cultivated person's relation to shame connects them to negative feedback as external sources of moral reflection. They may reject some of this negative feedback in the end, but—unlike the shameless person, who does not care about others' disapproval—this rejection is rooted in moral reflection. The shameless person would reject negative feedback based on the fact that they are negative evaluations, thus closing the channel of communication. Others' negative feedback does not have a way to enter their moral reflection, should they reflect at all. This is the fundamental difference between a moral sage—who does not feel shame because they are watchful of situations that warrant shame as a response—and someone who is indifferent to their own moral pursuit and thus feels no shame. This is also the difference between someone who refuses to feel shame when they judge the shaming to be unwarranted (because, for example, it concerns mere appearance or is unjust, suppressive, or abusive) and one who feels no shame from public outrage because they refuse any negative judgment about themselves.

8. Conclusion

Williams (1993: 83) characterizes a sense of shame as requiring an 'internalized other'—though Williams uses the term *internalization* in a different sense than how it is used in this essay, the interaction between the self and others is evident in shame and shame related processes. Hosting others in our own internal moral sphere can be a risky task, however, not to interact with external values so that we may escape our vulnerability to shame is simply unimaginable. Viewing shame as a threat closes that channel and leaves the real issue of problematic values unaddressed and unchanged. While emphasizing the importance of situating the experience of shame in the interaction between individuals and community, I argue that the internalization process provides an important arena where personal values interact with external communal values, and highlighted the insights from the Confucian tradition that allow us to be autonomous in the internalization process as well as in shame. Communal and social values at large are perhaps the more important aspects of the problematization of shame; they are also the context in which both episodic and pervasive shame are embedded in. While I have focused for the most part on the individual and on one's autonomy in controlling the experience of shame and the internalization process that determines what values to feel shame over, I invite future research to look into the externalization of shame—the process through which individuals channel and systematically discuss their experience of shame to push for changes to societal values, as seen, for example, in the #MeToo movement. The process of value interaction between individuals and their societies is bidirectional: while one remains connected to their community, one also contributes to shaping the values of society and to determining which practices are considered unacceptable.

JING IRIS HU 🅙
CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY, CANADA
jing.hu@concordia.ca

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