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Shame and moral autonomy

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Abstract

Does shame have a place in a mature moral agent's psychology? Does it play a useful and positive role in morality? One skepticism that disputes shame's compatibility with mature moral agency or its being a useful moral emotion is that shame appears heteronomous in nature: We experience shame not because we have behaved badly by our own moral standards, but because we have been reproved by other people and suffered an injury to our social image. To mitigate this skepticism, this paper will propose a way in which we can reconcile shame with moral autonomy. Specifically, I will argue that a mature moral agent is vulnerable to shame because she cares a great deal about morality, and possesses certain character traits that dispose her to take others' moral criticisms seriously. Occurrences of shame therefore are not always a threat to a moral agent's autonomous moral judgment.

KEYWORDS
intellectual humility, moral autonomy, moral virtue, open-mindedness, shame

1 | INTRODUCTION

Does shame have a place in the psychology of a mature moral agent? Does it play a useful and positive role in morality? One skepticism that disputes shame's compatibility with mature moral agency or its being a useful moral emotion is that shame seems to be heteronomous: We experience shame not because we have behaved badly by our own moral standards and commitments, but because we have been reproved by other people and suffered an injury to our social image. In this view, shame seems to be responsive to the evaluative standards of others, as opposed to our own when we feel shame in the face of criticism that we reject. As Cheshire Calhoun (2004) notes, '[T]he problem with shame … is that vulnerability to being shamed appears to signal the agent's failure to sustain her own autonomous judgment about what morality requires' (p. 128). Given that shame may be heteronomous in

the above ways, a mature moral agent would have no need for the emotion, and should strive to be 'thick-skinned' in the face of criticisms with which she disagrees.

Not everyone, however, shares this skepticism about shame's role in morality. Calhoun (2004), for example, thinks that moral agents should feel shame over immoral behavior. She even goes so far as to argue that shame resulting from criticisms which an agent rejects, can be, under certain circumstances, a sign of moral maturity. In order to establish these positive claims about shame—that it has a place in the psychological makeup of a mature moral agent, and that it is a useful moral emotion—a number of options are available. One is to deny that shame is heteronomous and to show that the emotion is ultimately tied to the person's self-assessment (e.g., Deonna et al., 2012). Another is to maintain that some instances of shame can be heteronomous but to establish that these instances need not threaten a moral agent's autonomous moral judgment (e.g., Calhoun, 2004; Williams, 2008). In this paper, I will propose an argument that falls under this second route to reconcile shame with autonomy. Specifically, I will argue that a mature moral agent is vulnerable to shame because she cares a great deal about morality, and as a consequence of such care, possesses certain character traits that dispose her to take others' moral criticisms seriously, whether she agrees with them or not.

The paper will be structured as follows. Using Calhoun's discussion of shame as a springboard, the first section will review and assess some strategies for reconciling shame with autonomy, including her 'co-participant' account that construes the power to shame in terms of 'practical weight'. Next, I will identify some problems with her account. The third section will outline some of the central features of mature moral agency, which I argue in the fourth section make someone who possesses them vulnerable to shame. I will further show why such vulnerability does not threaten the agent's autonomy, and how my account can resolve the difficulties of Calhoun's.

2 | THREE WAYS TO BE AUTONOMOUS

To get a sense of how we might reconcile shame with moral autonomy, it is instructive to begin with Calhoun's discussion and subsequent rejection of two general strategies that attempt to show shame's compatibility with autonomy (2004). The first, *The Shame of the Moral Pioneer Strategy*, holds that a moral agent feels shame only when she fails to live up to moral standards which she has set for herself (p. 129; See also Taylor, 1985 and Kekes, 1998). To be shamed, the agent must see 'in her own eyes' that she has violated moral norms which she endorses and holds. Thus, a mother who does not think that there is anything wrong with breastfeeding her infant in public will not feel shame despite gazes from other people; she does not worry about being censured for public indecency because she does not believe she has violated this norm. On this strategy, only the agent's moral standards matter, and only she has the power to shame. She cares about what others think only to the extent that she shares the moral and evaluative standards they hold.

The second strategy, which Calhoun calls *The Shame of the Discriminating Social Actor Strategy*, holds that a moral agent feels shame only when she is criticized by people whose 'ethical reactions' she respects (p. 129; see also Williams, 2008). Unlike the previous strategy, the power to shame does not rest solely with the agent but includes other people. Not everyone, however, has such power: Only those who are worthy of the agent's respect—be it for reasons of their dedication and commitment to morality, reasoning skills, breadth of moral knowledge, and depth of understanding—have that power. The agent cares about how she would appear in the eyes of these people, and is vulnerable to their shaming criticisms, even if she disagrees with their evaluation of her. But the fact that she cares about what others think does not threaten her autonomy, since she decides who is worthy of respect and hence, who can shame her.

Calhoun rejects both of these strategies. She objects to the first because it fails to explain the social nature of shame. According to her, an agent who only feels shame in her own eyes does not really care about what other people think of her. Even when other people have the power to shame her, it is only because they hold similar moral standards to hers and not because they can make her feel being held in contempt. What ultimately matters

for shame, on this strategy, is the agent's own moral standards. Indeed, as its name suggests, the strategy allows for the agent to be a moral pioneer whose thinking is so advanced (or idiosyncratic) that no one else possesses the same set of norms. In such a case, only she has the power to shame. If she behaves badly, she would feel shame even though no one else points out she has done anything wrong. But this, Calhoun argues, goes against the idea that shame is 'intrinsically tied to the thought of social others' actual or imagined contempt' (p. 131). It fails to explain why people who are shamed have fears of being 'ridiculed, made the subject of gossip, subjected to demeaning treatment, and of being ostracized or abandoned' (p. 131). Because the pioneer's shame is disassociated from both contexts of others' contempt and such fears, the strategy fails to explain the social nature of shame.

According to Calhoun, the second strategy does not fare better in addressing this objection. Recall that the agent is shamed only by the people she respects. But her judgment of who deserves respect, Calhoun argues, stems from her own moral and evaluative standards. Even though other people can shame her, the power to do so comes ultimately from her as the agent. Contempt from others therefore does not figure centrally in shame, and has no intrinsic tie with the emotion. Another problem with this strategy, Calhoun contends, is that it cannot explain why an agent would still feel shame when she disagrees with others' criticisms and their moral standards, an advantage it supposedly enjoys over the first strategy. If the agent rejects these standards, she would, in Calhoun's view, no longer respect those who hold them, thus stripping them of their power to shame. People who do not share the agent's moral standards turn out to be incapable of shaming her.

How then can we reconcile shame with autonomy? According to Calhoun, both strategies fail to explain the social nature of shame because they ultimately appeal to the agent's moral or evaluative standards. They mistakenly assume that an opinion has 'shaming weight' only when the agent 'at some level accept [sic] it as true' (p. 139). The key to reconcile the two, she argues, is to construe shaming weight in non-epistemic terms. Calhoun proposes that a mature moral agent is shamed only when she is criticized by a co-participant in a shared practice of morality expressing a representative viewpoint (p. 139). For her, social groups are formed when there is something that people want to do together, for example, being married, playing in the community band, teaching philosophy, etc.[1] To generate social norms for each group, its members—that is, its co-participants—would have to articulate and negotiate shared understandings about what behaviors are permissible, obligatory and supererogatory, and ways to interpret basic moral obligations and to resolve moral conflicts (p. 140). Given this critical role, when a co-participant criticizes another, and the criticism is shared by any number of other co-participants, it carries 'practical weight': It impresses 'upon the person that she has disappointed not just one individual's expectations but what some "we" expected of her' (p. 140.). For Calhoun, this practical construal of shaming weight is central to shame.

Calhoun's account reconciles shame with autonomy by allowing the moral agent to be shamed without giving up her autonomous moral judgments. She feels shame not because she agrees with the criticism of her critic (and thereby thinks that she has actually transgressed), but because her critic, by virtue of a shared moral practice, is someone recognized by the agent as a fellow participant who holds a representative and authoritative viewpoint. As such, Calhoun's account has the resources to overcome the problems faced by the two strategies that she has taken to task. First, it can explain shame's social nature by construing the emotion as the agent's response to fellow participants in their shared moral practice. She fears being ridiculed and ostracized because she cares about what her co-participants think. Second, Calhoun's account can explain how an agent can feel shame even if she rejects the moral standards of her critic. Whether someone is a co-participant is determined *not* by the agent's moral standards but by the moral practice that they share. A person can therefore be a co-participant—someone with the power to shame—and yet hold moral standards that differ from the agent's.

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[1]According to Calhoun, a person can belong to multiple social groups, given that there are different things she wants to do.

3 | PROBLEMS WITH CALHOUN'S ACCOUNT

Calhoun's way of reconciling shame with autonomy is innovative. However, I will argue that she errs in characterizing the 'weight' central to shame as practical in nature. By identifying the difficulties in her account, I will show that there are good reasons to think that shaming weight is epistemic in nature instead.

One problem with Calhoun's account is that criticisms made by co-participants expressing representative viewpoints do not always have shaming weight.[2] Suppose an agent feels shame because she is criticized by a co-participant on a certain issue. It is conceivable, however, that when the *same* co-participant criticizes her on another issue, she may fail to feel shame. In the latter instance, the criticism may, for instance, be so utterly absurd as to be taken seriously, or may challenge a norm which the agent holds with conviction. To use Calhoun's example, a professor may experience shame when her colleague criticizes her for being 'manipulative of colleagues or insensitive to student needs' (p. 141), a viewpoint that the rest of the faculty holds. Suppose now that the same colleague criticizes her for not wearing glasses when she lectures because she does not look professorial. Even if the other faculty members in her department share this outlandish criticism, the professor need not feel shame. From her perspective, this complaint is simply too unreasonable and irrelevant to effective teaching. Far from feeling shame, she will likely feel annoyed and bewildered instead, and stand prepared to defend her classroom appearance.

A related worry is that Calhoun's account cannot explain why a moral agent would *cease* to feel shame despite the contempt of her co-participants. Suppose as before that the professor feels shame upon being criticized by a co-participant for being manipulative and insensitive. As she has had time to process the criticism—as a morally mature agent—she realizes that this attack on her character is false and unfair; she is no more manipulative than her colleagues. In light of this realization, even though her colleague continues to be critical of her, she no longer feels shame because she has now rejected the criticism. In fact, she is now more likely to feel resentment towards the co-participant, given that she views their criticism as being utterly unfair.

A third problem is that criticism from a co-participant is not necessary for shame. Consider John Deigh's discussion of the case of Earl Mills, a person of Mashpee Indian background (p. 236). Mills remarks:

> When I was a kid, I and the young fellows I ran around with couldn't have cared less about our Indian background. We never participated in any of the tribal ceremonies, we didn't know how to dance, and we wouldn't have been caught dead in regalia. We thought anyone who made a fuss about our heritage was old-fashioned, and we even used to make fun of the people who did. Well, when I came back from the Army in 1948, I had a different outlook on such matters. You see, there happened to be two other Indians in my basic training company at Fort Dix. One of them was an Iroquois from Upper New York State, and the other was a Chippewa from Montana. I was nineteen years old, away from Mashpee for the first time in my life, and, like most soldiers, I was lonely. Then, one night, the Iroquois fellow got up and did an Indian dance in front of everyone in the barracks. The Chippewa got up and joined him, and when I had to admit I didn't know how, I felt terribly ashamed (p. 236).

Conspicuously missing from Mills's account is any mention of how his fellow soldiers reacted to Mills when they realized he did not know the dance of his heritage. This does not, of course, imply that they approved of his ignorance or refrained from expressing any critical evaluative judgment; they may well have expressed disappointment and disapprobation at Mills, which in turn caused him to feel shame. The point, however, is that Mills's account would remain coherent and intact were we to modify it as follows: '… when I had to admit I didn't know how, *and even though the*

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[2]For brevity and stylistic reasons, my use of 'co-participant' from here on, unless stated otherwise, should be understood to mean 'co-participant expressing a representative viewpoint'.

guys didn't care about or think that there was anything wrong with it because they were of a similar mind as mine before I joined the army (i.e., making a fuss about issues of heritage), I felt terribly ashamed'. That is, it is possible for Mills to feel shame even though his fellow soldiers did not disapprove of his not knowing the dance of his heritage. Despite their lack of disapproval, watching the Iroquois dance may have made Mills realize the importance of heritage, and thus feel disappointed at himself and ashamed for not recognizing this sooner.

The last problem I want to raise against Calhoun is that her account, contrary to what she maintains, cannot explain the distinctively social nature of shame. Recall her objection against the *Moral Pioneer* and the *Discriminating Actor* strategies in this regard: These strategies fail to explain how shame is social because in both instances, other people's power to shame is grounded in the agent's own moral and evaluative standards, and reasoning styles. Calhoun's account faces a similar difficulty. Consider her discussion of the above example of the professor accused of being manipulative. According to Calhoun, the professor can choose, in the face of her colleague's criticism, either to 'shift out of the participant attitude [and refuse] to take him seriously' or 'to sustain the attitude even though she thinks he is wrong' (p. 141). The professor may choose the former, for instance, if she thinks that her colleague has misinterpreted the facts or has misconceived the nature of the mistakes he attributes to her (p. 141). The problem here is that in order for the professor to decide which option to take—that is, whether to shift out of or sustain the participant attitude—she must invoke her own moral and evaluative standards (e.g., in judging whether or not her colleague's view is correct and more importantly, representative of other colleagues). Contrary to Calhoun, whether someone is a co-participant is not decided independently of the agent's moral and evaluative standards. Calhoun's account therefore does not account for the distinctively social nature of shame.

These four problems with Calhoun's account, I contend, put pressure on the idea that the weight behind shaming criticisms is practical in nature. They also suggest that the power to shame resides primarily with the agent and her own moral standards, and hence, harks back to the idea that shaming weight is epistemic. For instance, the first three problems suggest that the agent has much more control than her co-participant in determining which criticisms can shame her and the extent to which they can do so, and the last difficulty implies that even if Calhoun's account were otherwise unproblematic, the agent still has a role in deciding who counts as a co-participant. Where does this leave us? Since none of the above strategies for reconciling shame with autonomy is satisfactory, there is room for an alternative. Below, I will offer a new way of reconciling the two. In particular, I will argue that certain central features of a mature moral agent make her vulnerable to shame and that such a vulnerability to shame *is* an emotion of a critically reflective moral agent.

4 | MATURE MORAL AGENCY

A distinguishing mark of a mature moral agent is that she cares a great deal about morality (Arpaly, 2011). She is deeply concerned with the good and with doing the right thing. She wants to know what it is to be a good or bad person, and strives to become the former. She wants to find out which character traits are moral virtues and which are moral vices, and how best to acquire and cultivate the former and avoid the latter. She wants to learn about what morality demands, and how she can go about meeting it. At the same time, she is well aware that morality can be a perplexing matter, that moral problems are complicated, and that the solutions to them, when available, are contentious and controversial. She acknowledges that for any given moral issue, a number of plausible perspectives and approaches exist, and that it is difficult to settle on one. She realizes that nuances are sometimes necessary for understanding and appreciating moral issues but can easily be overlooked. She is attentive to the fact that she as a moral agent simultaneously engages in shared moral practices with others, which can often be a source of contention and conflict.

Given that a mature moral agent cares about getting morality right, she cares about acquiring true moral beliefs and removing false ones, and about obtaining genuine and deep moral understanding. According to Allison Hills, to acquire moral understanding is to gain 'cognitive control' or know-how over moral propositions, such as

the abilities to follow moral arguments offered by others, explain why some moral beliefs are true while others are not, and draw conclusions about a particular moral issue when given relevant information (Hills, 2009, 2015). These abilities enable her to reap goods, such as being responsive and sensitive to moral reasoning and confident in doing what is right, engaging in the core ethical practice of exchanging reasons, justifying her own actions, and finally, cultivating a good moral character (2009, section III).

Obtaining moral understanding, however, is not an easy task. We do not always possess the needed information, knowledge, and expertise to follow, explain, and justify our positions on moral issues. We may lack the requisite skills of moral reasoning to draw proper conclusions. We may be insufficiently attentive or sensitive towards nuances and details to grasp moral concepts and reasons. We may be too set in our ways to give other perspectives due consideration. Our judgments may be clouded by biases and prejudices, especially when the moral issues in question affect us personally. Even if we already possess some degree of moral understanding, pitfalls still await us. Novel challenges, arguments, and nuances can arise to threaten and impede our moral understanding, so can new biases, prejudices and other habits of thought. The pursuit for moral understanding is arguably a continuous endeavor with no terminal point in sight.

A mature moral agent who is sufficiently sensitive to these obstacles and is motivated to get morality right will have to practice open-mindedness and intellectual humility. Doing so can help to facilitate the acquisition of moral understanding and true moral beliefs. Consider open-mindedness first.[3] Many views exist as to what cognitive activities constitute this character trait. Jason Baehr, for instance, construes open-mindedness as the willingness and ability to transcend one's cognitive viewpoint so as to take up the merit of another (Baehr, 2011), whereas Wayne Riggs takes open-mindedness to mean certain habits of thoughts, such as the acquisition of knowledge of one's own biases and prejudices, and vigilance in detecting the presence of these so as to mitigate or neutralize their effects (Riggs, 2010). Their differences notwithstanding, both agree that an agent who is open-minded will be receptive to criticisms and challenges, and will give them serious consideration. In exercising open-mindedness, she will, for instance, make new connections between existing concepts and novel ones, discern hidden assumptions, set aside biases and prejudices, develop a sensitivity to reasoning, identify strengths and weaknesses in her own position, and so on. The fruits of these efforts, when applied in the moral context, are that the agent acquires and fine-tunes the abilities that Hills considers important, and obtains a better understanding of the moral issues at stake and her position on them, as well as contrasting viewpoints to her own.

A similar case can be made for intellectual humility. The recognition that we might not always get things right concerning morality keeps us abreast of the importance to consider other perspectives and reconsider one's own. Acknowledging that one can be fallible in moral beliefs—that they may not be all true, that support for them may not be universal, that there are possibly gaps in one's moral understanding—motivates one to take moral criticisms seriously and learn from them. The intellectually humble agent is also well aware that she is unlikely to reach the great depths of moral understanding on her own, which is why she is willing to enlist help from others for guidance, criticisms, and insights. As with open-mindedness, a person who is intellectually humble stands a good chance to deepen her moral understanding, and acquire true moral beliefs.[4]

In short, a mature moral agent who cares about getting morality right should also care about acquiring true moral beliefs and deepening her moral understanding. Given that the pursuit of moral understanding is an endeavor that is not only difficult but also open-ended—of which a mature moral agent is acutely aware—she would strive to be open-minded and intellectually humble.

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[3]For a detailed defense of this argument, see Cremaldi and Kwong (2017).

[4]For more on the nature of intellectual humility, see Roberts and Wood (2007); Whitcomb et al. (2017); Kidd (2016).

5 | RECONCILING SHAME WITH AUTONOMY

We can now connect these traits of mature moral agency to shame. My contention is that a consequence of caring about morality and exercising open-mindedness and intellectual humility in pursuit of morality is that a mature moral agent becomes more readily vulnerable to shame. Briefly, the conceptual support for this claim is as follows: Compared to those with a lesser or no concern for morality, or those who lack the above intellectual traits or possess them to a lesser degree (e.g. an arrogant and dogmatic person), a person who is morally mature in the ways identified above is more receptive to moral criticisms and to take them seriously. When challenged, she is more prepared to place her own moral beliefs—especially those about which she lacks a firm conviction or has reservations, and those which are particularly difficult and complex—on the table and subject them to further reflection and scrutiny. She is also more willing to acknowledge that other's moral criticisms or distinct viewpoints can have merit, and to admit, if necessary, that her position may be mistaken. Crucially, insofar as her beliefs concerning some particular moral issue may be mistaken, and her actions in turn are tied to and motivated by these beliefs, she opens herself up to the possibility that she may have acted immorally.[5] Furthermore, if she thinks that she has behaved badly, her sense of self would be compromised (e.g., she suffers an injury to self-esteem (Rawls, 1999), self-respect (Taylor, 1985), or self-worth (Deigh, 1983), or fails to satisfy some self-relevant value (Deonna et al., 2012) or to reconcile her identity with her self-conception (Thomason, 2018)); and she thus experiences shame.

To clarify, the present claim is *not* that the mature moral agent experiences shame every time she is criticized, or that she takes every moral criticism seriously. There are a number of reasons why she may not feel shame under these circumstances. One reason, as suggested above, is that the criticism may concern some of her moral convictions that she has thought carefully and thoroughly about. In such a situation, her sense of conviction and level of confidence may be so strong that she is unwilling to consider the possibility that she could be wrong and thus, acted badly.[6] Another reason is that the criticism may strike her as being clearly misguided or absurd. Recall the earlier example of the female professor who is criticized for appearing unprofessional because she does not wear glasses when she lectures. In this instance, her colleague's criticism is so irrelevant that she does not give it any weight, and thus, has no occasion to feel shame. A third reason that a moral agent might not experience shame is that the criticism concerns moral beliefs that lack practical relevance to her. For instance, the agent may be challenged on her beliefs concerning immigration. Assuming that she lacks any official capacity to affect people's status—say, to grant or deny citizenships or visas or to order deportation—being receptive to criticism and willing to reconsider her position need not cause her to feel shame.[7]

No doubt there are other reasons why the mature moral agent may not experience shame when criticized. To return to my argument, the present point is that the psychology of a morally mature person is constituted in such a way that she stands ready to subject *some* of her moral beliefs to doubt and places herself in a position where she sees that she could be wrong. When these beliefs in question inform her actions, she acknowledges that she could have acted badly, and is thus susceptible to feeling shame. To reiterate, her readiness to subject some of her moral beliefs to re-evaluation is due to her concern for morality, and to a cultivated and refined intellectual character that disposes her to be receptive to criticisms and to give them serious consideration. The morally mature therefore does not recklessly or randomly abandon just any of her moral beliefs, or defer to just *any* moral

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[5]Alternatively, even if these beliefs have no immediately ties to actions, she could still experience shame by realizing that she does not think that these beliefs are what a morally upright person should possess.

[6]The moral agent's unwillingness to reconsider some of her convictions is compatible with her being open-minded and humble. For instance, to quote Riggs, we can 'reject a challenge to one's views *open-mindedly*' (p. 186).

[7]All of these reasons are, of course, defeasible. For instance, reconsidering and reviewing my position on immigration may reveal that some of my moral commitments threaten my sense of self, in which case I would experience shame. Similarly, there are occasions in which some criticisms can cause me to rethink my moral convictions (see the later discussion on epistemic shock). The present point is that a mature moral agent need not experience shame every time she is criticized.

criticism. That instead is the mark of moral immaturity, the consequence of a compromised autonomy, and of the exercise of intellectual and moral vices. Rather, she would be receptive precisely to the kinds of criticisms that dispose her to be open-minded or humble. It is worth noting that part of what it means to be virtuously open-minded and intellectually humble is to exercise these traits for the right reason, at the right moment, and in the right context. My claim therefore is that a morally mature agent inevitably would have occasions in her life where she would appropriately open herself up to criticisms—specifically those pertaining to her behavior—which render her vulnerable to the experience of shame.

Shame that arises in consequence of the agent's multiple concern for morality, open-mindedness and humility is compatible with mature moral agency and does not threaten the agent's autonomy. For the agent, other people's criticisms play a critical role in shaping her moral standards and commitments, and in guiding her actions. She cares about what other people think because they can, among other things, offer insights, guidance, and frames of references to help shape her moral thinking. She needs them to help remove false moral beliefs, strengthen her existing moral convictions, and deepen her moral understanding, and to behave morally.[8] In this sense, morality is a shared social practice. When she experiences shame, it is because a particular challenge has enough epistemic sway to trigger her to think that she may have fallen short of acceptable standards, and to consider revising her moral beliefs and understanding.[9] That such criticisms can impact her at all, however, is something within the agent's control: She has deliberately acquired and cultivated character traits that dispose her to recognize her epistemic limitations and to be *appropriately* receptive and sensitive to criticisms and challenges. She is autonomous because she has *chosen*, out of epistemic and moral considerations, to be the kind of person to whom other people's moral criticisms can matter.

These claims about shame are what I will develop and defend in the rest of the paper. Presently, I want to elaborate on my view that shaming weight is epistemic, as opposed to practical, in nature. A central feature of shame experiences is that they involve the element of *shock*. Shock results when a moral agent suddenly sees herself in a detached, impersonal way that reveals her in an unflattering light, that is, as someone who has potentially acted immorally. She goes from being 'absorbed in what she is doing' to suddenly becoming 'self-aware and self-critical' in light of the criticism (Taylor, p. 67). Thus, Earl Mills did not feel shame until he was struck by the thought that he *qua* someone of Mashpee Indian background ought to know the dance of his heritage. According to Gabrielle Taylor, this shift in perspective 'has an element of drama' that is the catalyst for shame (p. 67.) Similarly, John Kekes observes that shame 'assails us, … [and] is a shock, realization or discovery' (p. 284).

The shock in question, we should note, is epistemic in nature. The sudden realization that we can be seen as having acted immorally disrupts and challenges our existing beliefs and understanding of the moral issue in question, and by extension, who we are as persons, how we evaluate ourselves, and how we view morality and our standing in it.[10] The moral criticism confronts us with an alternative, even conflicting, interpretation of our behav-

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[8]It is important to emphasize that what is offered here is a normative account. I am not suggesting that people who feel shame actually view moral criticisms as a way to improve their moral standards and commitments. Rather, what I am proposing is a way for an agent to be morally mature. More precisely, if an agent cares about morality and to get it right, and wants to obtain and deepen moral understanding, then she *ought* to view some moral criticisms and challenges issued by other people as a potential resource to shape and refine her moral standards and commitments. The argument, then, is that being morally mature in this way inevitably has the agent feeling shame on occasion.

[9]That she is so triggered need not be the consequence of conscious and deliberate reflection. My view is that a mature moral agent who has acquired the virtues of open-mindedness and humility, and who is properly motivated, will have sufficiently fine-tuned her sensitivity and receptivity to *appropriate* moral criticisms; being so sensitive and receptive would be second nature to her. Clearly, what is considered appropriate in this context is not confined to what is in fact moral. Rather, a criticism is appropriate to the extent that it strikes the agent as having potential moral weight and worthy of consideration. By contrast, consider those who are either overly receptive or not receptive at all. The former would take every moral criticism seriously, whereas the latter, no criticisms at all. The virtuously open-minded and humble would occupy somewhere in the middle, sensitive and receptive only to some criticisms while rejecting others. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for raising the issue in this and the previous footnote.

[10]It is worth noting that the morally mature agent's disposition to be shocked is directly related to her aforementioned dispositions to be receptive and sensitive. Thus, virtuous agents would be shocked principally by appropriate moral criticisms (see previous footnote).

ior that we either have not hitherto entertained or if we have, either suppressed, forgotten or neglected. The fact that it can shock us reflects that our existing thinking concerning the moral issue is in some way deficient. The criticism therefore opens us up to the possibility of being shamed: It makes us wonder whether we might not have gotten things right and forces us to question whether our position is defensible. So long as the criticism remains unaddressed, we face the likelihood not only of having acted inadequately but also of continuing to do so.

On my account, the power to shame belongs to anyone who can issue a criticism or challenge which has the power to shock the moral agent and is deemed by the agent worthy of serious consideration. In this regard, it differs from the *Discriminating Actor Strategy* in that it does not designate only certain people as having the power to shame (i.e., people respected by the agent). Instead, it recognizes that these selfsame people, as much as they deserve respect, can make criticisms that are misplaced and therefore, do not evoke the emotion of shame. As such, these criticisms fail to shock the moral agent and challenge her viewpoint. My account also allows people whom the moral agent does not usually respect to make criticisms that can upset her thinking and bring about shame. In my view, the power to shame lies principally with the content of the criticism, as opposed to who voices it, and in the dual context of the moral agent's open-mindedness and intellectual humility.

My account also differs substantively from the *Moral Pioneer* strategy. According to Calhoun, this strategy assumes that 'in order for an opinion to have shaming weight, [the agent] must at some level accept it as true' (p. 139). Furthermore, it 'traces the power to shame to the shamer's *mirroring* to a large extent the agent's own evaluative perspective' (p. 135, her italics). The agent's own evaluative standards and criteria of truth therefore take center stage in the way the *Moral Pioneer* strategy explains the conditions under which the agent experiences shame.

While my account also construes weight epistemically, it differs from the *Moral Pioneer Strategy* in significant ways. In my view, a mature moral agent need not accept the criticism as true in order to experience shame. For instance, she may not know whether it is true. As mentioned, the criticism may be one that she has not previously encountered and therefore has not thought through, or it may be one that is simply too complex and intricate for her to resolve quickly. Thus, Earl Mills might have wondered whether people of Mashpee background ought to know the dance of their heritage. It was not a matter that he could have easily figured out all by himself. More reflection and consultation with family and friends, for instance, would have been necessary. Recall, too, the earlier point that the person undergoes an epistemic shock prior to experiencing shame. Such a shock can be disorienting at the time of the criticism and delays the effort to find a satisfactory resolution. It does not, however, deter the moral agent, one who is humble and open-minded to give the criticism subsequent serious consideration and even acknowledge weaknesses of her own position and errors of her behavior. All this converges and results in shame.

In my view, a mature moral agent can reject the criticism but still experience shame without compromising her autonomy. Her shame, I propose, may result from one or more of the following scenarios, all of which are compatible with the moral agent's autonomy in judgment. First, she fails to come up with a satisfactory response to the criticism. As someone who cares about morality and wants to get it right, she has assumed that she ought to be able to meet objections. She thus finds her failure to do so both disappointing and unacceptable. Second, she fails to defend her moral position. Again, this is something that she thinks a mature moral agent *ought* to be able to do. Her inability to do so thus threatens her sense of moral integrity. Third, she realizes that the criticism might be false but nonetheless exposes gaps in her understanding of moral issues. The criticism may introduce novel concepts, assumptions, perspectives, and other evaluative standards that the agent has not previously thought about or that may remind her of unresolved problems and weaknesses in her own argument. For example, thanks to his fellow soldiers' critical gaze, Earl Mills likely started to wrestle with issues of identity, honor, integrity, tradition, respect, authenticity, and history in order to reassess the role of heritage in his life. Each of these issues by itself was difficult enough and together, they added up to quite a heavy load.

It is tempting to object at this point that a moral agent need not experience shame in the scenarios just described. For instance, she may well think it commonplace that one cannot always respond, let alone decisively, to criticisms; that one occasionally fails to defend one's moral position; and that one at times will have minimal understanding as regards certain moral matters. In response, I would stress that my argument is not that the agent *must* feel shame

whenever she finds herself in any of these circumstances. Indeed, in some cases, she may very well not feel shame at all, as when the moral issue is so complex or novel that she does not expect to have an adequate understanding of it, or develop an adequate and defensible position on it. However, there are bound to be moral issues for which the moral agent—if she is mature—believes she *ought or expect* to have an adequate defense and of which she *ought* or *expect* to have a good understanding (e.g., moral issues that she particularly cares about or has thought thoroughly about). So, with respect to these moral issues, when she faces a criticism, which makes her realize—to her surprise or shock—that she has fallen short, and thereby, possibly acted immorally, she is susceptible to feeling shame.

Alternatively, the moral agent may simply have high moral and evaluative standards and holds herself to them. For instance, she may aspire to be someone who possesses moral understanding and is always able to respond to criticisms and defend her moral position. In my view, having such high standards is perfectly compatible with, and well within the scope of, moral maturity. That is, if she has these aspirations, she will not be considered immature from a moral standpoint. However, with high expectations comes the price of a high vulnerability to shame. Whenever she fails to live up to her own standards, she succumbs to shame.

I would like to conclude this section by addressing how my account can resolve the four problems I identified earlier with Calhoun's attempt to reconcile shame and moral autonomy. According to my view, shaming weight is principally epistemic in nature. On the one hand, the power to shame belongs to anyone who can make a moral criticism that shocks the moral agent, weakens her epistemic position, and frustrates her moral expectations. On the other hand, *that* the agent is receptive in the ways I described above is due to the dual fact that she cares about morality, and exercises intellectual humility and open-mindedness. Her moral maturity and autonomy, then, are constituted in part by her cultivation of a character that is receptive to others' criticisms and to takes them seriously.

It follows, then, that anyone—co-participant or not, respected or not—can have the power to shame so long as he or she makes a moral criticism that satisfies the conditions I specified above. It also explains why co-participants can have the power to shame on some but not all occasions: Whereas some of their criticisms have shaming weight, others do not. Thus, if a criticism is wide of the mark, or is what the agent has already satisfactorily resolved, it will not weaken her moral viewpoint and have the power to cause her to feel shame. The fact that someone is a co-participant, then, is no guarantee that he or she will always issue moral challenges with a negative impact on the agent. Indeed, if my argument is correct, the status of co-participant has little to do with shame. For similar reasons, a moral agent can cease to feel shame over time with respect to a particular criticism because she has had time to reflect on it and decided that it is misconstrued. Once she comes to such a realization and her shame subsides, the fact that her co-participant still views her in contempt will have no effect on her.

Incidentally, this last point offers us a way to think about the question concerning the extent to which shame is heteronomous and about its implications with respect to moral autonomy and maturity. The position developed here is that a vulnerability to feeling shame is a consequence of caring about morality and of possessing a character that disposes one to be receptive to others' moral criticisms and to take them seriously. Importantly, the moral agent experiences shame when others' criticisms, specifically those that have the power to shock her, reveal that she may have acted immorally. I have maintained that being *appropriately* receptive to such criticisms could be construed as a mark of autonomy and maturity.

However, as mentioned above, being appropriately receptive to criticisms in this respect does not necessarily mean that the criticism will turn out to be correct or well-founded. A moral agent could well initially take a criticism seriously, only to reject it eventually. The principal condition of her taking such a criticism seriously is that it seems worthy of consideration and is potentially true. Put this way, if a moral agent is shamed by a criticism that she thought had epistemic weight but ultimately dismisses it, then she has responded to moral standards *not of her own*. In such a case, her shame would be heteronomous. Yet, crucially, that shame is heteronomous in this way does not compromise the agent's autonomy or maturity, for it is ultimately up to her (in the sense of her cultivating and possessing a virtuous character) whether to let misguided criticisms affect her.[11]

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[11] By implication, shame that results from an agent's being gullible or feeble would not, on my account, be an appropriate emotion.

Based on these foregoing remarks, we can now derive a rough way to assess when a shame experience, especially when it is heteronomous, is appropriate or rational. As I have argued, shame that results from a criticism that initially appears to have epistemic weight but is later found to be misguided is a rational and appropriate response of a mature moral agent. However, the response remains so only until the agent has carefully and adequately reflected on and assessed the merit of the criticism. In the event that she finally rejects the criticism as misguided after giving it serious consideration, yet *continues* to experience shame, then her response would now be irrational and inappropriate. Chances are good, however, that many moral issues are such that an agent is unlikely to arrive at conclusive positions immediately, as an adequate and comprehensive assessment of them would require much time and effort. Accordingly, mature moral agents may well waiver back and forth and feel shame while thinking through the criticisms. In my view, this would be an appropriate response.

The final point to consider is whether my view can explain the social features of shame independently of the moral agent's moral standards. The answer is, it cannot: My view explains the power to shame in terms of the moral agent's own standards; whether a criticism has shaming weight depends on whether, and to what extent, it weakens the agent's epistemic position on morality. However, for two reasons, my account's inability to do so is not a disadvantage. First, all of the other accounts considered in this paper—Calhoun's view and the *Moral Pioneer* and the *Discriminating Actor* strategies—also face this problem. But, as discussed, my account can resolve problems that they cannot and has therefore a distinct edge over them.

Second, given that none of the other accounts or strategies can explain shame without ultimately drawing on the moral agent's moral standards, I submit that the proper conclusion to draw is that *pace* Calhoun, the two are inextricably related. The impetus to divorce shame from the agent's moral standards stems from a need to ensure that other people and their criticisms have a role to play, that shame should not revolve *solely* around the agent as the only source of the power to shame. If this is the cause of the worry, then my account, which accords the social others a large role, can easily be the relief. Accordingly, other people can have the power to shame the moral agent, even if they make criticisms and hold evaluative standards which she rejects. She cares about what others think because they are, for her, an indispensable resource for shaping and improving her epistemic standing with respect to morality, and thus, a guide for whether she has behaved morally (i.e., causing potential harm to others). She does not view morality as an endeavor of her own alone, which is why she exercises humility and open-mindedness, traits that ensure that she takes others seriously and hence, allows them the power to shame.

6 | CONCLUSION

In this paper, I argued that shame has a place in the psychology of a mature moral agent and that it can be reconciled with moral autonomy. A mature moral agent is someone who cares a great deal about morality, and wants to get it right. But she also recognizes that it is a complex and difficult task. In an effort to acquire true moral beliefs and to deepen her moral understanding, she exercises intellectual humility and open-mindedness. Both of these character traits dispose her to take criticisms seriously and to subject her own views to scrutiny and open her up to the possibility that she may have acted immorally. This disposition renders her vulnerable to shame. Such vulnerability, I argue, is compatible with her moral autonomy because she *elects* to be the kind of moral agent who cares about what other people think and possesses the relevant virtues.

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