Shame and the Ethical in Williams

Abstract: Bernard Williams' *Shame and Necessity* (1993) was an influential early contribution to what has become a broader movement to rehabilitate shame as a moral emotion. But there is a tension in Williams' discussion that presents an under-appreciated difficulty for efforts to rehabilitate shame. The tension arises between what Williams takes shame in its essence to *be* and what shame can *do*—the role that shame can be expected to play in ethical life. Williams can—and we argue, should—be read as avoiding the difficulties stemming from this tension, but this requires a reevaluation of several of his central claims about shame's role in ethical thought and experience. For instance, his broad claims that the "structures of shame" can "give a conception of one's ethical identity" (93), and that shame "mediates ... between ethical demands and the rest of life" (102), cannot be taken at face value. What emerges is a view that is in a sense less ambitious, but also more in tune with the spirit of Williams' larger project. There may also, we suggest, be a more general lesson: We should be suspicious of the temptation to seek some special affinity between shame and ethical life, lest we distort our understanding of both.

1 Introduction

"There must," insists Bernard Williams in *Shame and Necessity*, "be options for ethical thought and experience that the Kantian construction conceals" (1993: *77*).[1] In seeking to elaborate one of these options, Williams famously develops and draws upon a conception of shame and shame culture that is informed by his understanding of the ancient Greeks.

Shame possesses at least two important features for Williams. First, shame and our susceptibility to shame are relatively basic and are not essentially ethical in character; they are thus prior to our ethical thought and experience. This means that shame can provide some explanatory purchase by grounding ethical thought and experience in more basic concerns and attitudes relating to our motivations, characters, identities, and social relations. Shame, in other words, offers a way to naturalize, humanize and demystify the ethical. Relatedly, according to Williams, the structures and propensities of shame make possible a demystification of the ethical that is accurate rather than distorting. Williams' development of this second point has made *Shame and Necessity* an influential early contribution to what has become a broader movement to rehabilitate shame as an ethical emotion.[2]

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[1] Unless otherwise indicated, all parenthetical references henceforth are to *Shame and Necessity* (1993).

[2] Other contributions to this effort include Gabriele Taylor (1985), Sarah Buss (1999); David Velleman (2001); Cheshire Calhoun (2004); Michelle Mason (2010); Julien A. Deonna, Raffaele Rodogno & Fabrice Teroni (2012); and Krista K. Thomason (2018).

However, despite the undeniable depth and subtlety of Williams's treatment, there is a tension between the features of shame just identified. The more basic shame is, and the more free of any *essential* connection to the ethical, the harder it is to see how shame could be specially suited to shed light on the nature of the ethical in the way that Williams envisions. Conversely, the better suited shame is to shed such light, the less plausible it becomes that shame (so conceived) is basic or free of any essential connection to the ethical in the way required for the desired demystification to succeed.

This tension is not addressed in *Shame and Necessity*, and has not been well appreciated since. Williams can—and we argue, should—be read as avoiding the difficulties stemming from this tension, but this requires a reinterpretation of several of his central claims in *Shame and Necessity* about shame's role in ethical thought and experience. For instance, his broad claims that the "structures of shame" can "give a conception of one's ethical identity" (93), and that shame "mediates … between ethical demands and the rest of life" (102), cannot be taken at face value. What emerges is a view that is in a sense less ambitious, but also more in tune with the spirit of Williams' larger body of work.[3] Moreover, and more generally, this reevaluation of Williams' views serves as an illustration of the dangers of asking too much of shame: 'rehabilitating' shame by seeking a *special* connection between shame and ethical life risks distorting our understanding of both.[4]

Williams' extended treatment of shame was groundbreaking, and contributed to a burgeoning theoretical interest in this emotion.[5] Yet more recent work on shame often treats Williams' discussion as a useful source of isolated, quotable insights, rather than engaging with his account in depth.[6] At the same time, shame often retreats into the background in work on Williams' broader ethical views, where it tends to appear, if at all, only through its connection to other topics like moral luck or reasons internalism. For these reasons, Williams' rich exploration of shame is ripe for a thorough examination.

We first lay out Williams' larger ethical project in *Shame and Necessity*, and his conception of shame and its role in ethical life (§§2-4). We then identify the tension between what Williams takes shame to *be* and what shame can *do*, and explore four different ways that Williams can be read to avoid the difficulties stemming from this tension before settling on our preferred interpretation (§5). We

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[3] Hence, readers sympathetic to Williams' larger project might need little encouragement to interpret *Shame and Necessity's* claims about shame's role less ambitiously. However, key passages in *Shame and Necessity* lend themselves to a more ambitious interpretation, and as we will see, this interpretation is prominent in more general discussions of shame.

[4] Here we can only suggest this as a broader lesson (in §6); we offer a more extended argument for it in "Asking Too Much of Shame" (in progress).

[5] See, e.g., the works cited in footnote 2.

[6] An essential and notable exception, to which we are indebted, is Calhoun (2004), though a significant disagreement with Calhoun's interpretation is raised in §5.

conclude with some brief observations about the project of rehabilitating shame as a moral emotion (§6).

2 Shame in Williams' Ethical Project

Williams seeks to show that Greek thought, especially that of Homer and the tragedians, contains resources that can help us to better understand ourselves and our ethical situation. In particular, Williams is concerned, in *Shame and Necessity* and elsewhere, to resist a specific set of assumptions about our modern ethical outlook, which sometimes finds expression in the idea that that the Greeks lacked a distinctively *moral* outlook, or a conception of *moral* agency, of a kind that we possess (4-8). In this way, *Shame and Necessity* builds upon and elaborates Williams' other critical writings concerning what he called "the morality system."[7]

The set of assumptions that Williams resists is mostly closely associated with the work of Immanuel Kant. Among other things, Williams rejects the Kantian ideas that practical injunctions come in essentially two basic kinds, categorical and hypothetical, and that morality is a distinct sphere that is concerned solely with categorical imperatives.[8] He sees these ideas as concealing a broad and important dimension of ethical life that is reflected, for instance, in Ajax's resolution that he *must* end his own life, or Oedipus' insistence that he *must* learn the truth (75). These injunctions are not categorical in the Kantian sense—they are grounded in the agents' specific characters, commitments, and situations. Yet they are not *merely* hypothetical, in the sense of being relative to a desire that the agent merely happens to have. They are, rather, *necessities* that are ethical in some broader sense. This sets Williams off on his search for "options for ethical thought and experience that the Kantian construction conceals" (77).

Williams thus uses 'ethical' to designate a dimension of our lives that is broader than the realm of categorical injunctions that is the stuff of morality on the Kantian conception. But he means at the same time to pick out something narrower than practical reason in general, or simply what matters or is important to us. *Shame and Necessity* is, he explains, "directed to what I call, broadly, ethical ideas of the Greeks: in particular, ideas of responsible action, justice, and the motivations that lead people to do things that are admired and respected" (4). This is in line with Williams' characterizations of the ethical throughout his works, as for instance in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*:

> However vague it may initially be, we have a conception of the ethical
> that understandably relates to us and our actions the demands, needs,
> claims, desires, and, generally, the lives of other people, and it is helpful

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[7] See, for instance, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (1985), especially chapter 10.

[8] Williams' criticisms of the Kantian conception of morality are more fully developed in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (1985), particularly chapter 4.

to preserve this conception in what we are prepared to call an ethical consideration (1985: 12).[9]

This is also consistent with the commonsense notion of the ethical, according to which matters of responsibility, justice, honesty, and the like are properly described as ethical, whereas certain other values and aspirations—beauty, renown, athletic excellence—are not. The same contrast is again indicated when Williams asserts, for instance, that "[t]he question 'what should I do?' and its answer ... are not necessarily or peculiarly ethical; *ethical* considerations are *one* kind of input into the deliberation" (1985: 127; our emphasis). Hence, Williams insists that there are pursuits and dispositions—such as "creative and cultural" ones (1985: 46)—that are valuable without being ethical.

Williams aims in *Shame and Necessity* to develop a conception of ethical thought and experience, in the sense just indicated.[10] But having rejected the Kantian-influenced conception of moral obligation, he requires a different understanding of the apparently distinctive force of the sort of injunction that confronted Ajax and Oedipus. His twofold aspiration is an understanding that will, first, ground the force of these injunctions in a realistic and intelligible way in our lived experience (rather than, for instance, appealing as the Kantian system does to a *sui generis* and ultimately inscrutable notion of obligation; second, it will do justice to the conviction that these injunctions are *ethical* in a recognizable sense. In developing such an understanding, Williams seizes upon shame as a key concept.

The reasons for this choice are never directly stated, but they emerge over the course of Williams' discussion. First, the ancient Greeks—particularly the Homeric Greeks—are often described as inhabiting a shame culture, in contrast to our own guilt culture (5, 78, 88-89). In developing this distinction, Williams presents the differences between shame and guilt as a key to understanding Greek ethical thought in relation to the modern alternative that he wants to resist.[11] In particular, he suggests that guilt contrasts unfavorably with shame in being more convoluted, less transparent, and more apt to be moralized—and indeed warped—by its close association with the morality system (88-95, 219-223).

Guilt's association with the morality system contrasts with shame's relative independence. Thus Williams' approach to understanding shame can be helpfully illuminated by contrasting it with a central theme in the Western tradition of philosophical moral psychology reaching back to Plato, which Williams repeatedly criticises. Plato is said to have invented

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[9] Cf. *Truth and Truthfulness* (2002: 24).

[10] He later wrote: "In my book *Shame and Necessity* ... I tried to reach an understanding of certain ideas in the Homeric poems, in particular ethical ideas such as agency, responsibility, shame, and constraint" (2006: 64).

[11] Williams also draws on this contrast between guilt and shame in his "Shame, Guilt, and the Structure of Punishment" (1997: 26-29).

the idea that the basic theory of action itself, the account of what human beings are and how they do anything, is a theory that must be expressed in ethical terms. ... The idea is ... that the functions of the mind, above all with regard to action, are defined in terms of categories that get their significance from ethics. This is an idea that is certainly lacking in Homer and the tragedians (42).

Accordingly, Plato's tripartite soul is designed to organize conflicts between different internal impulses so as to assign the impulses that he saw as rational and good, and those that he saw as irrational and bad, to different psychic organs.[12] A distant but direct descendant in this line of moralized psychology is Kant's idea of a "will" distinct from mere desire or inclination, that "serves in the interest of only one kind of motive, the motives of morality" (41).

Throughout his philosophical career Williams was fundamentally opposed to this moralizing tendency.[13] *Truth and Truthfulness*, for instance, finds him returning again to advocate a "project of ethical naturalism" that consists in "explaining the ethical in terms of an account of human beings which is to the greatest possible extent prior to ideas of the ethical" (2002: 26-27).[14] And in *Shame and Necessity* he urges, as an antidote to the moralizing tendency in theorizing about psychology, a return to Homeric conceptions of agency and action. Homer, he contends, had "the basic items that we need, and he lacked several things that we do not need, in particular the illusion that the basic powers of the mind are inherently constituted in terms of an ethical order" (46). Prominent among the things that Homer did have, of course, is the idea of shame that is central to Homeric shame culture.

Finally, shame presents itself to Williams as a promising point of focus because shame, as he conceives of it, has a structure that connects it naturally to the ethical as a category. He understands the ethical, we have seen, as centrally concerning the relation between "us and our actions," on the one hand, and, on the other, "the demands, needs, claims, desires, and, generally, the lives of other people," including "the motivations that lead people to do things that are admired and respected" and the capacities that enable people "to shape their behaviour in some degree to social expectations." And shame is for Williams (as we will see in more detail in §4) precisely the emotion that is most directly involved in relating our characters and identities to the attitudes and reactions of other people.

In sum, Williams' interest in, and admiration for, Homer and the Greek tragedians, his mistrust of the modern "morality system," his relational

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[12] Here, we are not arguing that Williams was correct in attributing to Plato a moralized psychology. One might argue that Plato's ethical treatment of psychological drives comes only after they have been characterized in independent terms. Thanks to Sophie Grace Chappell for this point.

[13] As the example of Plato illustrates, the moralizing tendency to which Williams objects includes not only efforts to characterize the functions of the mind in terms of the "morality system" associated with Kant, but also efforts to characterize them in moral or ethical terms more generally.

[14] Although naturalism is not a key concept in *Shame and Necessity*, Williams' commitment to naturalism is a consistent theme in his work. See *Truth and Truthfulness* (2002: 22-27) and "Nietzsche's Minimalist Moral Psychology" (1995: especially 67-69).

understanding of the ethical, and his commitment to naturalism, all converge on the focal concept of shame. The following two sections sketch how shame is put to work in Williams' project of developing his conception of ethical thought and experience that seeks to be at once realistic and faithful to our intuitive notion of the ethical.

3 A Realistic View of Shame

Williams opens his discussion of the nature of shame, in chapter 4 of *Shame and Necessity*, by observing that "[t]he basic experience connected with shame is that of being seen, inappropriately, by the wrong people, in the wrong condition" (78). But of course, if Williams is to avoid the moralizing error that he attributes to Plato and others, the terms "inappropriately" and "wrong" cannot be understood in a *moral* or ethical sense. And this is borne out in the more detailed discussion of shame in his first Endnote, "Mechanisms of Shame and Guilt". There Williams clarifies that "[t]he root of shame lies in exposure in a more general sense, in being at a disadvantage: in what I shall call, in a very general phrase, a loss of power. The sense of shame is a reaction of the subject to the consciousness of this loss" (220).

This "loss of power" conception represents shame in very basic, non-moralized terms, while providing sufficient flexibility to accommodate a wide range of shame phenomena within a unified account. Thus the "elementary situation of actually being seen naked" can provoke shame because, and to the extent that, being seen naked is experienced as a "powerful expression" of a disparity of power. That is, under specified circumstances, "the loss of power is itself constituted by actually being seen" (220). In other cases, the loss of power does not consist merely in being seen, but in having some behavior, feature, or circumstance revealed to another person in a way that puts the subject at a felt disadvantage. Consistent with this account, the revealed feature need not itself be of *moral* significance: As Williams notes, "we, like the Greeks, can be as mortified or disgraced by a failure in prowess or cunning as by a failure of generosity or loyalty" (92). Hence, his account of shame does not betray the moralizing tendency.

Moreover, the aspect of the agent that is revealed to the other need not itself be judged negatively either by the other or by the agent herself. This Williams illustrates through the case of an artist's model who has been posing for a painter for some time, but only comes to feel shame when she realizes that the artist sees her not primarily as a model but rather in a sexual light (220-221).[15] Here the model may find no fault in her appearance or conduct—after all, prior to realizing the artist's attitude she experienced no shame. Similarly, the artist may see the model only in a positive light.[16] The model's shame, then, may consist instead in the way

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[15] This example is originally Max Scheler's and is also discussed by Taylor (1985: 60-61), among others.

[16] Williams comments that he may even "think that she is privileged to have aroused his lust" (222). Of course, this thought may be more likely to arise in a society, like ours, where women are sexually objectified. Hence, the positive light in which she is seen by the artist might reflect an ideal of

in which the artist's revealed attitude puts her at a felt disadvantage: "the change in the situation introduces the relevant kind of unprotectedness or loss of power ... She had previously been clothed in her role as a model; that has been taken from her, and she is left truly exposed, to a desiring eye" (221).[17]

The flexibility of Williams' basic account of shame also accommodates a further category of shame experiences that Williams does not discuss, but which has become an important focus in some more recent discussions of shame. (We also return to these cases when we explain the tension that we see in Williams' views about shame.) These are shame experienced in the face of attitudes with which the subject may not agree. If shame is a matter of power or advantage relative to an audience (rather than, say, direct negative self-assessment) then the subject need not agree with her audience that she is, for instance, ridiculous or contemptible in order to feel shame in the face of their judgment that she is so. A vivid illustration of this possibility is provided by the shame that members of marginalized or subordinated groups sometimes experience in the face of demeaning attitudes towards themselves that they do not share.[18] If shame is conceived as a form of self-assessment that does not essentially involve the gaze or appraisal of an other, shame experiences of this type can seem puzzling.[19] But if shame is understood as a felt recognition of a loss or disparity of power in relation to an audience (in this case, a disparity in the social power attached to group membership), then these cases are rendered intelligible as instances of shame. The ability to accommodate this class of shame experiences can thus be seen as a significant virtue of Williams' conception of shame.[20]

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femininity which itself is deleterious to women and puts them at a disadvantage. This would be one way in which the model could experience this situation as involving a *loss of power* relative to her audience.

[17] Williams notes that "[w]hat arouses shame ... is something that typically elicits from others contempt or derision or avoidance" (90), but this is only typically the case, not necessarily so, as the example of the model illustrates. It is typically the case simply because we are more likely to feel at a disadvantage in the face of a contemptuous attitude than in the face of an admiring one.

[18] To be clear, we refer here not merely to experiences of *being shamed* by members of dominant groups—that is, being the objects of their demeaning attitudes or behavior—but to experiences of *feeling shame* in the face of such attitudes or behavior. Shame experiences of this kind are widely attested in the testimony of members of marginalized groups, and are increasingly the focus of philosophical attention. Calhoun, for instance, has argued that "people who wholeheartedly condemn sexist or racist insults are still vulnerable to feeling shamed by those insults, and ... this is a perfectly natural response for a mature, well-formed agent to have" (2004: 137). See also Maibom (2010: 572) and Velleman (2001: 45).

[19] This family of views is illustrated by John Rawls and R Jay Wallace's conceptions of shame. For Rawls, shame arises "from the injury to our self-esteem owing to our not having or failing to exercise certain excellences" (1971: 444). In a similar vein, Wallace claims that "in feeling shame about an action, one thinks of the action as revealing the lack of an excellence that one values and aspires to possess; the basic evaluative stance here is that of desiring something as a good" (1994: 240). According to these and similar self-assessment accounts, there is no essential role for the perspective of another person at all. Cf. Kekes 1988: 282. On the controversy concerning the role of an audience in shame, see Bero (2019).

[20] Hence it may be surprising to find that Williams has been depicted in the shame literature as *not* being able to accommodate this class of shame experiences. See, for instance, Calhoun (2010: 135-137) and Maibom (2010: 574-5). We return to this point in §5.

The addition of another psychological mechanism allows Williams to extend his account of shame further still. He proposes that the other whose gaze is an essential element in shame need not be an actual other, but may instead be an imagined or internalized figure: "Even if shame and its motivations always involve in some way or other an idea of the gaze of another, it is important that for many of its operations the imagined gaze of an imagined other will do" (82). The imagined other may be a specific person—for instance, a childhood authority figure (222)—but it need not be; it can instead be a figure who is in various ways abstracted or idealized. In this way, "the imaginary observer can enter very early in the progression towards more generalised social shame" (82). This begins to explain how it is that shame can play an important role even in conduct undertaken outside of anyone else's view. As discussed in the following section, this feature of shame is crucial to Williams' effort to understand ethical life in terms of shame.

4 Ethical Shame

We have seen that Williams conceives of shame, at the most basic level, in non-moralized terms, as a felt disadvantage or loss of power, relative to another person who stands in the position of a "watcher or witness" (219). A significant virtue of this realistic and flexible conception is that it accommodates a wide range of shame phenomena (reaching beyond the cases specifically mentioned by Williams) in a plausible way.[21] But Williams, while seeking always to avoid the moralizing tendency that he criticizes, is nonetheless most interested in a particular class of shame experiences that, he argues, are central to *ethical* life.

Here two features of shame are crucial. The first, mentioned at the end of the previous section, is that shame can be experienced before an imagined or internalized other; it does not require an actual person to occupy the role of watcher or witness.[22] The second is that a given person need not be, and ordinarily is not, equally susceptible to shame before all possible audiences; in this regard, shame can be selective. As he writes elsewhere: "Sometimes you would be ashamed only in the eyes of a particular person ('I am glad my mother did not live to see this'); in other cases, you will be ashamed in the eyes of a stranger, or a crowd of strangers, but not of your old friends or your family" (1997: 28). Similarly, in *Shame and Necessity* he claims that people "need not be ashamed of being poorly viewed, if the view is that of an observer for whom they feel contempt" (82). Rather, under favorable circumstances people may develop shared standards and values—"some kinds of behaviour are admired, others accepted, others despised" (83)—and shame

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[21] To be clear, we do not mean here to endorse or defend Williams' account of shame. Our aim is rather to explain it and understand the features that make it plausible and attractive for Williams' purposes.

[22] In contrast, Williams characterizes embarrassment as a "kind of shame which arise[s] either from situations which involve actual spectators, or from the thought (in particular, the memory) of such situations" (1997: 28).

may come to be attached to the gaze or appraisal of others whose judgments and attitudes the subject respects. It is then versions of *these* others who are internalized, abstracted, and idealized in the course of developing the complex susceptibility to shame that is the mark of a mature member of a shame culture.

It is the combination of these two features that makes it possible for shame to play an important role in Williams' conception of ethical life.[23] Through the process of internalization, shame becomes more than merely a matter of saving face, while the selectivity of shame allows it to become associated with specific values and commitments, including ethical ones. Thus Williams explains that the internalized other before whom more complex and developed versions of shame are felt

> need not be a particular individual or, again, merely the representative of some socially identifiable group. *The other may be identified in ethical terms.* He … is conceived as one whose reactions I would respect; equally, he is conceived as someone who would respect those same reactions if they were appropriately directed to him (84, our emphasis).

This is the pivotal moment in Williams' deployment of shame, in which shame takes on *ethical* content. Having taken this step, Williams can then draw upon shame's unique resources and "mechanisms" (103) to develop an understanding of several important features of the ethical.

We noted earlier that the ethical, as Williams conceives of it, is closely connected to social expectations and shared standards of evaluation. At the same time, the ethical is about much more than merely maintaining an appearance of outward conformity, but is a matter of character and integrity. Williams emphasizes that this was true also for the Homeric Greeks.[24] The ethical thus bridges the domains of social expectation and inner conviction in a way that can be elusive. Williams proposes that the mechanisms of shame hold the key to

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[23] Some may wonder whether guilt is sufficiently similar to shame in these two respects to serve as the basis for a similar, and perhaps competing, account of the ethical. Even if guilt were similar in these respects, however, it would be unsuitable for Williams' purposes due to other differences mentioned earlier, including that guilt is, in Williams' view, more convoluted, less transparent, and more apt to be moralized—and indeed warped—by its close association with the morality system. These differences play an important role in Williams' explanation of the ethical in *Shame and Necessity*, as they also do in his explanation of the psychological impact of punishment in "Guilt, Shame, and the Structure of Punishment" (1997). Moreover, in the latter paper he indicates that shame differs from guilt in possessing the two features we have identified. For instance, he lists "different dimensions in which shame is indeterminate or variable" even though guilt is not. In particular, he points to the publicity of shame and claims that shame, unlike guilt, "implies the idea of a spectator of one's weakness, failure, or bad behaviour" and that it is "essential to shame that this spectator may be merely imagined, an internalized figure" (1997: 28). We thus interpret Williams as conceiving of shame and guilt in such a way that only shame, and not guilt, is suitable to play a central role in explaining the ethical. Thanks to András Szigeti for urging us to consider this.

[24] "Suppose someone invites us to believe that the Homeric Achilles, if assured he could get away with it, might have crept out at night and helped himself to the treasure that he had refused when it was offered by the embassy: then he has sadly misunderstood Achilles' character" (81).

understanding this complex relation between inner and outer in ethical thought and experience.

In the first place, shame becomes more than merely a matter of responding or conforming to others' expectations when the figure of the audience is internalized in the way just discussed. The trigger for shame is then not the gaze of any social other whatsoever, but rather the appraisal of a figure whose judgment the subject *respects*. The subject can "identify with this figure, and the respect is to that extent self-respect" (103), and acting out of shame, or out of a desire to avoid shame, becomes a matter not merely of prudence, but of integrity.[25]

At the same time, however, Williams is at pains to emphasize that even in these circumstances the internalized other does not "merely shrink into a hanger" for the subject's own ethical values, and thus drop out of the equation. Rather, the other retains its identity as an *other*: it is "potentially somebody rather than nobody, and somebody other than me" who can "provide the focus of real social expectations, of how I shall live if I act in one way rather than another, of how my actions and reactions will alter my relations to the world about me" (84).[26]

In addition to shedding light on the special way in which inner and outer dimensions are united in the ethical, Williams proposes that when the internalized audience comes to be an object of respect and identification, then the "structures of shame" can serve to "give a conception of one's ethical identity" (93) and "of what one is and of how one is related to others" (94; cf. 102, 103). At the same time, because the internalized figure represents a genuine other who is connected to social expectations and more generally to the subject's social reality, the process of internalization tends to involve the inculcation of shared standards and values. Williams observes that shame, together with indignation or a sense of honor, are "shared sentiments with similar objects [that] serve to bind people together in a community of feeling" (80). Thus, the structures of shame, are "essentially interactive between people, and they serve to bond as much as to divide" (81). In sum, shame can function both as an important source of ethical self-knowledge and as a force that fosters ethical community and shared ethical sensibility.

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[25] This is related to what Williams calls the 'egoism' charge against shame cultures. If shame involves being anxious or afraid of being found out or of being seen in a certain way by others, then one might worry that shame is necessarily egoistic or narcissistic. Williams argues that this worry can be easily refuted by appealing to an *internalised* other since "[i]f everything depended on the fear of discovery, the motivations of shame would not be internalised at all" (81-82). In this paper, we are not concerned with this charge although much of what Williams says about shame is an attempt, in part, to disabuse us of the notion that shame is nothing but an egoistic concern for public opinion.

[26] Calhoun questions whether Williams can adequately capture the "distinctively social character of shame" (2004: 134). She worries that by "trac[ing] the power to shame to the shamer's *mirroring* to a large extent the agent's own evaluative perspective" (2004: 135), Williams causes the figure of the internalized other to "merely shrink into a hanger" for the subject's own ethical values, despite his insistence to the contrary. Calhoun concludes that "[t]o 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." (2004: 145). In this paper, we take no position on the merits of this objection, though we will take issue in §5 with a different aspect of Calhoun's reading of Williams..

Return now to the question that launched Williams' investigation of shame: the distinctive force of practical injunctions of the sort faced by Ajax and Oedipus—injunctions that were left out of account by the Kantian division of categorical versus hypothetical. The "mechanisms of shame," Williams suggests, provide the right kinds of materials to make sense of the special force of these injunctions (103). In an ethically well-developed subject, the force of shame is more than merely hypothetical, because it is connected to standards and to an evaluative perspective that the subject respects and identifies with; at the same time, the force of shame is not categorical, because it is firmly grounded in the particular social context and sensibilities of the subject. As Williams summarizes: "By giving through the emotions a sense of who one is and of what one hopes to be, [shame] mediates between act, character, and consequence, and also between ethical demands and the rest of life" (102).

What thus emerges from Williams' discussion is not only an ambitious alternative conception of our ethical thought and experience in terms of shame, but also an ambitious ethical reclamation of shame itself. As Williams remarks, from the perspective of the modern "morality system," shame often appears unprincipled, unruly, and generally more likely to disrupt or undermine ethical thought and practice than to support it. "In the scheme of Kantian oppositions," he observes, "shame is on the bad side of all the lines"—superficial, egoistic, and above all heteronomous, since "I lose face or save it only in the eyes of others" (78-79). Shame's essentially social orientation may appear to put the subject at the mercy of the evaluative perspectives of others, impairing her ability to exercise her own evaluative judgment and to function as an autonomous agent. But Williams' account redeems shame, suggesting instead that shame can serve as the most authentic and reliable voice of the subject's autonomous self—a self which is, in his view, inherently socially situated and constituted. The distinctive ethical injunctions of shame are, he concludes, "internal, grounded in the *ēthos*, the projects, the individual nature of the agent, and in the way he conceives the relation of his life to other people's" (103).

5 Our Challenge: Tension in Williams

There is a tension between the ambitious and central role in our ethical life that Williams attributes to shame and the rudimentary conception of shame as a felt loss of power. In essence, the tension is this: In order to play its assigned role in Williams' account, it appears that shame would need to become somehow exclusively, or at least *distinctively*, connected to the ethical; but in light of the broad scope of shame under the loss-of-power conception, such a special connection seems unrealistic.

To see this, recall that in Williams' conception, shame registers the subject's loss or disparity of power relative to an audience, consisting either of actual other people or of internal figures who may be abstracted and idealized. It is consistent

with this account, and confirmed by the wide range of experiences that are intelligible to us as instances of shame, that various and quite disparate dimensions of power or advantage can serve as the material for shame. In the elementary case of nakedness, it is the simple fact of exposure that is experienced as disadvantageous; in the case of bullying or abuse, the relevant dimension of power may be more concrete, consisting in the brute physical inability to defend or assert oneself. In addition, as Williams argues, in certain cases the relevant dimension of power may itself be moralized, as in the case of a subject who feels shame in the face of a respected other's *moral* disapproval. These examples illustrate the many different dimensions of power or advantage to which shame can attach itself.

This range of shame experiences poses a challenge for Williams' claims that the "structures of shame" can "give a conception of one's ethical identity" (93), and that shame "mediates … between ethical demands and the rest of life" (102). We might ask: Why should shame be expected to give a conception of the subject's *ethical* identity, rather than simply a conception of the salient or significant ways in which she is subject, in a wide variety of different dimensions, to the power of various observers? Or similarly, why should shame be expected to mediate between *ethical* demands and the rest of life, rather than simply between the demands of relative power or position and the rest of life?

Williams' account suggests how ethical content can enter into the mechanisms of shame, but it does not suggest that other dimensions of relative power or advantage would be *excluded* or displaced. Nor could it, without sacrificing psychological plausibility. After all, a subject who is liable to shame in the ethical domain can equally be liable to shame in other domains—for instance, relating to bodily privacy, to standards of appearance and attractiveness, to athletic or aesthetic abilities, and so on. Once allowance is made for the basic nature and broad scope of shame, it becomes difficult to see how, for a subject with a normal and familiar range of susceptibilities, shame could help to locate her *ethical* identity in particular, as distinct for example from her other (social) identities, or how it could mediate between *ethical* demands and the rest of life, precisely because her shame will draw much of its material from the rest of life.

This tension is not irresolvable, and there are resources within Williams' account to resolve it, but this raises an interpretive dilemma: *Either* we can read Williams as claiming a tight relationship between shame and the ethical so that *all* shame experiences are grounded in, and thus reveal, our ethical commitments and identities; *or* we can accept a weakening of the relationship between shame and the ethical, with the result that resources beyond our shame experiences will be required to reveal our ethical identities and lend force to ethical demands. Ultimately, we suggest that the second horn is preferable, but in one sense it does not really matter, because either option will require a significant reassessment of the connection between shame and what we ordinarily understand as the ethical,

revealing several central claims about shame in *Shame and Necessity* to be less ambitious than they may appear.

Before examining the two horns of the dilemma we briefly consider, and reject, one attempt to escape the dilemma: One might argue that Williams need not accept that the cases of shame we have appealed to are indeed shame experiences, insisting instead that some additional feature must be present for these emotional responses to count as shame.[27] However, this is not open to Williams given his basic conception of shame: "In contrast to guilt … [a]ll that is necessary [for shame] is that [the observer] should perceive that very situation or characteristic that the subject feels to be an inadequacy, failing, or loss of power" (221).[28] We therefore proceed on the assumption that the cases upon which we rely must be accepted under Williams' view as genuine shame experiences.

5.1 First Horn: Shame as Tightly Connected to the Ethical

On the first horn of the interpretive dilemma, we read Williams as holding that *all* shame, at least in ethically well-developed subjects, will reveal our ethical identities, impose ethical demands, and so on. Readers sympathetic with Williams' broader naturalistic project might be immediately inclined to resist an interpretation of *Shame and Necessity* which connects shame so tightly to the ethical. However (as we mentioned in footnote 3), a version of this interpretation is prominent in the shame literature.

There are two versions of this interpretation available. The first version draws on some additional resources within Williams' discussion. In particular, Williams conceives of ethical shame in terms of an internalized other whose reactions the subject respects, and his claims about shame's role in ethical life could be understood in relation to this feature. According to this reading, it is shame before a (typically internalized) other whom the subject respects and identifies with that is claimed to give the subject a conception of her ethical identity and to mediate between ethical demands and the rest of life.[29]

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[27] For instance, according to Rawls and Wallace, shame involves a negative self-assessment that one endorses (see footnote 19). The merits of this sort of account are not our topic, but in our view, this approach risks committing the 'moralistic fallacy' identified by D'Arms and Jacobson (2000), which consists in illicitly equating the fittingness of an emotion with its moral appropriateness. That is, we should not collapse the distinction between shame that can be accurately attributed to a subject and shame that we think is appropriate or justifiable for the agent to feel.

[28] Moreover, we suspect that Williams would not want to be forced to draw a sharp distinction between shame and embarrassment, as he thinks that embarrassment may be a mild variant of shame. (See also his footnote about embarrassment in his (1997: 28) mentioned in our footnote 22.) In the context of claiming some cases of shame "are very near to needing an actual watcher, without quite doing so", Williams gives the example of "stumbl[ing] over my shoelaces in the street, trying to recover falling packages, knock[ing] off my own hat". He claims that he would experience "some mild variant of shame or embarrassment" (221).

[29] On this reading, a further assumption would be required for shame to perform its assigned functions; namely that the mechanisms of this sort of shame are sufficiently transparent to the subject, or that they could be made so through self-examination, such that the subject can clearly distinguish between this sort of shame and other kinds of shame. This assumption is questionable,

Chesire Calhoun's influential interpretation of Williams follows this line. According to her understanding of his view, "ethically well-developed agents ... choose whose standards to respect and thus whose eyes have the power to shame. ... They care how they appear because they have a general respect for the other's evaluative evaluative commitments, skill at moral reasoning, and perceptiveness. That general respect grounds the power to shame" (2004: 133).[30]

Calhoun understands this to mean that the ethically well-developed agent will feel shame *only* in the eyes of others whose ethical judgment they respect. This becomes clear, for instance, when she characterizes Williams as rehabilitating shame in the face of the objection that shame is heteronomous and "incompatible with autonomous moral judgement" by "claiming that mature agents *only* feel shame in the eyes of others whose ethical reactions they respect" (2004: 129, emphasis added). This reading has the important advantage of furnishing a compelling justification for Williams' more ambitious-sounding claims about shame's ethical role. If the ethically well-developed agent only feels shame that is grounded in her respect for others' ethical judgments, then there is a clear sense in which shame can serve as a source of knowledge of her ethical identity and as a mediator between ethical and other demands.

This reading, however, carries a steep cost. As Calhoun complains, by grounding our liability to shame in our respect for others, the view that she attributes to Williams has the unfortunate result that "we must discount as irrational or immature much of the shame suffered by socially disesteemed populations—racial minorities, women, the poor, lesbians and gay men" (2004: 135). But this line of objection is somewhat perplexing, in light of our prior argument that it is one of the virtues of Williams' loss-of-power conception that it can account for precisely the sorts of cases that concern Calhoun. Given Williams' claim that "[t]he other *may* be identified in ethical terms ... as one whose reactions I would respect" (84; our emphasis) and given his broad and realistic understanding of the nature and dynamics of shame, it is uncharitable to interpret Williams as claiming that we *only* feel shame in the eyes of those we respect. But we can see how this distortion results from taking, at face value, some of Williams' more ambitious-sounding claims about shame's ethical role, and thereby illustrates the tension that we identify in *Shame and Necessity*.

So let us turn to the second version of the interpretation according to which all shame, at least in ethically well-developed subjects, will reveal our ethical identities. In this version of the first horn of the interpretive dilemma, we read Williams as broadening the notion of the ethical so that we can regard all shame before a respected, internalized figure as 'ethical' shame, and thus as revealing our

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as Williams seems to recognize (see his reference to the "ambivalence and possible betrayals of shame" (97)).

[30] Calhoun notes that the others we respect "can shame us with their criticisms [even] when we disagree with their evaluation of us" (2004: 133). But this is only, on her reading of Williams, because of the general respect we have for their ethical judgements.

ethical identities, imposing ethical demands, and so on. Suppose you are playing an informal basketball game with your colleagues and although you love playing, your abilities leave much to be desired. Being unable to play as well as your colleagues, you feel shame. Suppose that this shame experience reveals nothing other than your desire for a certain level of athletic ability as well as your desire not to look poorly to your colleagues. On the interpretation we are considering, we nonetheless regard your shame as revealing your 'ethical' commitments and your 'ethical' identity.

This interpretation would also construe shame experienced by "socially disteemed populations" as revealing their ethical commitments. For instance, suppose that a woman feels shame about her body for failing to meet the dominant, mainstream beauty ideal. According to this interpretation, this shame experience reveals her commitment to the mainstream beauty ideal and the notion of the 'ethical' is understood so broadly as to count this aesthetic commitment as one of her 'ethical' commitments.[31]

We note some problems with this second version of the interpretation on which all shame reveals ethical commitments and ethical identities, broadly construed. As an interpretive matter, it seems inconsistent with Williams' characterizations (in *Shame and Necessity* and elsewhere) of the ethical as comprising matters of responsibility, honesty, justice, and the like, in contrast with cultural and personal aspirations and dispositions—concerning fame, beauty, etc.—that are valuable, but do not belong to the domain of the ethical.

Moreover, construing the ethical so broadly that all shame reveals ethical identities drains of all meaning Williams's own proposal that the internalized other might be "identified in ethical terms" (84) rather than otherwise; according to this interpretation, shame before a respected, internalized other just is ethical shame, regardless of the terms in which the other may be identified.

In addition, on this reading, Williams' claims that shame can "give a conception of one's ethical identity" (93) and "mediate[ ] ... between ethical demands and the rest of life" (102) cannot be taken at face value. That is, they cannot be understood as claims about a connection between shame and what we ordinarily understand to be the ethical—they are instead claims relating shame to a much broader and more basic dimension of our characters and social lives. From the point of view of understanding what we ordinarily understand to be the ethical, these claims are thus rendered less ambitious to the point of triviality. What connection there may be between shame and the ethical in particular (understood in the ordinary sense) is, on this reading, simply not addressed in *Shame and Necessity*. Hence, we should

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[31] Perhaps one's commitment to the mainstream beauty ideal can be regarded as an *ethical* commitment even when the ethical is construed more narrowly. After all, this aesthetic commitment is plausibly the result of a commitment to patriarchy (even if this commitment is implicit and not endorsed after critical reflection). But even if some commitments to certain aesthetic ideals count as ethical commitments, there will be other clear-cut cases of shame (such as shame that reveals one's commitment to a certain athletic ideal) that are not ethical in character if the ethical is to be construed narrowly.

not accept this interpretation on which Williams' most ambitious-sounding claims about shame and the ethical are vindicated, in a sense, by definition, by using a much broader understanding of the 'ethical.'

In sum, on this horn of the interpretive dilemma, we considered that all shame, at least in ethically well-developed subjects, will reveal our ethical identities, impose ethical demands, and so on. We examined two different ways of preserving this tight connection between shame and the ethical. The first version claimed that we feel shame only in the eyes of others whose ethical judgment we respect. The second version construed the notion of the ethical so broadly that all shame becomes 'ethical' shame. Neither of these are viable interpretations since Williams does not think that the other must be identified in ethical terms.

5.2 Second Horn: Shame as Contingently Connected to the Ethical

On the second horn of the interpretive dilemma, we preserve the commonsense notion of the ethical as comprising matters of responsibility, honesty, justice, and the like. But although this notion of the ethical is broader than the notion associated with the morality system, it is not as broad as the operations of shame. On this horn, we deny that all shame experiences reveal our ethical identities; rather we accept that only some shame experiences reveal our ethical identities. Hence, on this horn, there is only a contingent connection between the shame and the ethical.

There are also two versions of this second horn of our interpretive dilemma. First, we could claim that there is a distinctive kind of shame—called 'ethical shame'—which is conceived as shame in terms of an internalized other whose reactions the subject respects, and this ethical shame reveals our ethical identities. This version is similar to the first version of the first horn of the interpretive dilemma but does not claim that all shame is ethical shame. Hence, on this reading, we concede that ethically well-developed subjects may be susceptible to other sorts of shame. The proposal here is that such subjects can still derive a conception of their ethical identities, and identify ethical demands, by focusing exclusively on the shame they feel before others whom they respect.

However, it seems to us that the scope of this type of shame—that is, shame involving a respected other—is still much broader than the ethical. This is because while we are prone to internalize a respected moral authority, we are also prone to internalize respected figures who appraise us according to a wide variety of other standards that are vitally important to us: standards of physical appearance, professional competence, aesthetic taste, athletic prowess, and so on. And this means that even if we focus narrowly on shame before internalized, respected figures, such shame will not be well suited to give us a conception of our ethical identities or mediate between ethical demands and the rest of life, because such shame is liable to—and personal experience attests, very often does—concern itself with much more than just the ethical.

An example may help to show that this phenomenon—of shame that is felt before an internalized, respected figure but is *not* ethical in character—is not merely a hypothetical or marginal possibility, but a common and indeed important factor in our social lives. Imagine a healthy, mature, well-socialized agent who has developed a sense of shame in connection with the ethical in the way that Williams describes. So she sometimes feels shame because she fails to meet real social expectations represented by an internalized other, identified in ethical terms, whose reactions she respects. Moreover, she is not typically ashamed of being poorly viewed if the view is that of an observer for whom she feels contempt.

Now suppose that this healthy, mature, and well-socialized agent is a member of a marginalized group—say, a woman of colour living under dominant ideologies of patriarchy and white supremacy.[32] Under these circumstances significant social power is attached to gender and race categories, and so, as the loss-of-power conception would predict (and as we have already noted in §3), marginalised people can be made to feel shame in response to demeaning attitudes or even to being stereotyped on the basis of the relevant features.[33] Our agent may thus be susceptible to shame in connection with her body size or shape; with being seen to be 'too bossy'; or with preferences and choices that might be regarded as connected to her race (for example, imagine that she is a black woman and feels shame when a colleague remarks that he is not surprised that she likes fried chicken).[34]

Finally, suppose that she has internalised some of these oppressive norms and that her attitudes towards them are not—or at least, not entirely—critical; that is, she has come to accept and endorse, at least to some extent—and perhaps implicitly though not explicitly—some sexist and racist standards and attitudes as they apply to herself. The result of this is that she is susceptible to shame in connection with these norms that is grounded in the gaze of an internalized figure whose appraisals she respects and identifies with. Call these shame experiences *oppressive shame*.[35]

Oppressive shame is not merely a theoretical possibility; it is, sadly, a common and pervasive feature of oppressive ideological systems, and one important mechanism through which those systems are established and maintained. It thus

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[32] Indeed, Sally Haslanger (2012) defends definitions of woman and man as well as what it is to be racialized in terms of this kind of systematic subordination and privilege.

[33] One might argue that when we focus on mature and well-socialized individuals, we see that they will be discerning about which other they internalize as an ethical other. Hence, mature agents will be insensitive to the gaze of those whose attitudes and responses they do not respect and so will not be susceptible to oppressive shame. But we find this objection problematic because it implies that subjects who experience such shame cannot be fully mature or well-socialized. Without delving more deeply into this issue, in the face of testimony to the contrary by members of marginalized groups, and in light of widespread recognition of the phenomenon of internalized oppression, this strikes us uncharitable and presumptuous, as well as simply implausible. Cf. Calhoun's observation quoted above in footnote 18.

[34] For potential sources of the stereotype that black Americans love fried chicken, see Demby (2013).

[35] The phrase "oppressive shame" is used by Aness Webster (unpublished). Heidi Maibom (2010) uses the phrase "persecution shame", but to the extent that persecution is narrower than oppression, we have opted for "oppressive shame".

makes concrete the tension between Williams' basic conception of shame and the role of shame in illuminating the ethical. For our imagined agent, even focusing solely on shame involving a respected, internalized figure cannot provide a conception of her ethical identity or mediate between ethical demands and the rest of life, because she has (at least) two such figures: one representing the ethical and one representing the norms of the oppressive ideologies to which she is subject.[36]

We have identified a particular type of shame—oppressive shame—which is not ethical in character and does not reveal ethical identities even though it is conceived in terms of an internalized other whose reactions the subject respects. This shows that we cannot establish a tight connection between shame conceived in terms of an internalized and respected other and the ethical. Hence, we are left with a weaker version of the interpretation according to which shame only plays a contingent role in revealing our ethical identities. In this second version of the interpretation, shame can, and often does, become attached to a broader range of social standards and expectations, only some of which belong to the domain of the ethical. This has the advantage of preserving a narrower and more commonsensical notion of the ethical that is consistent with the way Williams generally understands and uses the notion. Moreover, it allows us to say that oppressive shame, for instance, need *not* reveal *ethical* commitments and identities.

The tension that we identified requires reconciling Williams' conception of what shame is and the seemingly ambitious role that he assigns to shame in ethical life. The proposal here (and our preferred one) is to resolve this tension by reinterpreting several of Williams' claims about shame's role in ethical life in a less ambitious way, weakening the connection between shame and the ethical and recognizing that significant resources other than shame will be required in order fully to understand the relevant features of ethical life.

According to this proposal, we should understand Williams to be saying that shame and its structures can, under appropriate circumstances, *help* or *contribute to* the development of a conception of one's ethical identity, and can *help* or *contribute to* mediating between ethical demands and the rest of life. These seem like

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[36] One might object that oppressive shame *does* provide a conception of one's *ethical identity* because the root of oppressive shame is *not* failing to conform to the standards set by dominant (oppressive) ideologies, as we have been assuming. Rather, the root of oppressive shame might be a certain kind of moral failing; perhaps one feels shame for being susceptible to this kind of shame and not having the strength, conviction, or courage to react by being indignant or resentful, or perhaps not reacting at all, but dismissing the shaming act as morally problematic and oppressive. If this is the only content of all oppressive shame, then oppressive shame would be a second-order shame and more importantly, a kind of shame that mediates between ethical demands and the rest of life. However, for this argument to succeed, one would have to show that *all* cases of oppressive shame involve this kind of moral failing. In addition, this objection implies that there is a first-order shame to which oppressive shame is a second-order response. But this first-order shame is grounded in the gaze of an internalized figure who represents—not ethical norms, but—the norms of oppressive ideologies. Webster (unpublished) proposes a novel account of this kind of shame, focusing on shame experience in response to (subtler cases of) racism. She claims that shame can be explained by inability to choose when one's stigmatized racialized identity is made salient where this is not a moral failing, but an inability caused by racism and oppression.

appropriate and plausible claims, given the loss-of-power conception of shame, for the reasons we have explored. Because dimensions of power other than the ethical can and do equally serve as the material for shame (including shame before a respected, internalized other), shame alone cannot, at least for ordinary human agents, pick out our ethical identities in particular, and cannot mediate between ethical demands and the rest of life. Significant resources of some kind, in addition to shame, are needed to achieve these ends. (What those resources might be is a topic for another occasion.)

So reinterpreted, Williams' claims about shame and the ethical remain novel and vital. For instance, the way that he develops the idea of the internalized figure continues to raise a significant challenge to the claim that shame is somehow essentially and problematically heteronomous. But at the same time, his account is rendered significantly less ambitious in two ways: first, by giving up on the idea that there is a *distinctive* connection of some kind between shame and the ethical, one that was meant to be different from the connection between shame and non-ethical systems of social expectations (like standards of physical attractiveness or various oppressive ideologies); and second, by giving up on the related idea that shame on its own would, in virtue of its special connection to the ethical, be able to fulfill certain distinctive key roles and functions in ethical life.

6 Conclusion

We have argued that, given the ambitious agenda that Williams sets for shame in his conception of ethical life, he risks asking too much of shame. This is because shame, as Williams himself conceives it, cannot play the leading role that he (at least sometimes) seems to assign it in embodying our ethical identities and mediating between ethical demands and the rest of life. The simple reason for this is that shame concerns itself with much more than just the ethical, and so is not well positioned to mediate between the ethical and other domains. For instance, among other things shame can be and is used as a tool of power, and can embody and enforce relations that are asymmetrical, alienating, and divisive. An agent in whom shame operates in these ways cannot rely on shame to give her a conception of her ethical identity or to mediate between ethical demands and the rest of life—she will instead need other resources in order to distinguish between shame's ethical and non-ethical workings. To think otherwise would appear to require the assumption that shame somehow is naturally allied with the ethical or excludes the non-ethical; but to make such an assumption would look very much like a manifestation of the kind of moralizing tendency in psychology that Williams was otherwise at great pains to denounce and avoid. For this reason, we feel that our interpretive proposal is in tune with Williams' larger concerns and commitments.

There is also another reason to think that a more modest rehabilitation along these lines actually best captures the spirit of the Williamsian view of shame. We find it to be uncharacteristic of Williams to observe that "[i]n the scheme of

Kantian oppositions, shame is on the bad side of all the lines," and then to resist this by advancing arguments to put shame back on the *good* side of all those lines. The more characteristically Williamsian response, in our view—and the more appropriate one in this instance—is to be unperturbed that shame should fall on the bad side of all the Kantian lines, because *those* lines have not been drawn in the right places.[37]

Perhaps this might lead one to worry that on our reading of Williams he leaves shame "on the bad side of all the lines," and thus does not actually rehabilitate shame at all. This is too quick, however. Williams' account retains rich materials with which to understand shame as playing a constructive and even an important role in ethical life. The difference that our preferred interpretation makes is that this role will be a supporting and contingent one, rather than a central or distinctive one. We are optimistic about this more modest sort of rehabilitation that consists in showing how shame *can*, in appropriate circumstances, become attached to ethical values and so play an important if supporting role in revealing our ethical identities and mediating between ethical and other demands. We have tried to show that without taking undue license, Williams himself can be read as offering a more modest rehabilitation of this kind.[38]

There may also be a more general lesson to be drawn from this engagement with Williams—though we can do no more than offer this as a suggestion here. The more general lesson is that the persistent tendency among moral theorists to seek to discover some kind of *special* affinity between shame and morality or the ethical is to be regarded with suspicion. Moreover, we suspect that it has been a mistake to suppose that shame is in need of "rehabilitation," in this sense. Like Williams, with his loss-of-power conception, we are inclined to see shame as a quite basic and rudimentary emotional response that manifests in a wide variety of contexts and embodies a wide variety of concerns—ranging from the ethical to the merely personal to the quite superficial. We fail to see why shame is a more suitable target for rehabilitation than other relatively basic emotions, or why we should expect shame, more than other similarly basic emotions, to be able to play a central role in embodying and revealing our ethical identities. That is, we think that there is good reason to be satisfied with a more modest rehabilitation.

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[37] Indeed, Williams adopts the more characteristic response elsewhere, observing: "It is precisely what Kantians would call the heteronomy of shame (or rather its indeterminate degree of heteronomy), taken together with its inherent impurity, which give it its ethical significance" (1997: 29).

[38] To be clear, Williams suggests that shame is thought to fall on the bad side of all the lines because its values are superficial, heteronomous, and egoistic. We agree that shame does not have any of these characteristics predominantly or inherently; but we are equally skeptical of efforts to show that it has any special affinity for the opposite characteristics (depth, autonomy, respect for others, etc.).

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