

how to do things with emotions

The Morality of **Anger**
& **Shame** across Cultures

owen flanagan

HOW TO DO THINGS WITH EMOTIONS

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THE MORALITY OF
ANGER AND SHAME
ACROSS CULTURES



Owen Flanagan

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
PRINCETON & OXFORD

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Published by Princeton University Press
41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540
6 Oxford Street, Woodstock, Oxfordshire OX20 1TR
press.princeton.edu

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Flanagan, Owen, 1949– author.

Title: How to do things with emotions : the morality of anger and shame across cultures / Owen Flanagan, Princeton University Press.

Description: Princeton : Princeton University Press, [2021] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021006876 (print) | LCCN 2021006877 (ebook) |

ISBN 9780691220970 (acid-free paper) | ISBN 9780691220987 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Anger. | Shame. | Emotions. | Conduct of life.

Classification: LCC BJ1535.A6 F53 2021 (print) | LCC BJ1535.A6 (ebook) |

DDC 152.4/7–dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021006876>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021006877>

British Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available

Editorial: Rob Tempio and Matt Rohal

Production Editorial: Kathleen Cioffi

Jacket Design: Lauren Smith

Production: Erin Suydam

Publicity: Alyssa Sanford and Amy Stewart

Copyeditor: Cathryn Slovensky

This book has been composed in Miller

Printed on acid-free paper. ∞

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To Lynn Ainsworth

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PREFACE

Varieties of Emotional Possibility

I HAVE LIVED through two times—fifty years apart—when things seemed to be falling apart socially and politically. The present most resembles the period beginning in 1967, when the psychedelic “Summer of Love,” among what Joan Didion called the “missing children,” graced the grimy streets of Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco. It was also the year of bloody racial upheavals in more than 150 American cities, including Oakland, just across the Bay from the Haight, in what was, in those fiery places, a summer of extreme pain and exhausted demands for racial justice. This period lasted until 1975, by which time Richard Nixon had resigned the presidency in disgrace, and America had withdrawn its last troops from Vietnam. “We Shall Overcome” was the anthem we sung during those years, for both civil rights and for ending the war in Vietnam.

It is convenient to peg the starting date of our current turmoil—for which there is not yet a song—to the presidential election of November 2016, or to the beginning of Donald J. Trump’s administration in January 2017. This has the advantage of perfectly preserving the fifty-year interval between the two times of crisis. A dramatic unraveling came in quick order: immigration restrictions on Muslims, a deadly rally of

white supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia, government-endorsed separations of young children from parents at the Mexican border (there are still 600 children who have not been reunited with their parents), and a series of deaths of black Americans at the hands of police, culminating in the protracted suffocation/strangulation of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on May 25, 2020. After Floyd's murder, the #BlackLivesMatter movement (born after Trayvon Martin was fatally shot in February 2012) became national, multi-racial, and multigenerational. At the same time, the Covid-19 pandemic—which has killed more than 3,500,000 people worldwide and more than 590,000 Americans—was sweeping the land, disproportionately harming the working classes and racial and ethnic minorities, amid presidential lies and utterly unnecessary, childish wars over face masks and freedom.

These events created enough stress for any social system to withstand, but Trump, the master of mayhem in chief, could not resist adding fuel to the fires he had already lit by claiming that the election of Joe Biden was a fraud, which incited a violent invasion of the US Capitol Building to stop certification of Biden's victory on January 6, 2020, yet another day that will live in infamy. As a result, America experienced the first non-peaceful transition of presidential power in its history, due to a mendacious egomaniac who refused to concede to what every election official in the entire country agreed was a free and fair election. The news offered a vivid reminder of one of the major diseases that ails us, when the day after the Capitol riots, we saw the broken glass, furniture shards, and garbage left by the white insurrectionists cleaned up by the black housekeeping staff that does that sort of work. Perhaps ours is the time when the racial reckoning that America needs for justice's sake has finally arrived. It is too soon to mark the end date of our current troubled times, the date when things calm down, "get

back to normal,” as we say, and when the racial reckoning finally occurs. We are still in the thick of the crisis—or, more pertinent, various crises.

The sources of our woes are many, and many different things are coming apart at once. Some sources—systemic racism, economic inequality, long wars, inadequate social safety nets, and the indifference of the well-off—persist across these five decades. Other sources are entirely new. The internet did not exist in 1967 and, for all the good it has done, it is also a source of our problems. The internet has allowed an epistemic free-for-all in which truth is not aligned with facts but with what various influencers or interest groups say are the facts. There are very dark places on the web that convince unsuspecting souls that they are seeing the light, when, in fact, they are rummaging around at the bottom of Plato’s cave.

My focus in this book is on two emotional habits that are mixed up in our troubles. We are, as a people, angrier than ever—at least angrier than I have ever seen. We model for one another and our children a “passionate intensity” that is overly confident, narcissistically demanding, demeaning of those with whom we disagree, noisy, unwilling to listen, and often embedded in cruelty. How we *collectively* do anger needs work.

Simultaneously, there is also a loss of a shared sense of shame. People ought to be ashamed if they disregard what’s true, good, and beautiful. But they aren’t. Shamelessness is common, and it reflects a situation in which many values are weakly held, and in which norms suited for a common life that aims at the common good yield to precepts for winning friends and influencing people, gaming, and getting ahead.

In a world in which it is every ego for itself, it is better to seem honest than to be honest, and acquisitiveness of the “greed is good” sort—once a deadly sin—has various honorific disguises. Hoarding wealth is the reward for genius,

innovation, and entrepreneurship, the everyday lingo of top universities. Graduates of these universities create brilliant and allegedly benign financial instruments that profit off magic tricks, wheeling and dealing, and absolutely no commitment to a common good, except, perhaps, after the fact, when the genius takes his seat among the philanthropist class. This, it seems to me, is shameful. We need to rebuild a mature sense of shame that reflects a deep moral commitment to what is good, true, and beautiful, and we need to restore the idea that there are things that good people just ought not to do. In other words, we can do shame better.

There are objections to my idea that we ought to work on emotions, and specifically that we should amend the ways we do anger and shame. Many say that anger, as we do it, is simply inherent and justified, given the way things are. There is innate anger circuitry, and when you present it with craven politicians, traffic jams, or uncooperative colleagues, it activates. But this is false. Emotions are more like winks than blinks. They are plastic, not reflexive, and subject to norms of appropriateness and conditions of legibility. We can ask emotions like anger to obey high and demanding norms or we can let them run loose without principled, thoughtful guidance, in which case you can get a world like ours, where almost everyone is pissed off a lot of the time.

Regarding shame, the dominant view is that it is a primitive emotion, an adult version of embarrassment, and nothing weighty enough to make anyone abide by high ideals and norms. Shame, it is said, is merely social, awaiting the gaze of the other, and being caught and humiliated. Thus, shame is a poor emotion to depend on for sincere moral conviction and virtue. For that we need something deep, some emotion linked to transcendent sources—guilt in divine eyes, for example.

I disagree. There is no doubt that the causes of our anger—whether political, material, or personal—often require attention. But anger itself is also part of the problem. Anger is an emotion that often expresses the ego's demands, not the demands of justice or the other's good; ego doesn't listen well, and it tends toward disdain and enacting pain. How, why, and when we do anger is a cultural matter, the result of cultural learning, including, especially, how elders model it for the young. The way we are doing anger today is not good ethically and not good instrumentally; it doesn't get us what we want. This book is an invitation to explore how other cultures have thought about—and in most cases still think about—anger and how and when to do it.

As for shame, the situation is similar. As this book was going to press, following the period between the presidential election of November 3, 2020 and January 6, 2021, my argument in these pages for retrieving a robust and mature sense of shame started to win some advance support, as everyone started to wonder how the former president, his handlers, and his supporters could continue to lie every day about election fraud—in fact, a landslide in his favor—with a straight face and without loathing themselves. The media and ordinary people started to wonder and ask: Where has the sense of shame gone?

The answer to that question is complicated. My focus, as with anger, is rehabilitating how we do the emotion of shame. I am a fan of what I call a “mature sense” of shame. Mature shame, good equipment for morally serious people, is recessive in our culture, but we could revive it. Again, the anthropological record is relevant. The official view in North America that shame is a primitive emotion is a rarity in other parts of the world, in the past and now. And there is little evidence

in its favor. How we do emotions is normative and scripted. There is widespread cultural variation in which emotions—not only anger and shame but also compassion and love—are deployed to support social life. And there is huge variation in why, when, and how these emotions are enacted. So, as with anger, this book is an invitation to think about how other cultures do shame, and how they socialize the youth in norms of how, when, and why to do shame. Learning about how other cultures look at shame will help us think critically about our own situation.

The invitation to reflect deeply on how we do anger and shame, and to change *how* we do these emotions, is not just a call to change the tone and atmosphere of our interactions. How any culture does emotions embeds and thus reveals their views on the aims of social life, respect, human dignity, justice, love, and compassion. My view is that the ways we are doing anger and shame now reveal contagious soul sicknesses that include selfishness, atomism, shallow values, and low epistemic standards. If we can correctly diagnose the ways in which we as a people are emotionally “off,” we can change how we do emotions.

Emotions are things we do. This means that if and when they cause trouble, we can consider doing them differently. Cross-cultural philosophy, cultural psychology, and anthropology provide treasure troves of evidence for the varieties of emotional possibility, among them ways of doing anger and shame, which would benefit us all.

February 2021

Durham, North Carolina

HOW TO DO THINGS WITH EMOTIONS

INTRODUCTION

How to Do Things with Emotions

The Predicament

This book snuck up on me. In some respects it grew organically out of long-standing interests in philosophy of the mind, ethics, moral psychology, and cross-cultural philosophy on the nature and function of emotions. But it also responds to a persistent practical worry I've had throughout the first two decades of the twenty-first century, especially the last decade, and that I found myself talking about to family, students, and friends. I have never lived in angrier times. I've lived in fraught and bloody times before. I was thirteen in September 1963 when four innocent black girls were killed by a bomb at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. Two months later, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas. I was fifteen in 1965 when Malcolm X was killed; eighteen in 1968 when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy were assassinated. The year 1967 was the "Summer of Love" in Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco, and

also the summer of 159 race riots from Watts in Los Angeles to Detroit to Newark. On May 4, 1970, one month before I graduated from college, twenty-eight members of the Ohio National Guard fired sixty-seven rounds in thirteen seconds at antiwar protestors at Kent State University, killing four students, injuring nine others, and paralyzing one for life.

I was a young man through the 1970s, which many say, and I agree, were transformative times. The 1960s and '70s were a time of passionate causes: civil rights, women's rights, gay rights (the Stonewall Uprising was in 1969), and the unjust war in Southeast Asia, which we discovered had extended into Laos and Cambodia, and was no longer just the Vietnam War. There was anger and there was blood, but one sensed at the time that both were in the service of hope.

Our times seem angrier than that time, but also mostly absent of high ideals and hopes.¹ Our anger is fierce and frantic but not ameliorative. Politics especially is a zone where the communal spirit, patient listening, and public reasoning of the New England Town Meeting is a quaint memory, replaced by politics as the expression and performance of resentment and disgust. The conception of politics as the vocation of working for the common good, for justice and equality for all, is paid lip service but is recessive in practice, replaced by a model of politics as an expression of ego and the will to power, which is paid for by special, not common, interests to crush other not special interests as necessary.

I started to wonder how we could turn down the temperature on anger on both the left and the right, as a way of making room for hope, idealism, and solidarity.² But again and again I was met with people on all sides who explained that the anger I was seeing was rational and normal. I found myself explaining that it might be statistically normal here at this moment, but it wasn't statistically normal over the earth and over time.

And it wasn't normatively normal. It wasn't good. I found myself going to sources outside my own tradition for examples of philosophers or saints or exemplars or whole traditions that offered arguments against being as angry as we were, even in the service of noble ends. It suits my view, although it makes me sad, that Bob Woodward entitled his latest book *Rage* (2020). "Rage" names both former president Trump's character and modus operandi, and the state of current American social psychology.

At the same time that I was becoming convinced that we should turn down the temperature on anger, I worried that we (mainly my fellow Americans) were emotionally and morally off-kilter in another way that I can only describe as a kind of shamelessness. There were social roles that in previous generations would have been filled by people of good character that were not filled by people of good character, Trump being exhibit number 1. He represents, but did not remotely create, a new type, a type that shamelessly rejects the commitment to the true and the good, a type that makes fun of people who care about facts, a type that uses words like "good" and "bad," "fair" and "unfair," but no longer in any recognizable moral sense.³ Politicians on both the left and the right are condescending but not compassionate, indignant but not righteous, and moralistic but not moral. Truth is fungible for advantage.

It is not uncommon for people in good faith to disagree about what, exactly, is true and what, exactly, is good, but we are suddenly in an age where people who function as role models don't care about the true and the good at all. So my thought was that it would be good to turn up the dial on shame and not mistake moral and epistemic recklessness for a kind of refreshing unconventionality or as the victory of some kind of healthy antielitism. It is neither. It is a kind

of shameless nihilism that serves the interests of rapacious egomaniacs. Minimally, it would be good to reinstate norms of civic life that require commitment to truth-seeking and respectful interaction rather than allowing summary dismissals of fellow human beings as deplorable, stupid, or unworthy, or people of the wrong race, sex, gender, sexual orientation, or country of origin. There is some reason to hope. In the United States, President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris have pledged to work to overcome the cacophonous, bitter Babel that is American social and political life, and to work to reinstate norms of truthful speech, patient listening, and commitment to the common good. Former president Trump's lies about the 2020 election, his coup attempts, and his incitement of his supporters to invade the Capitol during the certification of President-elect Biden on January 6, 2020, has been followed by calls to cease and desist with shameful behavior. Use of the words "shame" and "shameful," expressions such as "he/they ought to be ashamed," and fitting questions such as "Where is his/their sense of shame?" shot up in frequency in the first weeks of January (they have been rising since 1980). A dear friend joked that this was "shit for the country but good for Owen's book." But as you will see, I think it is very good for the country and for individuals to rediscover the great but recessive good of a mature sense of shame.

If my diagnosis of our predicament is on the right track, then it calls for recalibrating our emotions, specifically doing something different with the emotions of anger and shame. Emotions express values, abide by norms, and figure essentially in virtues and vice. In trying to argue (often only to myself) about the best form for anger and shame to take, I found myself thinking once again of using resources from cultural psychology, anthropology, and cross-cultural philosophy.

Sometimes when one is in a rut, one needs to be creative in finding one's way out. Imaginative exercises where one is encouraged to "think outside the box," as we say, can give us permission, information, and the tools we need to explore previously unexplored, unfamiliar, often unknown possibility spaces. Parochial assumptions about one's realistic options can be challenged.

I will introduce the reader to some of the incredible cultural diversity that is actual in our world with regard to how people do anger and shame. The aim is to reveal the different ways different people do these emotions, and to see if there are any ways of doing them that might be better for us, even by our own lights.

There is an advantage and a disadvantage to this method. The advantage is that it opens one's eyes to alternative ways of doing emotions and thus of being a person. The disadvantage comes from this positive feature: seeing the possibility space can be daunting, possibly destabilizing, because it can seem to require us to entertain possibilities for self and social transformation that might force us to think of undoing ourselves in certain ways. Examining the possibilities for changing how we do emotions requires courage.

One reason that I advocate the method of critique for how we do emotions by way of philosophical anthropology is because it is, in a certain sense, a realistic response to our current situation. Those of us who live in increasingly multicultural cities and regions—essentially all of us—are continually exposed to people who speak different languages and who have different values and spiritual beliefs; they also do emotions differently from us. Perhaps we can start to pay more respectful attention to the possibilities in our midst and not simply demand emotional assimilation of the other. We have some things to learn.

Doing Emotions

Emotions are things we do, or better: emotions are feeling-action circuits, affective enactments. The capacity to have emotions is not gifted by Mother Nature because she thought we would enjoy the bright lights and thrill of an inner life. Emotions were selected to quickly and efficiently motivate smart, socially adept action. The way an emotion feels is motivationally powerful, designed to have us do things: head for the hills, confront an obstacle, express grief or solidarity, or mate. Experiencing emotions is closely linked to expressing emotions, which is closely linked to the regulation and coordination of social life.

Thinking of emotions as episodes, specifically as enactments, is ecologically valid. The natural arc of negative emotional episodes includes the perception of a situation as scary or sad or infuriating and culminates in the feeling of fear or sadness or anger dissipating or evaporating after an escape or tears or an angry expression. Emotion permeates the entire episode. It starts in a flash when one perceives the situation as scary or sad or infuriating and ends when some act or other leads to a release from the snares of that very emotion. In the case of positive emotions, the situation is somewhat different. The feeling of love or joy is sometimes released, as when words of love express what one feels or when laughing at a joke releases the “that’s funny” feeling. Other times, enacting a positive emotion deepens the positive emotions between lovers or shared by an audience at a comedy club, and entrains multiple emotional enactments until that set of enactments ends.

Even the most basic emotions involve “doings” and are not simply reflexes, tropisms, or ballistic reactions. A snake triggers fear and one runs. Which way one runs depends on voluntary action in an environment that affords a limited number of

escape routes (uphill, downhill, or sideways). Likewise, facial expression of the emotions is under voluntary control. First, facial expressions can be suppressed. Second, there are cultural display rules that govern expression and make emotions legible to compatriots, but often not as reliably to outsiders. Third, children as young as eighteen months can make pretend faces for emotions (that is, without being in the actual emotional state that they can nonetheless mimic) and, by age three, children are becoming adept at controlling their facial and vocal expressions. This is useful for lying convincingly, but it also reveals that the child is learning what adults expect when it comes to emotional expression—fewer tears, using your inside voice, and so forth.⁴

We enact emotions, display emotions, and actively and emotionally engage the emotions of others. This is especially true of emotions like anger, shame, and guilt. These emotions are used to inform others that they are out of normative conformity or, at minimum, that they are doing something we don't like or approve of. When these emotions are self-directed, as when one is angry with oneself, or ashamed of what one has done, or is suffering from a guilty conscience, the self is both agent and recipient of negative emotional judgment. Anger, shame, and guilt are disciplinary emotions. When we are objects of disciplinary emotions, we have various scripted options at our disposal: to resist, hide, dissemble, implicate others, attack, apologize, confess, atone, change our behavior, or work to modify our desires, inner tendencies, and dispositions.

The idea that emotions are doings, or are *for* doing, has a long pedigree. In American philosophy and psychology, William James, James Mark Baldwin, and John Dewey emphasized that humans actively explore the world by way of motivated attention and schemas of expectations that are

attuned to, and prepared for, affective affordances the world provides. When we see a rattlesnake or a cliff's edge, we see them as scary and as something to move away from quickly. The whole episode, from the sighting to the escape, is suffused with emotions. Emotions theorist Robert Solomon emphasized in his final work that emotions are psychophysical "engagements with the world" (2004, 83).⁵

The word "emotion" is, in the first instance, a superordinate term in folk psychology that names a motley class. When I use the term "emotion" in this book, I'm employing a model or schema that characterizes emotions in wide functional terms, as syndromes or episode types defined in terms of characteristic causes and effects. An emotion type or kind is defined by a schema comprising typical causes + inner phenomenal features/feelings + characteristic content + typical dispositions to act + typical action.⁶

Philosophers call the inner phenomenal features/feelings *quale* (singular) or *qualia* (plural). The inner phenomenal features/feelings include the "feeling scared" or "feeling angry" aspects of fear or anger, if there are any such aspects. I say "if there are any such aspects" because I am skeptical that "feeling scared" or "feeling angry" has a shared and unique phenomenal or qualitative feeling across all types of fear and anger, and so, too, for all other emotions. There are two reasons for my skepticism that emotions can be defined or characterized in terms of narrow phenomenal feelings. First, I am impressed by the vagueness and imprecision of reports about the narrow "what-it-is-like-ness" of emotions. Ask someone to explain what inner phenomenal feeling is shared by being scared of snakes or heights or of losing one's job. The second reason to resist defining emotions exclusively in terms of inner phenomenal properties is that if emotions are functional syndromes, then how they seem is not simply,

or even mainly, a matter of some inner phenomenal feeling that instances share independently of their causes, effects, contents, and the actions enjoined. That is, the emotional state one is in is a matter of what the causes are; how the causes are understood, interpreted, and affectively evaluated; the content of the emotion (what it is about); the action tendencies that are activated; and so on. An intense, negatively valenced response to a cliff's edge makes one want to move away from the edge. The bad feeling one has about a possible or impending job loss, its consequences, and what might be done to avoid that outcome is a different kind of case. Even if affective scientists discover profiles for each emotion that capture shared, narrow, phenomenal, and somatic features, the wide approach has the advantage of being ecologically realistic, since no emotional episode has ever occurred—not since the beginning of time—in the narrow form without causes, effects, and action dispositions.⁷

To describe emotions such as anger, shame, and guilt as “disciplinary” is not to imply that they are merely or only punitive. Insofar as these emotions are more sticks than carrots, the goal of using them must be to reap the rewards of a shared, harmonious, mutually beneficial common life. It can't be because enacting these emotions is good in itself. Doing anger, shame, and guilt correctly involves perceptual-cognitive know-how, acuity in assessing accurately what is going on, and knowing how to respond. Learning the whys, wherefores, and skill set required to experience and properly express disciplinary emotions is to acquire norms and scripts that previous generations have passed down to us because they judged emotional maturity as a necessary condition for living a good human life. The “to and fro” of these emotions is normative and scripted; it has conditions of legibility that are normally determined inside a culture. Americans use harsh words to

express anger. Ifaluk people stop eating. Japanese people leave the room.

A smooth operator, a person with emotional intelligence, knows the norms and the scripts, and is a reliable detector of how others are doing regarding the norms and the scripts. The philosopher and actor Ronald de Sousa (1981) and the psychologist James Russell (1991) developed this enormously helpful idea of emotions as scripts. The idea is to get away from thinking that emotions are only or primarily “inner things,” and that emotion words are intended to refer to these inner things. Instead, it is better to think of an emotion as an event or enactment comprising a “sequence of subevents. . . . According to the script hypothesis categories of emotion are defined by features. The features describe not hidden essences but knowable subevents: the causes, feelings, physiological changes, desires, overt actions, and vocal and facial expressions. These features are ordered in a casual sequence, in much the same way that actions are ordered in a playwright’s script” (J. Russell 1991, 442).⁸

There are cultural rules about the sweet spot for enacting emotions, for expressing an emotion in a way that suits the situation—for example, not getting too angry or feeling too ashamed, or making another feel more ashamed or guilty than they deserve. Finger wagging, moral grandstanding, calling out, canceling, and deplatforming are styles of performing disciplinary emotions that are intentionally punitive and attention grabbing. They are judged by many to violate rules for decorous emotional display, as well as social consensus about where the mean (as determined by the doctrine of the mean)—the sweet spot—for emotional expression lies. Some advocates of these techniques for enacting emotions think our norms have been too polite and permissive, too patient and insufficiently attuned to what social justice requires. Others

say that mercy and forgiveness are always warranted and that no human being should ever be permanently written off. How do we resolve such disagreements, especially given that they themselves are heated? The debates about whether and how angry we should be enact the very angry emotional displays that we are trying to simultaneously, rationally assess and critique. These are hard problems.

Cultures and subcultures differ in both norms and preferred scripts. The norms of friendliness, politeness, anger, and annoyance vary greatly across different ecologies, both between cultures and inside cultures, where the conditions of legibility can be extraordinarily intricate because of embedded subroutines based on status, age, gender, ethnicity, and wealth. This is especially so in cities and regions that contain people of multiple lineages. How do we figure out the right emotional scripts when there is variation among the options?

The question can be divided into two questions, one causal and one normative. The causal question is: What happens when a large immigrant group with, let us imagine, its own practices for expressing anger, pride, gratitude, grief, forgiveness, shame, and guilt arrives in a city or country that already has its own dominant practices for these things? Emotional norms and scripts usually designate certain states of affairs as ones for which, say, anger is warranted. These norms and scripts determine the degree of anger warranted by these causes; how intense the feeling of anger ought to be, given the causes; and what sort of action the anger warrants.

One answer to the causal question, studied in northern Europe, is that the dominant norms and scripts typically crush or swallow up the nondominant norms and scripts in a matter of three generations (De Leersnyder, Mesquita, and Kim 2011; Jasini, De Leersnyder, and Mesquita 2018; Mesquita, Boiger, and De Leersnyder 2016). The reason: the simple

power of majority practices. Presumably, there is some size that an immigrant group might reach, such that it could affect the practices of the dominant group; or, on the other hand, what certainly does happen: emotional practices of a minority group that are not endorsed in public life are preserved at home, in religious places, and in immigrant neighborhoods, and are thus not extinguished in the private zones of life.⁹

The normative question is: What should happen when different norms and scripts for emotional expression meet? Can such clashes serve as opportunities for reflection—on both sides—about whether each group’s ways of enacting emotions are good, whether they are suited to the new ecology (new to them and new again after people with different norms and scripts for emotions come together and interact)? How should individuals on all sides assess or reassess their practices? Are there rational ways to assess, evaluate, and appreciate alien ways of doing emotions for the sake of improving one’s own way of doing them?

This book is devoted to this question: How should we live, or, more specifically, how should we think about how to live in a world in which there are so many live possibilities for being a person? These live options involve matters of which projects to pursue, what to value, and which emotional norms and scripts to abide by for high-quality personal and interpersonal relations. These norms and scripts always involve standards for apt or fitting emotions. Many of us live in multicultural cities, or visit such cities often enough to experience alien ways of being human among people who are nonetheless living well by our own lights and standards. Often such people enact different emotional norms and scripts. How are we to understand these differences? We know that differences can often result in thinking of the other as odd or weird. What are the chances

that the way the odd duck or weirdo conducts itself might be good for us if only we could see its strengths and adopt its practices?

*Emotional Variation, Animal
Natures, and Ecologies*

Modern *Homo sapiens* is 250,000 years old and currently the only living species of the genus whose members extend back between two and three million years. *Homo sapiens* plus the four still-living higher primates—chimps, bonobos, orangutans, and great apes—are descendants of a common ancestor who lived fourteen million years ago. Anthropologists have reliably identified about a dozen extinct species in the genus *Homo*. Neanderthal (*Homo neanderthalensis*) is a closely related species that roamed Europe as recently as 24,000 years ago and interacted with us before we invented agriculture and domesticated animals 12,000 years ago. New evidence suggests that the diminutive *Homo floresiensis*, which some think may have been an offshoot of *Homo erectus*, lived in the South Pacific as recently as 17,000 years ago. In the autumn of 2015, a new extinct species, *Homo naledi*, was confirmed based on skeletal remains in what looks to be a burial site, at least a body disposal chamber, in a cave in South Africa. Think about it: we once, over tens of thousands of years, commingled with other species of humans.

Over the course of the descent, Mother Nature equipped us with certain emotional dispositions that are psychobiological adaptations and come in the form of “initial settings” for doing emotions, such as a fear of falling off high ledges and the anger or protoanger that an infant shows when its desires are obstructed. These initial settings mark certain situations

as scary or angry-making; they are seen or experienced as such, and they motivate certain characteristic actions, such as crawling away from the edge, crying, and so on. These are what some call “basic emotions” or “core affect programs.” Basic emotions are always for the sake of action and involve settings that have an active, perceptual side. For example, the crawling child is set up to quickly perceive that it is at an edge and moves back.¹⁰

How does the basic emotional profile of *Homo sapiens* compare to that of the other *Homos*? We don’t know, since the others are extinct. But different bodies and different types of brains usually bespeak different phenotypic traits to some degree, so we can safely assume that there were likely some differences in initial emotional settings among us and the extinct *Homos*. Evidence from the genus *Pan* with two still living species—chimps and bonobos—reveals that chimps, who show greater sexual dimorphism than bonobos, for whom males and females are similarly sized, are patriarchal, aggressive, and conniving, while bonobos are matriarchal and like to resolve disputes with sexual healing.

Voles, not to be confused with moles, are another mammal popular among philosophers interested in emotional regulation. Prairie voles and meadow voles look alike but differ greatly in “attachment style,” and the differences can be traced to variations in species-specific genes that regulate oxytocin, vasopressin, and dopamine. Prairie voles are monogamous and attentive to their offspring, whereas meadow vole males are promiscuous and comparatively indifferent to their young (Carter, DeVries, and Getz 1995; Wang et al. 1999; Churchland 2012).

Thinking in evolutionary terms requires thinking historically, in terms of lineages with long, natural histories. It requires thinking of lineages as coevolving with ecologies,

often microecologies, high mountain ranges, equatorial forests, different postal codes, a particular street in a particular neighborhood, a family. Sometimes microecologies are discontinuous veins in a shared space coalescing around such features as age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, education, or religious affiliation. Strictly speaking, there are no shared ecologies. A family that raised clones would invariably offer a novel ecology to each child. The parents have changed in age and experience, they are more patient or less patient, there are age differences among the sibling clones, there are novel effects of sibling interactions, and, of course, the world outside is ever changing.

The unshared features of what might seem to be a single ecology, but isn't, cannot be emphasized enough. We often speak in general terms about, for example, China, how the Chinese are and how they are raised, as if, at a certain time slice, there is a coherent, unified way of life and a single ecology named "China" or "the Chinese." This can be useful shorthand, a way of orienting ourselves to a certain geography and demography, a kind of political and economic life, and a historical landscape. But it is only that: a handy typology that reduces the noise that would attend thinking realistically about China, which is, strictly speaking, cognitively impossible. There is no such thing as "China" or "the Chinese" in the intended sense, despite the fact that we can truthfully say such things as that China—now marking features of a certain nation-state plus distinctions drawn by the Chinese government—is one of the least ethnically diverse countries in the world, along with Australia and Argentina.

But there isn't a unified or homogeneous ecology in China or almost anywhere else, at least not at any fine-grained level. Han Chinese make up 90 percent of the Chinese population, but there are more than fifty other, mostly indigenous, Chinese

ethnic groups with their own histories and traditions that are recognized by the Chinese government. The most ethnically diverse countries in the world include New Guinea, India, Mexico, the northern parts of Central America, the western parts of South America, and all of West and Central Africa. In India, there are more than two thousand ethnic groups. The US Census Bureau identifies only six ethnicities, marked by racial characteristics, but America, in fact, contains a huge number of mostly exogenous ethnic groups, since the indigenous peoples suffered multifarious degrees and kinds of extermination during colonization. Still, America is middling among the countries of the earth in terms of comparative human ethnic diversity. Nonetheless, the point about differences at every level of ecological grain obtains in countries like America with a common language and centralized government. As an Irish Catholic in New York in the 1950s and '60s, I grew up in a different ecology than my Jewish acquaintances and even than my Italian Catholic friends who attended the same school as I did. I was both puzzled and delighted by interactions with the Garguilo and Mancuso families and the Steinbock and Sternberg families. They ate differently than we did, celebrated different holidays (Saint Anthony's Day rather than Saint Patrick's Day; Hanukkah not Christmas), and they really did emotionally engage each other differently than we Flanagans did. The Garguilo and Mancuso men, for example, hugged and kissed each other. We Flanagans did not do that, although my brother and I do now. Mrs. Sternberg yelled a lot but never seemed angry. When my mother raised her voice, she was angry.

Many countries in the world that are not among the most diverse overall contain cities that are incredibly diverse—for example, Houston, Jersey City, and Stockton, California, in the

United States. Half of the people in Miami and Toronto are foreign born. Amsterdam, Sydney, Melbourne, London, and New York all have foreign-born populations in the vicinity of 40 percent. Close to two hundred languages are spoken in both New York and Los Angeles—but not the same two hundred languages. Languages parse the emotional universe in different ways. And cultures prize different kinds of emotional expression. To the WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic [Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010; Henrich 2020]) eye, Mexicans might laugh too much at work, and Chinese people might be judged for hiding their emotions.

There is another point: ethnic, linguistic, and country of origin diversity are not the only ways to measure diversity and to think about interaction between diverse groups. There is, for example, economic diversity within and between countries, and socioeconomic status is known to also mark different habits of the heart and mind inside a nation-state independently of race, ethnicity, or gender. The Gini coefficient measures economic inequality. Namibia and South Africa have the highest Gini coefficients. The United States is about fortieth of 180 countries (top 20 percent) in terms of economic inequality. Northern European countries and former Soviet Union countries are the most equal economically (but for different reasons). China, even though it is 90 percent Han Chinese and thus on the ethnically homogeneous side, has a high Gini coefficient—about the same as the United States, which is much more ethnically diverse than China. With money comes the power to employ, to sue, and to buy out, and sets the stage for paternalism, condescension, and the power to enforce rules of emotional deference and submissive expressions of courtesy and gratitude.

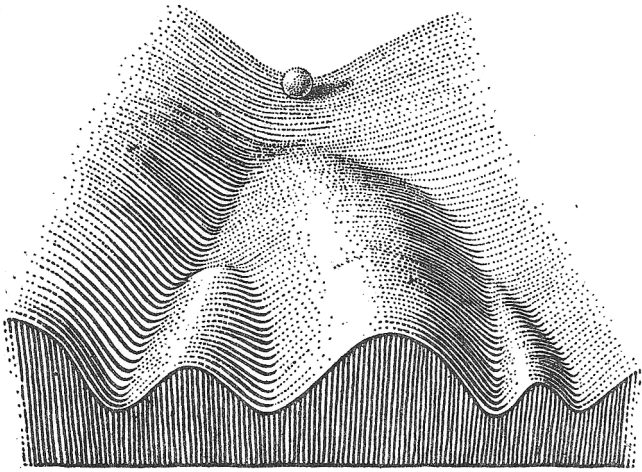


FIGURE 1. Waddington epigenetic landscape.

The key point is that formation as a person takes place amid a variety of dimensions that, depending on the ecology, make use of divisions by race, language, ethnicity, gender, political affiliation, and wealth. When differently formed groups with different social statuses interact, there are often clashes of value and of ways of being human, including norms and scripts for emotional expression.

Ecologies, microecologies, and micro-microecologies can be conceived as landscapes that receive, channel, and interact with the organisms who enter the landscape, and who change and are changed by that very landscape. Here is C. H. Waddington's picture of a simple individual, represented by the ball, about to enter a fairly simple, variegated landscape (see fig. 1). The probable trajectory of the ball and its probable end point are easy to see. Now, for realism's sake, imagine a multiplicity of nonsimple individuals, represented by balls with variegated dimples, carrying their own individual and social histories in the pattern of dimples, and entering into a much

more complicated and variegated ecology from every direction with different initial spin. Such a picture represents the ecological situation across the earth and also the situation in many multicultural, cosmopolitan locales, places where lucky people come for new opportunities and unlucky people come to escape degradation, poverty, war, and genocide.

A Waddington landscape can help us think about variation inside a culture or between cultures, as well as about circumstances where interactions take place between people from different valleys. If one wants to, one can imagine two persons who, by the circumstances of birth, end up living in the leftmost and rightmost valleys. They are Mexican and American, Basque and !Kung, or New Guinean and Rwandan, say, and they are constituted to some significant extent by values particular to the ecology in which they were formed. Then circumstances of immigration lead the people from different valleys to intermingle. What happens then? What should happen then? My "What happens?" questions are focused on what happens and should happen to their values and how these are affectively colored, constructed, and enacted to do work in creating the conditions of a meaningful life. It is known, for example, that on average, Mexicans are happier and experience more positive emotions than Americans.¹¹ If they meet, who will change and why? If they meet, who should change and why?

Citizens of Ecuador, Paraguay, and Uruguay lead the world in feeling that they are treated respectfully by their compatriots. Will we in the United States learn their rules for emotional expression, ideal emotional tone, and respectful interaction if they immigrate, or will they acquire our less respectful modes of interaction? Or, considering another case, the Japanese in Japan, even those who score high on the anger trait, do not score high in identical circumstances, such as the experience of road rage, like Americans do (McLinton and Dollard 2010).

If a Japanese person moves to America and is caught in a traffic jam or is yelled at on the freeway, what will happen? What should happen?

The first question invites causal prediction. The second question invites wondering if, and when, reasons for or against a certain way of being should be brought to bear on the otherwise decisive, and possibly entirely arational, causal circuits. Thinking in terms of Waddington landscapes helps us realize that a fertilized egg identical to that of Martin Luther King Jr. or Mahatma Gandhi or Sojourner Truth or Rosa Parks or Albert Einstein, born at an earlier or later time and in a different place, is a different person and not, as it were, one of those notable people, although, we hope, a good, worthy, and successful person in their own right. Prospects, fates, and ends depend on multiple sources, some in individuals but most in natural and social ecologies. Forms of life, visions of good lives, are cocreations of persons, communities, and natural and social ecologies with long natural and social histories. One consequence of thinking in terms of coevolution is that we detect the possibly disturbing truth that if we were born into different cultures, we would have different emotional experiences and different views about the proper norms and scripts for emotions. But perhaps this knowledge can be power. Can we leverage this knowledge of our contingency to motivate us to try to locate live options for changing ourselves for the better? One source of evidence about the possibility space can come from attentive study of cultural differences in emotion norms and scripts. For denizens of multicultures, the study can really be that of a “participant observer,” since we already live in such mixes.

For most of human history, we have lived in small groups, typically fifteen to twenty member bands, rarely larger than

150 people. Reputation tracking is relatively easy with numbers such as these. One could easily know who had reason to be proud, or ashamed, or to feel guilty. Starting twelve thousand years ago, with the inventions of agriculture and the domestication of animals, there was a rapid expansion of the size of social units and thus entirely new ecologies. New practices in agriculture, trading, waterworks, and architecture allowed urban development. There are, as I write, 30 cities in the world with more than ten million people, and that number is predicted to rise to 43 by 2030. There are 436 cities with between one and five million people, and another 550 cities with between five hundred thousand and one million people. With anonymity and distance between trading partners come difficulties in reputation tracking and the need for new strategies for doing disciplinary emotions. One form this eventually took over millennia was the change from up-close and personal reactions to normative violations to handing over punishment and rewards to impersonal institutions, the military, civil service, school systems, the state, and international courts.

Thinking of human development as taking place in multifarious ecologies allows, but does not require, us to think of the mechanisms that govern social and cultural evolution as operating according to similar mechanisms that operate on genes. Selection by consequences is the unifying idea that genes, ideas, norms, and social institutions increase their footprint, but perhaps only for a limited time in a particular place, when they lead to reproductive success, or to a successful solution to an ecological challenge, or to the flourishing of some population (those in power, the men, the whites, possibly, at the limit, everyone), as well as various serendipities, chance, drift, and randomness (Boyd and Richerson

2005; Richerson and Boyd 2005). One fancy capacity that humans, but not just humans, have is the capacity to create and maintain various kinds of normative order. The normative order uses both (1) the capacities of individuals to acquire reliable dispositions inside themselves—typically conceived as virtues or character traits—to do what is judged to be good, right, or expected, and (2) public institutions and structures, such as the government, the law, and tax codes, to accomplish, regulate, and enforce regimens of compassion, justice, forgiveness, and mercy, which individuals might not find easy to motivate from reliable inner resources. Emotions are considered to be integral parts of virtues, and they play a major role in marking what we value and don't value (Kristjánsson 2018; Sreenivasan 2020). We, but again, not just us, are normative animals (de Waal 2006b; de Waal et al. 2014; Whitehead and Rendell 2015; Andrews 2020).

When Cultures Meet

Think again of the valleys in a Waddington landscape as inhabited by peoples who live in distinctive cultures. One might imagine that, in place of some of the hills between valleys, there are instead seas and oceans and impassable mountain ranges, and many different languages, cultures, and religions on the other side of these barriers. Imagining variation might help us consider the extent to which the ways we think about and enact emotions might be path dependent and culturally specific.

Anna Wierzbicka is a linguist who has spent much of her career warning anthropologists, psychologists, and cognitive scientists about the danger of taking the meanings of psychological terms in English as capturing psychological essences that can be mapped onto foreign terms without loss

of meaning on either side. In *Imprisoned in English* (2014), Wierzbicka gives numerous examples of a lack of synonymy of emotion terms across languages. One might think that translation is straightforward between nearby languages like English and German, and especially for terms that some think name basic emotions. But this is not so. “Anger” is typically translated as *Wut*. But *Wut* refers to a *very* negative feeling (as opposed to simply negative) and involves “being out of control,” which “anger” in English does not. *Wut* also connotes destroying something rather than, say, retribution against someone for an act of injustice. So perhaps *Wut* is better translated as “rage” or “fury,” and *Zorn* is better for everyday negative, but not out-of-control anger. But *Zorn* is an increasingly uncommon word in German and is also often translated as “wrath” (2014, 79–82). So neither *Wut* nor *Zorn* accurately captures the English word “anger,” but it’s good enough for everyday work, and we let linguistic context fix meanings at a particular time so that, for example, if *Wut* is used to translate anger about a minor inconvenience, we know it is not normal German *Wut*, which is “furious.”¹²

In her classic book, *Unnatural Emotions* (1988), Catherine Lutz also discusses the difficulties of translating emotion terms across cultures. She explains that the Ifaluk word *fago* can be translated as romantic love, but it is better read as meaning something like love + compassion + sadness. Lutz considered the possibility that *fago* is one word that, depending on the context, names what for us are three separate emotions. But for good anthropological reasons, including applying the principle of charity in interpretation, she found that the love + compassion + sadness interpretation was the right one. This means that *fago* is a word that combines three emotions that we normally distinguish. As understood by us, *fago* is a linguistic molecule made up of three emotion atoms. This does

not—without lots of further analysis—mean that it is an emotion molecule for the Ifaluk. It could be that what we take to be a combination of more basic emotions is taken as unitary by the Ifaluk. The greatly simplified story for this word—imagine it is uttered like our word “love” on one’s wedding day—is that the fragility of life among the Ifaluk is such that when one looks into one’s beloved’s eyes, one experiences love + solidarity with the lineage from which they both come and that contains much loss + the recognition that either loved one might be lost to the other before the proper time. So *fago* means “love,” except, well, as with “anger” and *Wut*, not really.

Emotion terms are one kind of value term. “Good” and “beautiful” are value terms with affective aspects. Some good things are not beautiful, and not everything that is beautiful is good. But what is good and what is beautiful are identified by the same word in twenty-seven different languages from eight different language families (Mayer et al. 2014). The close conceptual connection between what is good and what is beautiful reveals itself in the finding that Americans infer moral goodness and a healthy personality from physical attractiveness (Dion, Berscheid, and Walster 1972). The fact remains that most languages in most language families do not use the same word for “good” and “beautiful.” This does not settle the question of whether what is good and what is beautiful are conceptually closely linked in these languages but only that it is not so obvious. Cars and bikes could be named by one word. They are not. But the words “car” and “bike” are conceptually and semantically interconnected in ways that “car” and “cat” are not.

These sorts of linguistic relativities and variations matter because we will be talking about emotions using English words, but we can’t assume that we carve up emotions as

other cultures do. And if we don't, we can't be confident that, when we discuss norms and scripts of emotions, we are comparing apples to apples and oranges to oranges. Tracking the meanings of emotion terms across languages is a promising way to find out what different peoples mean by their emotion terms—how emotion terms are connected in a language with other emotion terms—without presupposing that emotion terms mean the same thing across languages. The psychology of emotions is holistic. Even if emotions are distinct from one another, they interact with one another conceptually and causally in myriad, culturally specific ways.

Linguists classify languages into language families according to principles of descent. There are 135 language families from which emerge the 6,500 languages spoken in the world today. About 4,500 of these languages have substantial numbers of people speaking them. Mandarin Chinese is the first language of one billion people. English is the first language of about 380 million people, but it is the most spoken language in the world at 1.5 billion competent speakers. What do we know about how people across the earth conceptualize emotions?

A remarkable study by Jackson and others (2019), published in *Science*, reports on an analysis of the meaning of emotion terms in a sample of 2,474 languages from twenty major language families. The experiment tracks “cases of colexification, instances where multiple concepts are coexpressed by the same word form in a language.” For example, in Persian, the word *aenduh* is used to express both the concept of grief and the concept of regret, whereas in the Sirkhi dialect of Dargwa, the word *dard* is used to express both the concept of grief and the concept of anxiety. The key background assumption is that colexification can be used reliably as a proxy for conceptual proximity or distance as understood

inside a tradition. Persians think of grief and regret as similar emotions, whereas Darga speakers think grief is more similar to anxiety than regret.¹³

Jackson and others write:

Our findings reveal wide variation in emotion semantics across 20 of the world's language families. Emotion concepts had different patterns of association in different language families. For example, "anxiety" was closely related to "fear" among Tai-Kadal languages, but more related to "grief" and "regret" amongst Austroasiatic languages. By contrast, "anger" was related to "envy" among Nakh-Daghestanian languages, but was more related to "hate," "bad," and "proud" among Austronesian languages. We interpret these findings to mean that emotion words vary in meaning across languages, even if they are often equated in translation dictionaries. (2019, 1522)

They continue:

Despite this variation, we find evidence for a common underlying structure in the meaning of emotion concepts across languages. Valence and physiological activation—which are linked to neurophysiological systems that maintain homeostasis—served as universal constraints to variability in emotion semantics. Positively and negatively valenced emotions seldom belonged to the same colexification communities, although there were notable exceptions to this pattern. For example, some Austronesian languages colexified the concepts of "pity" and "love," which implies that these languages may conceptualize "pity" as a more positive (or "love" as more negative) concept than other languages. The ability of valence and activation to consistently predict

structure in emotion semantics across language families suggests that these are common psychophysical dimensions shared by all humans. (ibid.)

This is interesting in a host of ways. First, it supports my skepticism about the claim that emotion words name mental states that are typed by universally recognizable, narrow, phenomenal feelings. On such a view, “fear” names whatever inner state has the robust, distinctive, and unambiguous fear feeling; “anger” names whatever inner state has the robust, distinctive, and unambiguous angry feeling; and so on for “guilt,” “shame,” “happiness,” and “sadness.” In my experience, it is normally fairly easy to get oneself or another to second-guess what emotional state they are in when queried: “Are you sure you are angry at James? I think you are more scared or sad about losing your relationship with him than you are angry.” Second, these findings about valence and activation support Lisa Feldman Barrett’s (2017) and Joseph LeDoux’s (2018) view that linguistic communities teach the language of emotions by making inferences—for example, in a child’s case—about whether a reaction expresses a positively or negatively valenced state. If the child breaks a toy, we infer negative valence; if she starts crying, we infer high physiological activation and teach the child the language of being “sad” as opposed to the language of being “bored” or “depressed,” which are also negatively valenced but of low activation.¹⁴

Figure 2 visually maps some of the semantic relations among emotion terms in different language families (Jackson et al. 2019). In Indo-European languages, grief and anxiety can be expressed by many different terms, whereas it is not at all clear how they are expressed in Nakh-Daghestanian languages.¹⁵

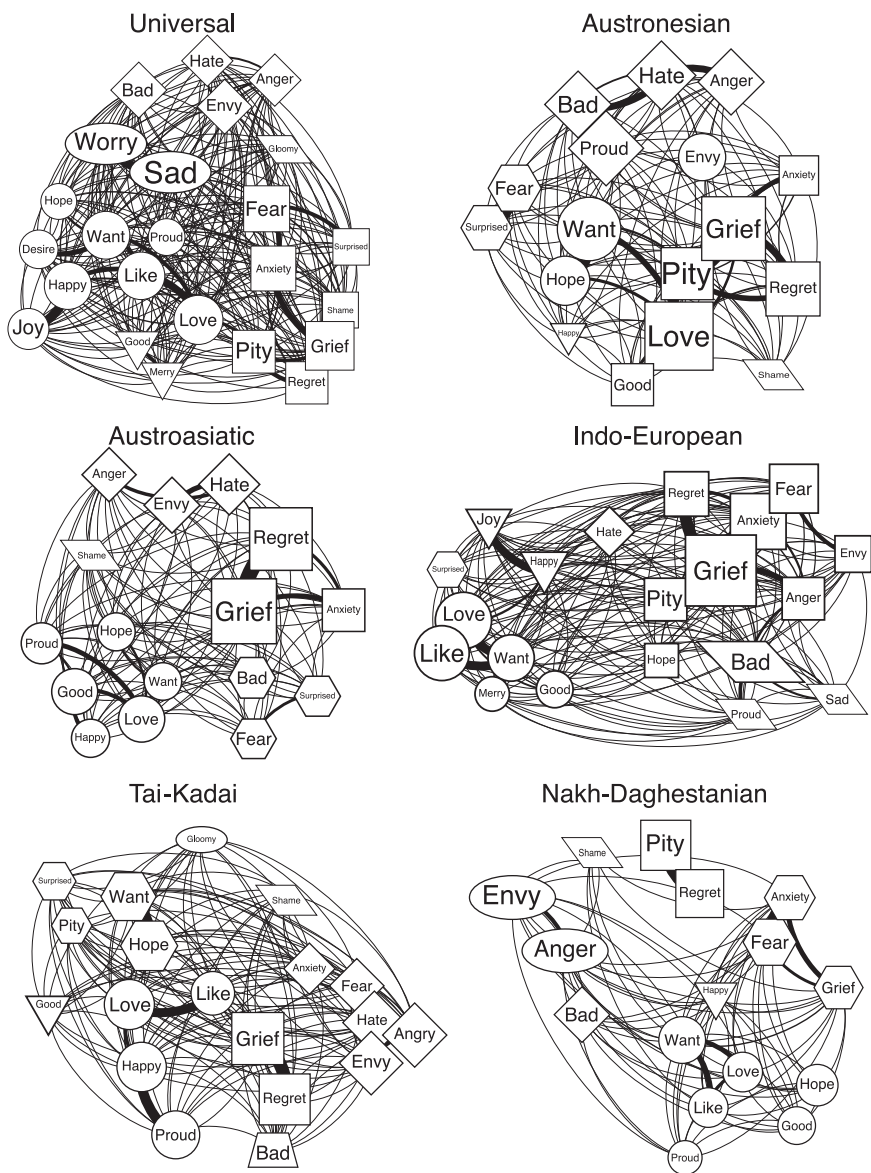


FIGURE 2. Colexication of emotion concepts across all languages (top left) and the largest language families. The nodes represent emotion concepts, and node size represents the number of colexications involving the concept. The connecting lines represent colexications, and connecting line thickness represents the number of colexications between two emotion concepts. The node shape designates community. Adapted from Jackson et al. 2019.

Emotion Words Are Theoretical Terms

How does a child learn the language of emotions? One thought is that adults point to an emotion in the child and name it in the same way they point and say “apple,” “red,” “nose,” and “car.” But adults don’t see emotions in children, nor do children see them in themselves, although they have feelings, as we say. Adults and older siblings surmise that a child is sad because her toy broke and she is crying, or she is happy because she is smiling while eating M&Ms.¹⁶ The adults don’t point and say the right word; the adults infer, surmise, and offer the child a way of interpreting and speaking about their experiences.

The distinction between observation terms and theoretical ones is neither simple nor clean. Names for common objects and some of their properties can be thought of as paradigm case observation terms. “Apple,” “red,” “round,” “block,” “tree,” and “dog” are observation terms. Naming them is anchored to observable things, things even a novice can directly experience. “Love,” “friendship,” and “bully” are theoretical terms. These things surely exist. They are part of the ontological table of elements. But you can’t see them without understanding something akin to a piece of social theory. There are human relations and human behaviors that require positing phenomena such as love, friendship, and bullying. In science, we don’t see electrons, neutrinos, bosons, fermions, genes, or electrical fields without instrumentation, in some cases not even with instrumentation. These things are all real and required to explain the phenomena in their totality. It is the same with terms for psychological states with unobservable properties (the way you feel now) and terms that name complex social relations (bullying, friendship, true love).

In a paper on learning emotion terms, Shablack, Becker, and Lindquist (2019) write:

Much of the experimental work on children's vocabulary development focuses on how children acquire words for object concepts, which are primarily labeled by nouns (Gentner, 1982; Huttenlocher and Smiley, 1987; Markman, 1990; Bloom, 2000). This emphasis is logical, as children's earliest vocabulary items are largely nouns that label people and basic objects (Bates et al., 1994). However, words of different lexical categories (verbs, adjectives, etc.) tend to have very different kinds of meanings and are learned in very different ways. For instance, verbs often label actions and events, and adjectives, which modify nouns, typically label properties or attributes. Emotions are internal states that are most frequently labeled by adjectives in everyday speech (Shaback, 2017), and verbs and adjectives are conceptually more complex than nouns (Gentner, 1982). Moreover, while caregivers may label salient objects for children ostensibly (e.g., "Look! That's a dog!"), caregivers do this only rarely (if at all) with properties and states of being (Gleitman, 1990).

Words like "sad" or "happy" are introduced in complex episodes where what is marked is a relation consisting of the cause (of the feeling state) + feeling state with its associated content (what the feeling is about) + behavioral accompaniments and effects. Words like "sad" or "happy" are introduced and learned by way of meaning rules that are wide in scope and refer to functional syndromes that involve typical causes + feelings + effects. Never in any actual ecology has anyone tried to teach the child names for an inner phenomenal state that is sadness-as-such or happiness-as-such by ostension. I doubt that there is any such thing as an emotion-as-such.

Even in cultures in which there is lots of emphasis on what a person feels,¹⁷ and in which careful description of what one

is feeling is prized (thus, in all therapeutic cultures), one is always being encouraged to describe a feeling state with its associated distinctive content (often with its causes as well).¹⁸ I'm sad that the candy is gone; I'm sad that big sister can stay up half an hour later than me. It is an interesting philosophical question whether there are any phenomenal properties that sadness in these two cases shares independently of their content. But it is not an ordinary question, nor is it easy to study or decide.

One thorny epistemic problem is about the identity conditions for narrow phenomenal feelings—anger-as-such, sadness-as-such, fear-as-such—assuming that there are any such things. Barrett (2014, 2017) and LeDoux (2019) claim that there is no brain signature that captures any common feature of conscious fear or anger, or any other emotion. Furthermore, introspection and/or phenomenology will not yield a high degree of confidence that fear of snakes and fear of being fired are of the same kind fearwise, or that being sad that the M&Ms are gone and being sad that Mommy said it's time for bed are the same sadnesswise. People will express confidence about the differences between sad states and scared states. But this confidence may well have as much to do with information they receive from the situation, audience cues, and dispositions to act as it has to do with any direct information about inner phenomenal feelings (in which I include somatic/bodily feelings).

Suppose we came to really care about whether people use emotion terms like “anger,” “fear,” “sadness,” and “shame” to refer to the same inner qualitative states—anger-as-such, fear-as-such, sadness-as-such, shame-as-such, assuming for now that there might be such things as emotions-as-such. One might accept my view that emotion terms normally refer to functional syndromes, only one aspect of which involves inner feelings, but still legitimately note that I can get angry that the

Red Sox lost the series and I can get angry that the president is a racist, and want to know whether there is any consistency to the phenomenal feeling aspects of anger across these two anger episodes.

We could divide the question into two, one intrapersonal, the other interpersonal or communal: Does some individual use words like “anger,” “fear,” “sadness,” and “shame” reliably over time, where “reliably” means that the inner phenomenal feeling is the same, or more or less the same, across usages? Do the members of some population use these terms to refer to the same, or more or less the same, inner state?

Suppose one started with the reasonable assumption that conscious emotions supervene on or emerge from complex, possibly global, brain and bodily states. If so, then sameness of phenomenal states depends on some kind of sameness at the level of brain and bodily states. Thus, in the intrapersonal case where we wonder whether some individual uses words like “anger,” “fear,” “sadness,” and “shame” to name the same feeling states, linguists should gather speech-act evidence, which would be checked against physiological measures of heart rate, blood pressure, cortisol level, and so on, which would then be checked against brain-imaging data and neurochemical assays. Then we’d look for matches in the bodily state profile with the intrapersonal use of the relevant emotion terms. The interpersonal case would be more difficult and not just because of the numbers of subjects required. Different human bodies are bound to display differences across every physiological and neural measure. Think about your annual physical when your doctor shows you your comprehensive metabolic and blood panel scores and declares you healthy. Every measure admits of a range of values that are all normal. Different bodies achieve the emergent property of blood and metabolic health in somewhat different ways. Likewise, there

will be many levels of grain at which no two bodies are ever in exactly the same state or do anything—even visual perception or digestion—in exactly the same way. One consequence is that answering our two questions about sameness of phenomenal feelings requires more than matching similarity or sameness of bodily states with linguistic reports; it requires theoretical advances in consciousness science that tell us what kind of similarity or sameness at the bodily levels are sufficient to infer a high degree of phenomenal similarity or sameness in conscious emotional experience.¹⁹ Furthermore, if emotional states are the states that they are partly in virtue of their content, which in the normal case the person consciously knows, then sadness that the flowers died and sadness that Mom died are unlikely to be the same kind of sadness. This is not just because they differ in depth, intensity, and existential ramifications, but (1) because their content differs (dead flowers versus dead mother); (2) because the distinctive contents are partly constitutive of the two different sadness states; and (3) because these sadness states with their different contents must supervene on, emerge from, or be produced by a brain/bodily difference. Otherwise, it is a miracle that we can detect them and know what emotional state we are in. Where is the sadness-as-such? Probably nowhere.

Emotional Norms

So emotion words are theoretical terms, not observation terms. The community infers that the child is sad or happy or jealous or ashamed by way of typical causes and effects, including the child's own behavior, and teaches the child the language of emotions. The child does not attach emotion terms to inner feelings alone but to inner feelings plus characteristic causes and effects.

Emotion terms also convey norms. That is, the child is introduced to emotion terms along with encouragement to learn the aptness conditions, rules, and norms for expressing that emotion. There are modes of emotional expression that are appropriate, decorous, warranted, and ethical, and those that are not. In a human life, there will be many times when one will feel sad, angry, scared, or ashamed, but ought not to. The oughts and ought-nots for emotions are offered normally as culturally certified norms for feeling and expression. The child who is learning words like “happy” or “sad” is learning about emotions, as well as when it is appropriate to be happy or sad or, what is different, to express happiness or sadness (advanced placement emotions training often involves learning what emotions you are permitted to have but not to share). It is okay to be happy when you are given M&Ms but not when your sister cries because they are “all gone.” It is okay to be sad when your puppy is sick or when you fall and scrape your knee, but not when the M&Ms have been evenly distributed between you and your sister and you want more than your fair share.

Anger and shame are generally even more implicated in normative life than emotions like sadness, fear, and happiness. As disciplinary emotions, they play central roles in an entire form of life. The Old Testament, for example, theorizes shame primarily in terms of unlawful sexual relations, especially mother-son sex and sibling incest. Modern children are introduced to varieties of shame and taught that some common sources of shame do not warrant real shame. For example, shame is appropriate for bad things you have done, bad intentions and dispositions, but not for wrongs that have been done to you or features of your body or mind that you have no control over. The philosopher Eleonore Stump offers a helpful fourfold taxonomy of shame: “Shame resulting from one’s own wrongdoing; shame stemming from wrong done by others;

shame following on some defect of nature; shame attaching to being a member of the human species" (2018, 347).

Each kind of shame is governed by norms: If I steal from the poor I should be ashamed. If I am raped I might be ashamed but shouldn't be. If I am born with a mental or physical handicap, I might feel ashamed but shouldn't. If I feel awkward, embarrassed, or ashamed for being naked in front of uninvited others, welcome to the human species. If I feel shame because my ancestors owned slaves, it is contested whether this is warranted shame or not, and thus whether I now have a special responsibility to make amends for what "my people" did then.²⁰

Or consider anger. According to its fans, anger is a refined detector of injustice, and uniquely effective at getting oppressors to yield their evil ways. *Liberté, égalité, fraternité*, insofar as they have been achieved, have only come from the insistent activism of angry souls. Opponents of anger say that anger is undisciplined and sloppy. It is "greedy for revenge," the unprincipled servant of a rapacious ego, and a miserable detector of the truth. Seneca, the first-century Stoic, offers this evidence of anger's ultimate futility: "See the foundations of the most celebrated cities hardly now discerned; they were ruined by anger" (1928).²¹ And Mahatma Gandhi writes: "The only force of universal application can . . . be that of *ahimsa* or love. . . . It follows, therefore, that a civil resister, whilst he will strain every nerve to compass the end of the existing rule, will do no intentional injury in thought, word or deed [to another person] . . . a civil resister . . . will harbour no anger" (1993).

Different communities teach different norms and scripts. Stoic children, Buddhist children, and children of the Western Enlightenment learn what anger is, in large measure, by learning norms about when, if ever, anger is permitted, when it is expected or required, how to enact it, how to suppress or

rechannel it, and how to respond if one is on the receiving end of another's anger.²²

Emotion terms are taught and learned in ecologically rich situations that typically involve episodes and events with complex causal structures, in which norms for the emotion are in play and being conveyed in the case of new language learners, or reinforced in the case of competent language users. When one is introduced to emotion terms and concepts, one is also simultaneously being inducted into a form of life, a way of being human, in which novices are taught about how we (in this family, school, culture, nation-state) do emotions, enact norms of appropriate expression and action, and so on. The child is inundated with information about what sorts of things typically make other kids and caretakers sad, angry, happy, and embarrassed. And the child can read off information about causes and permissions from the caretakers. "When I don't share with my sister, Mom gets mad and sends me for a time-out." The child also learns what kinds of emotional displays on her part get positive or negative uptake. If a child eventually claims to have an opinion about the narrow phenomenal feelings that are definitive of different emotions, she is engaged in a complex and fraught abstraction exercise, because she has received almost no direct information about the matter at all.

Path Forward

Let me sum up and at the same time describe the path forward. There is the predicament, a method to address the predicament, and a view of the nature, function, and plasticity of the emotions. The general version of the predicament is this: There are many philosophically and existentially significant things that humans may question about how they are living at a time and in a family, community, and nation-state for the sake of doing better. We can question our loves and hates,

opinions, values, virtues and vices, general principles, commitments, aims and aspirations, and civic institutions and practices. One among the things that can be questioned, criticized, and possibly changed is how we do emotions.

The specific version of the predicament, which I claim has some urgency, at least where I live, is that we are too angry and don't see our way out. We also live in a world in which shame is given a bad rap and is considered as a primitive and damaging emotion. I think we underestimate the good uses of shame. I do not intend to advocate for shaming but for a mature sense of shame, for the importance of equipping children with a strong sense of responsibility for the health and well-being of the practice of truth seeking and abiding the virtues of cooperative and respectful civic life. When children are inconsiderate, selfish, cruel, or dishonest, we say, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself." This is not shaming or humiliation, which typically enact cruelty. It tells the child that they have been seen doing what is wrong, but it doesn't claim that the gaze of others is what they need to be responsive to. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself" is an invitation to internalize certain values and norms so that the child eventually is ashamed of itself when it is tempted to do wrong or does do wrong. A mature sense of shame is good, possibly the best protection for such deep value commitments, and it might play for us something like the positive role it played—possibly that it still plays—in East Asia and South Asia.

My remedy for the predicament is to explore, excavate, and critically evaluate resources for doing anger and shame differently than we now do anger and shame. How do we see what we are doing with these emotions with a clear eye and, at the same time, explore alternative possibilities? There are several ways to undertake such a task. The method I follow here is a variation of what I call "the natural method" (Flanagan 1992): bring to bear any and all resources that pertain to the problem

at hand. The question at hand is how to do emotions, specifically anger and shame. The question has both scientific aspects and normative ones. Who are the experts on the scientific aspects of anger and shame? Who has methods for describing and explaining emotions? Who should one go to in order to understand the nature and function of emotions? The answer is that there are entire subfields in biology, psychology, sociology, and anthropology devoted to the nature and function of emotions. I have read this research, so I bring it to the table.

The normative questions include the following: How do we tell when our emotional practices are not doing their job? What is their job? What are emotions supposed to do? How do we tell if and when there are morally problematic aspects to the way we do these emotions (either by the lights of the culture in question or from some external perspective)? How do we judge when we should readjust or modify our practices, norms, and scripts for anger and shame?

Who has methods for addressing these normative questions? My answer may surprise the reader. I do not think philosophers or religious leaders have any special expertise to answer normative questions except in one narrow respect. The narrow respect is that philosophers and religious scholars, but only as scholars, sometimes know a lot about the ways in which different traditions have conceived emotions, whether and how they are thought to support a good life, when they get in the way, and so on. As scholars, philosophers can bring knowledge, in the present case, of different traditions—for example, the way Aristotelians, Stoics, Buddhists, Confucians, Jews, Christians, Kantians, and utilitarians think or have thought about the proper role of emotions in human life, their role in virtue, and so on.

But I do not think that philosophers, including ethicists and social and political philosophers, have any special abilities

in the normative spheres or regarding normative questions. All the scientific disciplines that study emotions also contain and deploy normative standards and criteria that are used to assess such things as an individual's emotional well-being (psychology) or a subculture's or culture's emotional well-being (sociology, cultural psychology, anthropology, political science). There is no problem with that, no violation of some intellectual division of labor that restricts "oughtology" to philosophers and religious leaders. Ideas about living good human lives are entirely in the public domain. My method is to invite reflection on the variety of ways people have for doing emotions in service of improving our practices.

There is a background theory of emotions, which I express in summary form and without necessary hedges and exceptions. I intend the theory of emotions to be plausible based on the totality of evidence; it only partially reflects the folk psychology of emotions.

- Emotions are things we do. Emotions are enactments.
- Emotions typically involve exchanges between or among people.
- Terms for emotions, and conceptual categories for individuating emotions, are introduced along with norms for doing emotions.
- There is cultural variation in the norms and scripts for emotions.
- The norms for emotions express when, where, how, and (sometimes) why different emotional responses are acceptable; when they are expected or possibly required; how intense the feelings ought to be; and culturally certified scripts for emotional responses.
- Emotion terms normally refer to functional states or syndromes characterized by a quartet comprising

typical causes + typical feelings + typical dispositions to act + typical actions.

- Virtues and vices involve emotions. Classic definitions of virtues depict them as reliable dispositions (to perceive, feel, think/judge, and act) in the way a situation requires. One element of a virtue is to feel correctly—for example, to have a proper sense of shame, not to be shameless or overly severe, to experience and express anger as an injustice warrants, neither too little nor too much. Acquiring the virtues requires in part cultivating the emotions, sometimes taming them (anger, fear), and sometimes expanding their scope (compassion) (Kristjánsson 2010; Sreenivasan 2020).
- Emotion terms do not normally refer to some narrow phenomenal state that is the emotion, to some narrow, natural kind that the terms “sad,” “scared,” and “angry” refer to across all instances of a kind (Barrett 2006, 2017; Scarantino 2012; LeDoux 2019). Emotions might nonetheless refer to well-behaved social kinds (typed in terms of wide functional syndromes) such that both local and global generalizations and predictions about emotions can be made in the human sciences.
- When individuals focus on the phenomenal feeling aspect of their emotions, we should expect there to be differences in feelings that are inherited from the ways an emotion is assembled by caretakers (who represent a culture or subculture). American guilt and shame are conceptually intermixed and have negative valence; American shame is associated with “feeling defeated,” which it is not almost anywhere else on earth (Sedgwick and Frank 1995; Wong and Tsai, 2007); Chinese, Japanese, and Hindu shame has both positive and negative valence. Dispositions to change behavior are associated

with guilt in American samples, but they are associated with shame in Javanese and Raramuri (Mexican indigenous people) samples. Regarding anger: Americans feel like punching the person who makes them angry, whereas Japanese feel like leaving the room.

- As emotional norms are acquired, the initial untutored causal sequence (what some call a “basic affect program”) is restructured so what was the initial or typical sequence is remade into a warranted sequence, by which I simply mean the normatively permitted (apt or fitting) expression of the emotion replaces the original expression. If children are originally, naturally, or typically sad if they don’t get more than their fair share of M&Ms, they come to learn that sadness is unwarranted and adjust their desires, expectations, feelings, and responses. Remarkably, children who initially want more than their fair share of M&Ms (all children) eventually learn to be genuinely happy when everyone gets exactly the same amount!
- Cultures have control over how emotions feel insofar as how they feel depends on which other emotions are recruited to build the emotion, and by proximity or distance relations to other emotions. American shame is conceptually linked to anxiety and fear, whereas Japanese shame is linked to love and happiness (Romney, Moore, and Rusch 1997).
- Cultures also have control over the intensity settings and the scope of emotions. If a culture indicates that an emotion like shame ought to be tuned high and, what is different, be all-encompassing in the sense that it devalues the person who is ashamed as a human being, it can do that. Because cultures are not fixed, and because there are multiple models for how to do emotions on

offer in multicultures, there are constant renegotiations about legitimate reasons for experiencing an emotion, for intensity tuning, and for scope. For example, shame can be constructed in such a way that I feel that I am a failed human being or, more narrowly, such that I feel that I ought to change some particular aspect of myself.²³

My proposal is to renegotiate the dominant scripts for anger and shame. I will now proceed to examine the emotions of anger and shame from the perspectives of cultural psychology, anthropology, and cross-cultural philosophy. The exploration of some of the many different ways that these emotions have been done over the course of human history, and are being done across the earth now, allows us to imaginatively explore the possibility space. The aim is to use the evidence of variation as an invitation to think about how we do these emotions, to think of how we do these emotions as something we are in charge of and that we can change if we have reason to. The method of change might be direct and involve changing ourselves. More likely, it will involve some work on ourselves plus work to change social expectations and social institutions. My personal desire is to make the case that we could do better specifically by tuning down the anger and promoting a healthy sense of shame. Even if the reader entirely disagrees with me about the particular cases of anger and shame, they still might find the method of comparative philosophical anthropology valuable as a source of critical tools for thinking about how we do emotions, and how we might do them better. The method of comparative critique is entirely exportable to any emotion, value, or practice that is done differently by different people.

PART I

Anger



Anger and Morals

WHAT WORK DOES ANGER do in morality? What work ought anger to do in morality? The first is a question in psychology, sociology, anthropology, and politics. It calls for thick description and explanation. The second is a question in ethics. It calls for reasons and normative justification. How are the two questions and their answers connected? I will discuss one substantive and one methodological way they connect. The anthropological record shows that anger as “we” do it (for any group) is neither necessary for moral life nor normal in any robust psychobiological or statistical sense. These findings open up the space of moral possibility. Methodologically, the process of reflective equilibrium, where we bring our enacted norms of anger into alignment with our ideals, can work to recalibrate practices and provide internal normative justification for both our practices and our ideals. In a community that is Aristotelian about anger, the method permits members to remind themselves of the kinds of anger that are justified, that accord with the mean between too much and too little. Over the course of this chapter and chapters 2 and 3, I will provide such reminders and give some evidence that contemporary

North American anger practices are far from ideal and embed vice, typically the vice of aiming to hurt another.

The two kinds of anger that are common and worth eliminating are *payback anger* and *pain-passing anger*. Payback anger is vengeful anger that says “You (or your people) hurt me or mine, are an obstacle to me or mine, or disgust me or mine, so I hurt you.” Although most Americans will pooh-pooh simple revenge, the political air is thick with vengefulness, disgust, and demonization of fellow members in what is supposed to be a commonwealth. Whereas payback anger is conscious and intentional, pain-passing anger is often lazy and inadvertent. It has this structure: “I am hurting, anxious, depressed, fearful, and wounded, and I strike out at you in anger and hurt you.” We are much too permissive about pain-passing anger, in part because we live in a peculiar kind of therapeutic culture that believes falsely that ventilating negative emotions is necessary for the well-being of the venter, and this good somehow overrides the hurt to an innocent bystander.

Because my main aim is to make the reader reconsider our practices of payback anger and pain-passing anger, I will often speak of “payback and pain-passing anger” together for ease of exposition, though the two kinds are different and deploy different norms and scripts. Payback and pain-passing are only two of many varieties of anger. Many other varieties of anger are entirely justified—for example, anger against structural racism or sexism. Such anger has, as its aim, ending racist and sexist practices, and it does not require the intention to harm racists or sexists or to pass pain to racists and sexists. But if it does, then it embeds and encourages types of anger we should actively discourage.

The conversation between the anthropology of anger and the ethics of anger has implications for how we should think about anger and how we should think about the methods of

ethics. I enact and model the method of reflectively comparing, contrasting, and criticizing our anger practices in the hope that doing so will help us see when, whether, why, and where our own practices of doing anger need reform. The method has this simple structure: Look, see, imagine, and reflect on how you do the emotion of anger by using information about other ways of doing it and rationalizing it as data.

Moral Imagination

How do the human sciences matter to moral philosophy? In a paper titled “How I Survived the Moral Philosophy of the Twentieth Century,” Alasdair MacIntyre offers one answer to this question, embedded in a lament:

For on the view that I have found myself compelled to take, contemporary academic moral philosophy turns out to be seriously defective as a form of rational inquiry. How so? First, the study of moral philosophy has become divorced from the study of morality or rather of moralities and by so doing has distanced itself from practice. We do not expect serious work in the philosophy of physics from students who have never studied physics or on the philosophy of law from students who have never studied law. But there is not even a hint of a suggestion that courses in social and cultural anthropology and in certain areas of sociology and psychology should be a prerequisite for graduate work in moral philosophy. Yet without such courses no adequate sense of the varieties of moral possibility can be acquired. One remains imprisoned by one's upbringing. (2013)

The reason for normative ethics to engage with the psychology, sociology, and anthropology of morality is straightforward: The study of actual moralities, including alien ones,

is protection against taking for granted the parochial moral order, and from being “imprisoned by one’s upbringing.” At the same time, engaging with other moral traditions provides sources for moral imagination and critique, for exploring the “varieties of moral possibility.”

Here, I explore this idea, discussing its merits as a distinctive method for ethics that cannot be subsumed under the rubric of consistency testing, what philosophers call the methods of seeking narrow or wide reflective equilibrium, or under the method of seeking an overlapping or unforced moral consensus, and certainly not under methods that involve fully informed rational agents or impartial observers. The method of exploring the moral possibility space by engaging cross-cultural empirical and philosophical sources is a method well suited to engaging in moral reflection and critique in both settled moral ecologies and in unsettled multicultural ecologies, where a dominant tradition speaks about how we do things when, in fact, there is not any way “we” do things, nor any “we” with the moral authority to speak in this way.

I deploy the method of philosophical anthropology in order to unsettle certain views held by philosophers and ordinary people about the naturalness and moral defensibility of, especially, two types of anger—payback and pain-passing anger—which are hard to challenge unless one explores contrastive spaces that deny that they are normal, necessary, or good.

Anger is a special case in comparative ethics. All cultures have a theory of virtues. The virtues, whatever they are, are considered to be necessary for a good human life (though rarely sufficient). Although lists of virtues (compassion, justice, honesty, loyalty, courage) differ in terms of which ones have the highest status and trump the others when there are conflicts, it is rare for a virtue in one tradition to be considered

a vice in another. There is disagreement across and among traditions for any particular virtue (justice, courage, temperance, compassion, loyalty) and what its “mean” form, as in the doctrine of the mean, is. So, for example, there might well be a kind of Confucian family loyalty that is considered nonvirtuous because it allows too much partiality, even nepotism, from the perspective of an impartial morality, which nonetheless also views loyalty (of the right kind) as a virtue (Henrich 2020). Anger is exceptional in that most people, including most moral philosophers, think there are varieties of anger that are virtuous. But some well-respected moral traditions consider anger as always, or almost always, a vice. It is worth considering why.¹

Here’s a true story that was pivotal in my own exposure to alternative moral possibility spaces and that provoked my imagination. In March 2000, I visited Dharamshala, India, for four days of meetings with the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, some of his fellow Buddhists, and a group of Western scientists, mostly psychologists and neuroscientists, to discuss the topic of “Destructive Emotions and How to Overcome Them.” Daniel Goleman’s (2003) book on these meetings with that title is a good report. There was much to learn at these discussions in the Dalai Lama’s residence and many surprises. Here is one unforgettable one.

It became clear after a day or so of talks that Tibetan Buddhists believe that anger, resentment, and their suite are categorically bad, always unwarranted, wrong, and “unwholesome,” as they are inclined to say. That was surprising by itself. We have many norms for appropriate anger, such as “Don’t get too angry” or “so angry” as we sometimes say. And wrath is a deadly sin. But we do not think that one should never get angry or that anger is always wrong. For us, the right kind of anger reveals

that one sees and cares about something of value. Everyday, not-so-warranted anger shows that one is normal. Minimally, we expect and tolerate a certain amount of it.

But even more mind-boggling, these Buddhists also believed that anger could be eliminated in mortals, that there are practices that actually work so that it is possible to not experience anger, practices that can extirpate anger and cleanse the soul of tendencies toward anger. I understood that there are practices and rules of decorum—"counting to 10," sublimation, or "stuffing it"—norms of apt anger that keep us from expressing anger and that work to contain it, but not experiencing anger at all seemed unnatural, weird, and unhuman. Again, self-work to keep from getting pissy over small frustrations makes good sense and is possible. But, except for a rare saintly bird of maximally even temperament, not experiencing anger at the cosmos or the gods for the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, and especially at evil people for their awfulness, seemed close to a psychological impossibility. Then there is the fact that most people I know were raised to think it is okay, permissible, and possibly sometimes required to feel and express outrage. Righteous anger is something we ought to experience and express sometimes, something that certain people or states of affairs deserve.

So I found myself posing this thought experiment to the Dalai Lama: "Imagine that one were to find oneself in a public space—say, a park or a movie theater—where one realized that one is seated next to Hitler or Stalin or Pol Pot or Mao, early in the execution of the genocides they perpetrated. We (my people) think it would be appropriate first to feel moral anger, possibly outrage at Hitler and the others on the list, and second, that it would be okay, possibly required, to kill them, supposing one had the means. What about you Tibetan Buddhists?"

The Dalai Lama turned to consult the high lamas who were normally seated behind him, like a lion's pride. After a few minutes of whispered conversation in Tibetan with his team, the Dalai Lama turned back to our group and explained that one should kill Hitler (actually with some swashbuckling ceremonial fanfare, in the way a samurai warrior might). It is stopping a bad, a very bad, karmic causal chain. So "Yes, kill him. But don't be angry."

What could this mean? How did it make sense to think of one human being killing another, being motivated to kill another human being, without emotion, without activating the suite of reactive attitudes such as anger, resentment, or blame?

Varieties of Anger: "A Multiform Evil"?

Moral emotions are complex. There are cultural norms, scripts, and permissions for how we do them, and there are often, but not always, ethnotheories about the nature and functions of the emotions—in whose terms ordinary people explain themselves—as well as norms and scripts for enacting them. I propose that we reflect on anger and seriously consider whether we have, as I think, reason to reconsider how we do it, to turn down its temperature, modify some uses we make of it, and stop modeling payback anger and pain-passing anger for the youth. Just as we know there is an obesity epidemic in our country and we need to model new health and nutrition habits for the sake of the next generation, the same is true with anger. When we model bad anger norms, we endanger the moral and psychological well-being of our youth. We need to change how we do anger.

I intend "anger" to serve as a superordinate term, as the name for a genus. All, or almost all, comparative work on emotions assumes some overlap across the instances of an emotion

genus, typically some core phenomenal feeling (this might just be something like valence and intensity), a distinctive set of somatic markers, plus some evolutionary old behavioral links. But what exactly falls under the term translated as “anger” so conceived—its broad phenomenal features, semantics, psychological linkages, neurobiological characteristics, and the norms that govern anger scripts—involves cultural particularity (Wierzbicka 1999). Inside American English there are puzzles: Is frustration a type of anger, a precursor, a fuel, or a different emotion altogether? Are resentment, indignation, and contempt types of anger or close cousins? What about envy and jealousy? Are moral outrage and righteous indignation types of anger?

In *On Anger*, Seneca, the first-century CE Stoic, writes of the abundance of words for the varieties of anger, enviously noting that the Greeks make more distinctions than the Romans:

What anger is has been sufficiently explained. The difference between it and irascibility is evident: it is the same as that between a drunken man and a drunkard; between a frightened man and a coward. It is possible for an angry man not to be irascible; an irascible man may sometimes not be angry. I shall omit the other varieties of anger, which the Greeks distinguish by various names, because we have no distinctive words for them in our language, although we call men bitter and harsh, and also peevish, frantic, clamorous, surly and fierce: all of which are different forms of irascibility. Among these you may class sulkiness, a refined form of irascibility; for there are some sorts of anger which go no further than noise, while some are as lasting as they are common: some are fierce in deed, but inclined to be sparing of words: some expend themselves in bitter words

and curses: some do not go beyond complaining and turning one's back: some are great, deep-seated, and brood within a man: there are a thousand other forms of a multi-form evil. (1928)

We will need to keep our minds on the varieties of anger. I do not think every variety is bad. It may be that anger is a "multiform evil," as Seneca puts it. I think it is. But not every form of anger is a vice. In fact, the Dalai Lama claims that even Buddhists can allow that there is "healing anger" (1997).² It is hatred, not righteous or healing anger, that is vicious. This suggests that what the Dalai Lama said to me about killing Hitler without anger should really be understood as recommending that one ought not to hate Hitler because hate, but not righteous anger at the evil that he did, is incompatible with love and compassion. Another interpretation is that if you love him, as an act of mercy, you would kill him, because allowing him to keep committing genocide is harmful to his humanity. In this regard, killing him is lovingkindness. With both interpretations, one can certainly be angry at genocide. One can also, I assume, be angry at Hitler because he intends genocide, and one is permitted to kill him to stop a genocide. But one ought not to hate Hitler or have a lack of compassion for him. If hate is a species of the genus anger, then this means that not every form of anger is prohibited, even for the Buddhist. I'll leave to the reader the exercise of thinking about whether hatred is in fact a variety of anger (I'd be inclined to say it is) or a different beast altogether, and to consider how one could determine this in a nonarbitrary way.

Distinguishing among varieties of anger might seem tedious, but it is necessary. On my view of emotions, there are several places at which cultures regulate and build norms and scripts for apt emotional expression—and rightly so. There are

the causes of anger, how the anger feels or seems (its intensity, magnitude, duration), what it is about, how it is expressed, and what it intends. Regarding causes, we often say that such and such (the traffic jam) was nothing to get angry about or that a noticeable slight (the condescension) was something to get angry about, even though you let it pass. Regarding feeling (suppose some minor slight from long ago still gnaws at me) or expression (I blow my stack), I might well think, depending on the case, that I am over- or underreacting. Regarding intention, I say anger aimed mainly to execute a grudge or gain revenge is wrong (see Agnes Callard [2020] for a defense of grudges and revenge),³ whereas anger aimed to increase awareness of structural racism, and then to overcome racism, even if it hurts, is legitimate.

Aristotle and Anger

I am interested in whether anger is a good or bad thing morally. I have a view on the matter: in my world, many kinds of anger worth worrying about are normalized. Surprisingly, Aristotle explicitly defends one variety of anger that I think is bad:

Anger (*orgê*) may be defined as a desire accompanied by pain for a conspicuous revenge, on account of a perceived slight (belittlement) on the part of people who are not fit to slight one or one's own. (*Rhetoric* 1.2, 1378a31–32)

According to Aristotle, there are three kinds of slights or belittlement that produce the justified desire for vengeful anger:

1. *Contempt*—as when you treat me as of no or little value, as deplorable.
2. *Spite*—as when you block me from some good, not to have it for yourself but just because you don't want me to have it.

3. *Arrogant abuse*—as when you publicly shame, humiliate, and embarrass me.

The first thing to notice is that *orgê* is a term of much more limited scope than the word “anger” as it is used in English. *Orgê* names only the species of revenge-desiring anger that comes from, or is legitimately caused by, contempt, spite, and arrogant abuse, and is scripted to respond to these types of causes. It is personal. One might credibly think that even understood narrowly, *orgê* is narrower still, embedding cultural knowledge about status and hierarchy, about “who is not fit to slight one or one’s own.” One wonders: What about when I am angry at the rock on which I stubbed my toe or at the drought, or at the coronavirus, or about the legislation to limit government health care, or to make voting more difficult for some groups, like poor people and people of color?

Among Greeks of Aristotle’s time, what one is feeling in these cases is *ekhthra* (enmity) or *misein* (to hate) (Konstan 2007). These are distinctive responses to bad or harmful things and involve the desire that the bad or harmful thing—the inanimate obstacle, the bad weather, the coronavirus, or the bad legislation—cease, disappear, go away, and be erased. *Ekhthra* or *misein* might be fairly thought to be a kind of anger that can involve enacting vengeance or not. My view is that one can respond to slights with anger if the anger is not aimed at payback or pain-passing, but only rectification of the person who has done the slighting and harmed the relationship. The same could be said for *ekhthra* or *misein* for unjust social policies. That is, these are acceptable if they are aimed at removing bad people from power or the rectification of unjust laws or social policies, and if they are not vengeful.

Despite the fact that Aristotle approves of vengeful anger for slights and belittlement, he is no fan of irascible souls. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE), he makes clear that the virtuous

person is gentle and their anger is targeted at wrongdoing in a way that is neither excessive nor defective. “There is praise for someone who gets angry at the right things and with the right people, as well as in the right way, at the right time and for the right length of time” (*NE* 1125b 27). A person who never gets angry when they are slighted or belittled is stupid and servile (*NE* 1126a).

Nonetheless, when the “slight” passes certain tests, then “revenge” is virtuous.⁴ The American Psychological Association goes further and says this: “Anger is a completely normal, usually healthy, human emotion” (n.d.). One might wish for a joint communiqué from the American Psychological Association and the American Philosophical Association specifying whether, when, and how healthy anger and moral anger coincide, if they do.

Carol Tavris describes the dominant American view among psychologists and psychiatrists and, thanks to them, also among laypeople, as the “ventilationist view” (1982; rev. 1989). Anger must be released, otherwise there will be addiction, eating disorders, skin disorders, migraines, divorce, and general mayhem—except when one examines the evidence, it is all bullshit in the technical, philosophical sense (Frankfurt [1986] 2005). The message is designed to persuade, but with complete disregard for the truth and evidence. Ventilating anger models self-indulgent expression, allows people to practice how to have an outburst, and increases rather than decreases the total amount of angry expression, especially among people who are receiving “anger management” treatment (Barash and Lipton 2011).

The ventilationist view gives permission both for vengeful anger, which aims to pay back, and also for pain-passing anger. Whereas payback anger is aimed at the person or persons who caused the anger, pain-passing anger expresses anger at

an individual or audience who did not cause your pain. You are hurting, so you vent your pain and cause pain to innocent others. Aristotle only defends the first kind of anger, payback. Therapeutic culture, inspired by nonscientific models of emotions and emotional well-being, provides permission for pain-passing anger as well. It's as if the Hatfields and McCoys, Sigmund Freud, and Arthur Janov (of evidence-free "primal scream" fame) set our anger norms.

Even worse, ordinary, garden-variety anger is considered normal, an expectable part of the "to and fro" of everyday human interaction. The world I live in partakes in an orgy of anger but doesn't see or acknowledge it.⁵ Anger is sometimes recognized as a problem in politics but is not much of a topic of discussion or reflection in other spheres. In my world, anger is interpreted as an emotion that involves the political right or those who are down on their luck and are unenlightened. Such unfortunate souls are volatile, erratic. They may need "anger management" training; their children may require mindfulness training.

Liberal people—the lucky, well-educated, and enlightened—are also angry and permissive about anger, but they do not see their own anger very well. American culture, the Left and the Right, and across racial, gender, and class lines, normalizes anger that aims at payback, that excludes, downgrades, mocks, and condescends, which is motivated and energized by the not-so-disguised wish that the other slink off and disappear from sight, fearful and wounded or crushed like a bug.

What about the claim that there is misguided/hurtful/excessive anger in antiracist movements, anticolonialist movements, and movements for gender justice? The objection comes in two forms. Sometimes the objection is not so much about the revenge or pain-passing aspects of such anger (often there is no revenge or pain-passing intended)

but that such anger causes disharmony, unpleasantness, and/or inconvenience. This is an elite, bourgeois objection to anger. It simply expresses a low tolerance for discomfort of any sort. But opposition to revenge or pain-passing anger does not entail opposition to anger that speaks truth to power, so long as it doesn't aim to enact revenge or pass pain. It might be, and a sensible person will fully expect that such anger will cause pain, which she does not intend but produces, and for which she takes responsibility. A different type of objection to some kinds of personal and political anger is that independently of whether they intend to pass pain, they are unforgiving, and sever relations forever. My thinking is that human fallibility, together with the cosmic contingency of moral personality, warrant mercy and forgiveness when there is remorse and regret. That said, it just may be that some harms in some relations need to be forever reasons for the parties involved.

#BlackLivesMatter, #NODAPL (Standing Rock Sioux Tribe), #MeToo, and #NeverAgain are movements that aim at grievous economic, institutional, and structural injustices, or in the case of #NeverAgain, at grievous threats to public safety due to guns. The anger involved can be entirely righteous, dedicated to correcting these injustices. Like all social movements, the aims of individuals in such movements are multifarious. If an aim of some is to pay back or to pass pain to racists, indifferent capitalists, sexual predators, or government agents, then it is a hybrid anger and the payback/pain-passing parts are, according to my view, not good.

There are ways of expressing justified or righteous anger that are intentionally cruel and vicious. In my world, many people I know think it is morally acceptable to tell people with whom they disagree politically to “go fuck themselves”—often from the cowardly pose of social media, where the target is

not reading what they say, write, or “do.”⁶ “Fuck you” is not a *façon de parler* that has evolved to colloquially express disagreement with another’s ideas, a preparatory gesture before one explains why they disagree; it is not a way of gaining the other’s attention in order to have a conversation. The use of the second-person pronoun is not an invitation to intimacy; it is not a Buberian “I-Thou” moment. It is an angry speech act directed at another person, intended to hurt the other, and often an invitation to others to join in the pile-on. The situation is morally, socially, and psychologically unhealthy.

It will be good if we can talk about some of the destructive features of anger that are triggered by wrongdoing or injustice.⁷ Anger that aims to enact revenge or pass pain is bad, and a healthy moral community ought to teach this truth and keep it visible. A stronger norm than the minimal one that judges revenge and pain-passing as bad, and one that I prefer, but that is even harder to defend, is this: The best world is one in which when anger is necessary, it is motivated by love and compassion for the person or community of persons that one is angry at or with and does not aim at revenge or harm but only to make the person or persons, at the limit the world, better.⁸ This is loving anger. Philosophical advocates of the norm, or something in its vicinity, include Glenn Pettigrove (2012) and Martha Nussbaum (2015, 2016).

Anger that has payback as its main or sole aim is not good, nor is anger that passes pain because I am in pain. One reason is platonic. Ethics aim at the good. Seneca uses the platonic point against Aristotle and points out that *orgê*—“conspicuous revenge for a conspicuous slight”—aims to do harm, which is inconsistent with the aim of ethics.

But there is a move that admirers of *orgê* can make. They can claim that revenge anger has an aim beyond hurting the other, as when we say: “I needed to teach them a lesson” or “He

needs to learn he can't get away with that!" Genuine cases of this sort, where the aim is to hurt in order to improve the other or set an example for others, are complicated. Another tactic is to claim that there is some significant psychosocial good at the level of the collective that comes from legitimate exercises of revenge or, what is different, from cathartic venting.

Since holding people accountable sometimes, possibly often, makes them feel guilty or ashamed, which is painful, I will need a doctrine of double effect for legitimate cases of anger, where an individual or collective is called to change their beliefs, norms, or practices in a way that is guaranteed to cause pain but where that is not the intention.⁹ Anger that aims to improve the other, to preserve and restore balance in a relationship, can be respectful and good (a lot depends on the manner in which it is expressed). Making the other feel guilty or ashamed is not the aim in such cases but a predictable effect of respectful, conscientious accountability practices.

There are many other complexities about loving anger: The norm does not require the elimination of anger. It sets conditions in good moral worlds on anger at a person or persons. In such worlds, the aim or motive of the angry person ought not to be to hurt or to pass pain. It ought to be the other person's well-being, and ought to be done, at least in part, out of such concern. The norm requires that objections—including outrage—to beliefs and policies defended or enacted by particular persons be directed at the beliefs and policies, not at their carriers and defenders, in a way that aims to injure, mock, or downgrade them.

Loving anger is compatible with circumstances where punishment, civil disobedience, violence, and even killing might be warranted—for example, in situations of self-defense or when an evil person must be stopped. According to the norm, killing an evil person such as Hitler, if necessary, is to be done

out of love and compassion, including love and compassion for Hitler. One reason is that a good understanding of causation undermines the view of Hitler as a *causa sui* who chose to be evil in the ways that he was surely evil (see Fleischacker 2019 for an argument against all demonizing).

Anger that is designed to activate feelings of responsibility, shame, and guilt, all of which can be experienced as painful (at least they are not standardly pleasant), will need to be distinguished from the proscribed payback and pain-passing kinds in the first instance by the motives and intentions of the angry person, as they can be understood inside a way of worldmaking in which loving anger plays a role.

Some expressions of the relevant norm for loving anger say it is warranted “for the love of God”; others say that it is warranted for the love of the good, by the nature of morality, or for the love of the good, the true, and the beautiful. Gandhi typically endorsed something in the vicinity of loving resistance for the sake of the truth: *satyagraha*. I am interested in naturalistic justifications of the norm (perhaps some of the latter can be read naturalistically) according to which the norm or the wisdom it contains involves a discovery about goodness, about a reliable feature of good lives.

I have just told you the norm I favor, but I am not confident that it can be vindicated by the method of reflective equilibrium, narrow or wide, since there are many arguments that both the fans of anger and its opponents can locate inside “our” tradition.¹⁰ There are also no unequivocal, theory-neutral findings in the human sciences that reveal that payback and pain-passing anger objectively undermine individual or collective well-being. Nor is there an overlapping consensus inside my culture or across cultures that anger of the revenge and pain-passing types are vicious. What comparative resources do reveal to a certain extent are different kinds of reasons that

different cultures offer for containing, moderating, and morally proscribing certain kinds of anger that may be good reasons for us to pay attention to the shape of our own norms and practices. What can happen is that we can get glimpses of alternative ways of being, “varieties of moral possibility,” that have various attractive features, and that might, if we are open to these features, cause critical reflection on our normalized practices, and motivate us to rethink those practices.

Anger and Fitness

One obstacle or family of obstacles to calls to modify or moderate how we do anger or any other basic emotion come from the flat-footed view that we evolved to be angry when necessary, and thus anger serves whatever function it is supposed to serve. The mistake here is to think that the natural history of anger reveals much about anger’s optimality, its plasticity, or about its proper cultured scope and form.

Once upon a time, there was no anger. Now there is a lot of anger. Why is there any anger at all? What is anger good for? There is a scientific consensus that the disposition to something in the vicinity of anger—call it “protoanger”—is a biological adaptation. A biological adaptation is a phenotypic trait that enhanced fitness in ancestral species over the time it evolved, and was gifted in some modified form to modern *Homo sapiens*, thanks to our descent. A disposition to anger, first and foremost keyed to threats to the food supply, children, mates, and close kin, is nature’s solution to a particular sort of fitness problem. The disposition is now part of human nature.

This is just the short version of a very long story: The original earthling creatures (single-celled organisms) of two billion years ago were almost certainly not conscious, but they were

self-protective and utilized light, water, and carbon dioxide to flourish. All fit creatures, even the most ancient ones, show a single, dominant architectural feature. They move toward nourishment, away from noxious threats, and colonize or attack obstacles, if necessary. This requires a sense of one's boundaries so as not, for example, to chew on or eat oneself, or if one is a sexually reproducing animal, not to eat one's mate or offspring—unless, as in the case of some insects, the female consumes the male postcoitus as part of nature's plan to nourish the newly fertilized egg. The black widow spider that eats her husband after sex is not angry; she is just doing what nature decrees as best for perpetuating black widow spider genes. That's the thing about evolution by natural selection; it is not concerned with being loving, kind, or nice unless these traits serve fitness.

The original reflexes or tropisms fired ballistically and without phenomenal consciousness: *detect an obstacle/threat* → *infest it/sting it/bite it/kill it*. Bacteria, viruses, insects, sponges, sea slugs, crabs, and jellyfish all possess survival circuitry that involves policing boundaries and a withdrawal-and-attack mode. But there is nothing like anger in such critters, although their survival circuitry can and often does lead them to kill.¹¹ Unconscious survival circuitry evolved by way of gradual modification and integration in ever-evolving nervous systems to include phenomenally conscious feeling states, including, eventually, the conscious emotion we call "anger" (LeDoux 2019).

Homo sapiens are hominids, members of a clade that includes chimps, bonobos, orangutans, and gorillas, and as many as a dozen species of extinct humans (Neanderthal, Naledi, Erec-tus, etc.). All these species are descendants of a common, long-lost ancestor that existed fourteen million years ago. The work

of Frans de Waal (1982, 1991, 1996, 2006b, 2013) is a treasure trove of information on anger in various nonhuman primates. Our kind of gregarious social animal, as well as our nonhuman primate relatives, evolved to be able to control some of the anger circuitry some of the time. Getting angry in both the phenomenal (what it is like to feel angry) and cognitive (what I am angry about) senses alerts the organism to its own behavioral dispositions and provides a window to moderate, modify, and adjust its thinking and feeling, and to deliberate and plan action. A conscious, flexible mind with good memory, the capacity to imaginatively spin scenarios, to communicate what I am feeling and likely to do, and to be read by conspecifics enhanced fitness all around.

Darwin (1872) hypothesized that humans evolved to more or less automatically express the intersection of the somatic, phenomenal, and behavioral properties of anger and the other basic emotions on our faces. An angry face or angry posture, or, especially in the human case, angry words, can signal how I feel and what I intend to do to you in time for you to stop doing what I interpret as a threat before I take hostile action.¹² In this way, others can see or know that I am angry and respond appropriately. Anger in response to a threat both communicates that there will be hell to pay if the other doesn't stand down and efficiently motivates or sustains motivation for hostile action on the part of the angry individual if necessary.

The adaptationist account of the disposition to anger or protoanger settles very little. It provides a causal history of the core disposition, and it explains why it has the initial settings it has; settings normally vary in a population in a bell-shaped fashion so that at the two ends of the distribution, 17 percent of us will be on the meek and mild side and 17 percent will be quick to "flip our lids." But the adaptationist genealogy does not, at the same time, provide reasons for anger, especially in

its cultured forms, where the objects of anger can be states of affairs and institutions that could not have been part of what caused the disposition to be as it is; they didn't exist when the core disposition evolved. The natural history of anger or protoanger does not even settle the question of whether the disposition to anger is fitness enhancing now, only that it once was.

The disposition to anger or protoanger that is an adaptation is almost certainly only satisfactory as far as fitness goes, not optimal. It is not perfectly tuned to only detect genuine threats to fitness but is prone to perceiving threats that aren't really there, to overreaching. I kill the poisonous snake in a furious rage, except, well, it was a piece of rope. Even if anger is fitness enhancing now, nothing follows about whether anger is also good for well-being, flourishing, fulfillment, or whether getting angry or being angry or acting angry is morally good, since these concepts—well-being, flourishing, fulfillment, good, bad—are not the same as one another. Neither are they reducible to one another, or to the concept of biological fitness. They have different criteria that are not always mutually satisfying. A martyr for a cause dies with integrity but sacrifices fitness. She is noble. She is good. She is dead.

Additionally, knowing that some sort of disposition to anger or protoanger is an adaptation does not settle whether and to what degree the disposition can be controlled, moderated, modified, suppressed, or sublimated by individual will, education, self-cultivation, culture, or the moral and political order. We don't know how much individual variation there is in the disposition to anger or whether, and if so how, the settings might be gendered (Panksepp and Biven 2012). These are questions for neuroscience, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and medicine.

What *is* settled is that there is some sort of core disposition to anger or protoanger that is universal, that evolved because it

had ties to fitness. If reasons of fitness are acceptable as justifying reasons for anger at some times and in some situations—for example, in self-defense—then there are such reasons for some kinds of anger.

One caution: It is easy to overemphasize the link between anger and aggression, punishment, violence, and killing. Many birds and animals that prey—hawks and tigers, for example—stalk for the pleasure of it, and they kill, when they do, because they need food. There is no reason to think that hawks and tigers are angry when they stalk and kill, although they are phenomenally conscious in a host of ways, and capable in other parts of life, say, when raising chicks or cubs, of experiencing something in the vicinity of anger at both unruly chicks and cubs, and at threats to them.

Likewise, in the human case the psychological causes of aggression, punishment, violence, and killing are multifarious. Anger plays a role in some cases of aggression, punishment, and violence, but so do fear, shame, and guilt, as well as nonpsychological sources, economics, the prison system, the power of police, the size of the military, and so on.

Varieties of Anger

Anger, along with shame, is empirically the most widely studied moral emotion. I don't mean anything very controversial by calling anger a moral emotion. I am simply marking the fact that anger (and shame)—perhaps unlike fear, surprise, and happiness—are normally heavily moralized and morally regulated. Compare anger, disdain, and contempt on one side to fear, surprise, and happiness on the other. All of these are governed by norms for apt or fitting expression. One can be too happy, scared, or surprised given the situation. But when

one finds a joke too funny, or is too scared to climb a trail, the mistakes are primarily epistemic. The individual hasn't interpreted the joke or the risk accurately. Being too angry or too contemptuous involves a moral mistake. One can do something wrong, not simply foolish, by getting too angry.

Anger commonly targets moral violations such as inconsiderateness, dishonesty, and injustice. Anger is known everywhere on the earth. It is assigned an important moral role in some cultures and can be considered a virtue or a potential virtue. Or better: it has virtuous forms or has some role to play in a virtuous life if its aim is narrowly focused, and its mode and intensity are suited or proportional to the wrong it detects. But, in other cultures, anger is considered vicious, personally and interpersonally destructive, and mostly the noisy sound of an ego that has tantrums when the cosmos fails to comply with its fancies. Seneca, the Stoic, doubted that anger could be tamed, noting that it always gets involved with what is "on the outskirts of the case." The angry person loses focus. I am angry that you lied to me. I say so. But in my rage I mention how ugly I find your eyeglasses, and then that your mother is a bore. Such escalation quickly leads to the point of no return. Thus, Seneca recommended that we "extirpate anger root and branch."¹³ It's the only way to avoid the unending vengeance and pain-passing traps.

Anger comes in varieties that can overlap and intersect. These include:

- *Payback anger*, where I intend to cause another physical or mental pain and suffering, and/or status harm, typically because they caused me pain.¹⁴
- *Pain-passing anger*, where I intend to cause pain to another because I am in pain, but not pain that they caused.

- *Feigned “as if” anger*, where I am not really angry or very angry in the inner phenomenal sense but use angry words or threats to gain compliance.
- *Instrumental ameliorative anger*, where I am really angry but primarily aim to get you to behave, apologize, or fix things (but not to cause you to suffer).
- *Recognition respect anger*, where I have been diminished and demand that you recognize my dignity and equal worth as a way of restoring a sense of my self-worth and as a signal that you are not the callous kind of person you seem to be.
- *Political or institutional anger* at social policies, laws, structures, or communal institutions that are unfair, racist, sexist, or otherwise harmful or dehumanizing.
- *Impersonal anger* that expresses horror and fury at the heavens, nature, human evil, or folly.¹⁵

My main interest is in payback and pain-passing anger, both of which I think are bad, but for different reasons. Payback anger is intentionally cruel. Pain-passing anger is thoughtless and self-indulgent. Both hurt others for no greater good or higher purpose, such as improving the other, balancing a relationship, or changing harmful practices or institutions. The arguments against them apply to the other kinds of anger insofar as they embed, enact, and encourage payback or pain-passing.

I heard Eddie Glaude Jr., the Princeton professor of African American studies, describe on TV the anger in the aftermath of George Floyd’s May 25, 2020, murder by a Minneapolis policeman as “blue anger,” anger born of sadness, tears, exhausting and exhausted patience, and righteousness. This seems like the right description, and as poetic as it is, it captures what

seems to me to be the ameliorative and loving aspects that the multiracial righteous anger #BlackLivesMatter displays at this moment. There is, as far as I can tell, little desire to pay back or pass pain to racists but just to have the racism, systemic and personal, be done with. It's wrong, it's exhausting, it's shameful, and it aligns with no system of decent values.¹⁶

Scripts for Anger and Spheres of Anger

Anger, like all emotions, is culturally scripted. We learn the scripts over time in distinctive social ecologies, in countries and nation-states, often in microecologies, as the ways various “we’s”—native New Yorkers, Pennsylvania Amish, Tibetan Buddhists in exile, Tamang or Brahman in Nepal, and Utku Eskimos in Northern Canada—enact anger. Some anger scripts are acquired and maintained in micro-microecologies, as distinctive familial or neighborhood ways of being angry and doing anger. What matters first and foremost for acquiring the right scripts is what the locals do where one is born, where “right” just means the scripts practiced by us, around here, in this locale, where you ended up, and then, if you move around, in whatever social-ecological niches your personal life journey takes you. A person’s internalized norms are largely a function of the postal zip codes they traverse, each of which is a proxy for some set of dominant norms, how much reflection and conversation about norms is endorsed, and the amount of information available about alternative norms and practices. Even within zip codes, there can be multiple norms and scripts. In the introduction, I mentioned the different emotional scripts of my Italian and Jewish friends’ parents where I grew up in zip code 10530. It may be easier, I suspect, for kids than it is for adults to figure out which emotional norms

and scripts are appropriate in which microecologies. Children raised in bilingual or multilingual households can adapt pretty quickly to which language to speak to whom without discomobulation. I suspect it is the same with multiple scripts for emotions.

Anger expresses, signals, communicates, and motivates both the angry person and the person they are angry at, if the object of anger is also sentient. The angry person hopes or aims to get its target to do something(s): feel pain, cease and desist, shape up and conform to a norm, be scared, acknowledge a harm, recognize my standing, reconsider what you have done, redescribe what you have done, ask for forgiveness, make amends, accept blame and responsibility, get out of town, or something else. The scripts follow rules that govern which situations warrant feeling angry, permissible expressions of anger, rules governing the intensity and duration of angry episodes, and so on.

There are three main spheres of anger: anger in the personal sphere involving loved ones, family, and friends; anger in “the middle realm,” Nussbaum’s useful phrase, comprising communal, commercial, and work relations; and anger in the political sphere, at politicians, institutions, laws, legal decisions, and government policies. Anger might employ similar norms for a people across all three spheres or zones, or it might not.

There are rules for evaluating anger in each sphere. Anger among family and friends is warranted especially where there is inconsiderateness, disloyalty, failure to pitch in as expected, or betrayal; in commercial relations when there is rudeness, trickery, scheming, or contractual failure; in politics when there is injustice. Various norms govern how one appropriately expresses anger in different spheres—for example, by harsh words (personal), by low ratings of services on social media or

lawsuits (commercial), or by demonstrations, voting, and civil disobedience (political).

Consider just the sphere of personal anger. When is it justified, for what ends, and how often does it accomplish what you want it to accomplish? I have come to think that the national average of success with payback anger and pain-passing anger in the personal sphere is about the same as the 1962 New York Mets win-loss record. At the time, the Mets were the “losingest” team in the history of modern baseball (the Cleveland Indians beat their record in 2003). The Mets record was 40–120.

When I speak about anger, I ask members of the audience to reflect on their own experience with payback and pain-passing anger in the personal sphere, among loved ones and friends (one could perform the exercise by asking about payback and pain-passing anger separately). Across all those angry payback and pain-passing exchanges, do you feel as if you were usually on the winning side morally? What about practically or instrumentally? Did you usually get what you wanted from the other in a way that was satisfying? My experience is that most people judge that they have engaged in a lot of innings of personal payback anger, and more than a few of pain-passing anger, and that both morally and practically, they have usually lost at about a 1:3 ratio—the same as the 1962 Mets did. They did not get what they wanted, or if they did, there were high costs to pay, including guilt or shame, afterward.

In a paper titled “The Paradoxical Consequences of Revenge” (2008), K. M. Carlsmith, T. D. Wilson, and D. T. Gilbert explain that people are poor at affectively forecasting how they will feel after exacting revenge. People think it will make them feel good, satisfied. It doesn’t. One reason is that exacting revenge causes second-guessing, rumination, and guilt, which

are not taken into account in making the forecast. So, even if payback anger wasn't immoral, which it is, it would still be self-defeating.

One can ask the same questions about anger in the middle sphere and in the political sphere. When you got angry on the phone at the agent for your cable company or credit card company, how did that work out for you? For them? When you vented about politics and the "scumbags" or "stupid motherfuckers" on the other side, to like-minded people, does that do good—instrumental, psychological, or moral—for you, for your like-minded friends, for political life? If not, why do it? What is the anger for? What about anger directed at political opponents to their faces, in email, or on Facebook or Twitter? Could you be in the grip of the misguided ventilationist view (Tavris 1989), which really just stokes the flames and does almost nothing to address the source or cause of distress?

There are power, gender, age, ethnic, and racial norms governing who is permitted to feel and express anger in different spheres and who is not. Just as there are scripts for getting and being angry, there are norms for receiving and responding to the anger of others. There are various code words that mark where another is on the anger spectrum—irascible, stoic, passive-aggressive, repressed, disciplined, severe, harsh, mean, cruel, sadistic—and where one is on the scale of worthiness for another's anger: selfish, thoughtless, insensitive, disobedient, worthless slime, a scumbag, a douche bag.¹⁷

WEIRD Anger

Allan Gibbard, speaking of twentieth-century fin-de-siècle American morality, says that it is the zone of life governed by the twin emotions of anger and guilt.¹⁸ We can demarcate a

large part of what we consider morality, and make sense of the language of right and wrong, blame, and responsibility, in terms of norms of apt anger and guilt. "Moral convictions . . . consist in norms for anger and for the first-person counterpart of anger, guilt" (1990, 126). Moral anger, anger that passes moral inspection, is anger from the special standpoint of "full and impartial engagement" (*ibid.*, 127). Gibbard writes: "Morality, on a narrow reading, concerns the moral emotions it makes sense to have from the standpoint of full and impartial engagement. It concerns the things it makes sense to feel guilty for having done and the things it makes sense to be angry with others for having done" (*ibid.*, 128).

According to Gibbard, morality is shaped—in some central ways constituted—by norms for when anger and guilt are fitting. It isn't that anger and guilt are the ends of morality, not at all. They are tools that can be used in detecting, anticipating, and enforcing moral norms designed for whatever the ends of morality are: peace, harmony, well-being, the happiness of the few or the many, and so on. Fittingness has to do with such things as appropriate triggers and contents of anger and guilt, what kinds of things it makes sense to be angry about, the quality and intensity of these emotions, and the range of warranted displays and actions. If, as many think, guilt is just anger turned inward—note, Gibbard calls guilt "the first-person counterpart of anger"—then anger alone is the master key to the moral domain. North American morality is the domain of norms designed to govern when it makes sense to be angry at others, or in the case of guilt, to be angry at oneself.

One might think that the special standpoint of "full and impartial engagement" will restrict the kinds of anger that are judged to be warranted. And indeed it will. But "full and impartial engagement" is intended in the first instance to

test whether wrongdoing has occurred. If it has, and if the expression of anger is proportional to the degree and kind of wrongdoing, then anger that has “conspicuous revenge” as part of its aim will—at least it might—be warranted from that standpoint.

Cross-cultural philosophy, psychology, and anthropology teach that anger and guilt play more of a role in WEIRD moralities—of Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic peoples—than in all other moralities (Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010; Henrich 2020). And, in fact, Gibbard is sensitive to the fact that some moralities might not use the same emotional tools or fuel that ours does. He writes: “What about the moralist with special views, the moralist who rejects guilt and anger? . . . Other cultures may lack guilt altogether, or may give it no great play in their norms of social control. Could there not be shame moralities, or fear moralities?” (1990, 51). Gibbard answers that there are such moralities, disdain-shame moralities, but he insists that our morality is an anger-guilt one.¹⁹ I’ll return shortly to what this idea of “our morality” could mean, and how it is, and ought to be, weighted in the methods of ethics.²⁰

At this point, I hope to have given the reader some reasons to be open to reconsidering how they do anger, and especially some reasons to worry about pain-passing and payback anger. Both kinds are fundamentally incompatible with the aim of ethics, which is to promote the good. Revenge and pain-passing are performatively inconsistent with the aim of ethics. There may also be reasons to want to modify and turn down the temperature on other kinds of anger. Such reasons in my experience are likely to be prudential, strategic, and psychological (anger is noisy and unpleasant; anger in one’s soul can make one feel depressed) rather than moral. But all such reasons can be good reasons for modifying how we do anger.

Conclusion

Let's take stock:

- I've proposed a view of emotions as plastic, normative, and scripted. Emotions are things we do, and, if we have reason, can do differently.
- Changing emotional scripts requires changes in role models, moral educational practices, social practices, and social structures.
- We live in an "Age of Anger," as Pankaj Mishra calls it. There is more anger than I have ever seen in my lifetime, and it is of a particularly unhelpful "Fuck you!" "Fuck you too!" sort.
- I've proposed a method that uses data from cultural psychology and anthropology to see our anger practices more clearly and to entertain alternatives, so as not to be "imprisoned by our own upbringing" but rather to be aware of the "varieties of moral possibility."
- I've argued that the core psychobiological disposition to anger sets parameters regarding cultured anger but radically underdetermines cultured anger. The natural history of anger tells us very little about how we ought to do anger in twenty-first-century worlds.
- I've distinguished among seven types of anger: payback anger, pain-passing anger, feigned "as if" anger, instrumental ameliorative anger, recognition respect anger, political or institutional anger, and impersonal anger.
- I've distinguished among three spheres of anger: personal, commercial, and political.
- I've argued that two distinct kinds of anger—payback anger and pain-passing anger—are morally bad. The first kind aims to hurt another (or others) for reasons of revenge; the second kind hurts inadvertently,

callously—I hurt, and you, often simply the nearest sentient being, suffer for it. We indulge both kinds of anger, but we shouldn't.

- Payback anger and pain-passing anger sometimes, possibly often, infect entirely justified anger with noble aims. In this way, even entirely righteous, ameliorative anger can be poisoned ethically and instrumentally.

I now turn to resources in cultural psychology and anthropology to advance my argument.

Anger across Cultures

IN AN INFLUENTIAL anthropological review of child-rearing practices, Naomi Quinn finds two universals: (1) “Emotionally arousing practices are used in all cultures” to teach the normative order; and (2) such instruction “always includes norms for adequately expressing and regulating emotional behavior” (2005, 261).

It is common, but not universal, for anger to play the major “emotionally arousing” role in the acquisition, maintenance, and enforcement of the normative order, which includes etiquette, social conventions, and ethical rules. It is universal for anger itself to be subject to norms that contain and regulate its expression. Anger is vehement; it stings, calls attention to itself, and demands that my desires win. Anger’s wild form needs taming, domestication. Every culture builds anger to its specification, or tries to.

The psychologist Carol Tavris vividly captures the powerful, normative, ought-laden character of anger:

People everywhere get angry, but they get angry in the service of their culture’s rules. Sometimes those rules are

explicit (“Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife”); more often they are implicit, disguised in the countless daily actions performed “because that’s the way we do things around here.” These unstated rules are often not apparent until someone breaks them, and anger is a sign that someone has broken them. It announces that someone is not behaving as (you think) she or he *ought*. The “assertion of an ought” is, according to the psychologist Joseph de Rivera, the one common and essential feature of anger in all its incarnations. (1989, 49)

Anger and Culture

One obstacle to the aim of changing how we, for any “we,” do anger—for escaping the clutches of this “Age of Anger”—is the view that the way we do anger is natural and normal. The way anger is; the way anger is supposed to be. This view is defeatist. It judges that an angry world is just the way the emotional weather is nowadays. As with the real weather—global warming, the Gulf Stream, the prevailing winds, fires in the West, and so on—little can be done to change it. This view is easily defeated by looking at the extraordinary variation in cultural attitudes and practices about anger. Anger is already done in multifarious ways, and it can be done differently.

In some traditions, anger is seen as a reliable mark of a refined and righteous character. In others, it is seen as an infantile or bestial emotion, the rapacious, unquenchable ego’s handmaiden. The varieties of moral possibility, most of which are actualized, can help undermine confidence that our way(s) of doing anger is normal and responsive to universal features of human psychology. They can also unseat the belief that asking us to radically adjust our anger norms, or work on future

generations to do anger differently, would be unnatural, too demanding, and, at the limit, impossible. Finally, the varieties of roles and statuses for anger invite the questions: Which ways of doing anger are the right ways? Which ways of doing anger are the wrong ways? Which ways of doing anger are better, which worse, which good, which bad?

Here is a sampling, a thirty-item partial inventory of the different roles anger plays in sustaining the normative order across cultures, as well as variations in how anger itself is judged.

1. At least two major ethical traditions, Stoicism and Buddhism, judge anger to be the most destructive emotion, worthy—as Seneca put it—of “extirpation root and branch” (Flanagan 2000, 2011, 2017).
2. The Minangkabau of West Sumatra, Indonesia, view *marah* (anger) “extremely negatively,” the work of *pengaruh setan*, the devil. *Malu* (shame) is the primary socializing emotion among the Minangkabau, and getting angry is something a good person ought always to be ashamed of (Röttger-Rössler et al. 2013, 269).
3. The Bara of southern Madagascar use strong fear-inducing anger (*seky*; *heloky*) to teach the children *hitsy*, the norms of good behavior. Physical punishment, including beating, is one acceptable method for expressing *seky/heloky* (Röttger-Rössler et al. 2013, 269).
4. Tibetan refugees in India consider *lung lang* = anger (a variety of *she dangs* = hatred) morally bad. One ought never to experience anger or act on it. Furthermore, anger can be transcended (Shweder et al. 2008).
5. When asked why anger is so bad, Tibetans describe bad moral effects: separation, alienation, and distance between people (Shweder et al. 2008).

6. When Americans describe the bad effects of anger, they report unpleasant effects on oneself (lingering resentment; “asshole pissed me off, couldn’t sleep”) and bad cardiovascular health effects (“She drives me crazy, gives me high blood pressure”) (Shweder et al. 2008).
7. The most common style of American anger (43 percent) differs from Japanese anger and Belgian anger insofar as it “is strongly associated with both blaming the other person and giving him a piece of your mind” (Mesquita, Boiger, and De Leersnyder 2016).
8. The most common American style results in escalating anger (anger being met with anger). Meanwhile, Japanese anger (55 percent) is conveyed without a similar ideology of personal blame and responsibility. It does not normally involve giving the other a “piece of one’s mind,” and it is commonly met with smiling, nodding, and acquiescence (Mesquita, Boiger, and De Leersnyder 2016).
9. A full 57 percent of Americans do not abide the most common anger style, and a full 45 percent of Japanese do not follow the dominant Japanese one (Mesquita, Boiger, and De Leersnyder 2016).
10. Americans and Australians experience and enact a lot of “road rage.” Japanese in identical types of traffic do not. This is true even for Japanese who are otherwise on the irascible side (McLinton and Dollard 2010).
11. In free word association tasks, Americans associate anger with yelling, shouting, and hitting. Belgians associate anger with ignoring and withdrawing (Mesquita, Boiger, and De Leersnyder 2016).

12. Whereas German mothers tend to meet anger of children with their own anger, Japanese mothers meet children's anger with disappointment and sadness (Mesquita, Boiger, and De Leersnyder 2016).
13. American children's books depict anger much more frequently than Belgian, Romanian, Turkish, East Asian, and South Asian children's books (Tsai, Knutson, and Fung 2006; Boiger, De Deyne, and Mesquita 2013; Vander Wege et al. 2014).
14. Anger is modeled in American children's books as an emotion that is appropriate when there are obstacles in the way of achieving one's goals, and as an emotion that "facilitates achievement and mastery" (Mesquita, Boiger, and De Leersnyder 2016).
15. Anger is not modeled as useful in children's books that promote egalitarian ends, harmony, equality, and group success (Boiger et al. 2013).
16. American culture relishes efficiency (Taylorism) and treasures Horatio Alger success stories, and thus Americans describe what some other cultures conceive as leisure as a waste of time, and consider anyone who wastes "their time" as a legitimate reason for expressing anger at them (Clark 1997).
17. In business negotiations between European American businesspeople and Asian American and Asian businesspeople, anger elicits significantly bigger concessions among European Americans than no anger; whereas no anger elicits significantly bigger concessions among Asian Americans and Asians (Adam, Shirako, and Maddux 2010).
18. Indian college students experience lower overall intensity of anger than American college students,

who find the world to be more filled with obstacles and sources of frustration (Mesquita, Boiger, and De Leersnyder 2016).

19. Luganda speakers in Uganda use the same word, *oku-sunguwala*, for anger and sadness. Luganda speakers who are English interpreters have a hard time understanding the Anglophone distinction between anger and sadness (Orley 1970 as cited in J. Russell 1991; Mesquita 2021).
20. Utku Inuits of Northern Canada live in small groups of approximately thirty-five individuals. They consider all forms of interpersonal anger vicious, although anger toward their sled dogs is common and acceptable. For Utku, “the maintenance of equanimity under trying circumstances is *the* essential sign of maturity, of adulthood” (Briggs 1970, 4). “Bad temper, stinginess, and unhelpfulness [are] three of the most damning traits” (195).
21. The Utku Inuits are Christians. When asked about Jesus’s anger with the money changers, the elders explain that it was (it must have been) feigned “as if” anger. Jesus could not have been really angry, because being really angry is wrong. Jesus is the role model, and role models embody emotional ideals.
22. An Ammassik Eskimo husband is a proper host only if he invites a guest to have intercourse with his wife. He signals that it is time for the sexual gift by extinguishing the lamp. A guest can feel legitimately angry if the invitation is not extended. And the husband can legitimately be angry if he finds his wife having sex with the visitor outside of the lamp ritual (Tavris 1989, 48–49).

23. Among the Ifaluk of the Caroline Islands in the South Pacific, most kinds of anger are disapproved of, especially anger about personal misfortune, inconvenience, or slights/hurt feelings (Lutz 1988).
24. Among the Ifaluk, the only kind of justified anger is called *song*, and it is used primarily in response to selfishness and stinginess. Sharing all material goods, food, cigarettes, and labor is obligatory among the Ifaluk. *Song* uniquely marks the moral violation of selfishness, induces fear of social exclusion in the violator, and invites amends (Lutz 1988, 156–60).
25. The Nepalese Tamang value harmony and self-effacement and strongly discourage anger, teaching children that being angry involves puffing oneself up, and that it creates disharmony (Cole and Tamang 1998; Cole, Tamang, and Shrestha 2006).
26. Unlike the Tamang, the Nepalese Brahmins, who are descendants of lineages associated with high-caste Hindus, encourage anger in their children and use it to mark their cultural dominance and high social status, and to express pride in their unusual ability to live in the morally correct way (Cole and Tamang 1998; Cole, Tamang, and Shrestha 2006).
27. In certain Indian Hindu communities, there is a complex virtue called *lajja* (*lajya*) that involves showing knowledge of and respect for social rules and roles in a way that sustains harmony. “Biting the tongue” or “ducking out” to suppress harsh words, anger, or rage, or to acknowledge and apologize for incipient anger displays (*lajja*), are endorsed and encouraged. Both men and women are expected to possess this disposition, but the decorous restraint from anger and

associated conflict is expected more of women than men (Menon and Shweder in Markus and Kitayama 1991; Shweder et al. 2008).

28. When the Ilongot of the Philippines experience extreme intragroup anger, they plan a head-hunting raid on an enemy tribe (R. Rosaldo 1980; M. Z. Rosaldo 1983).
29. Tantric varieties of Buddhism that judge anger to be entirely destructive (“unwholesome”) live in worlds with abundant “wrathful deities” who, as it were, “metabolize” personal anger, thus taking care of the anger business (McRae 2015).
30. In economic games across cultures, angry and punitive responses, as well as generous responses, vary with such features as religion, group size, market integration, local norms about anger and punishment, and cultural history (Henrich et al. 2005).

This inventory reveals some of the vast possibility space that is actually explored and enacted by (mostly) living human communities. It contains a mixture of three kinds of norms:

1. Statistical regularities or patterns of anger enacted by different communities;
2. Norms of expected, acceptable, or tolerable anger;
3. Ideals regarding anger—both normative ideals such as “never get angry about personal misfortune” (Ifaluk) and ideal scripts such as “acknowledge and apologize when one starts to experience the first hint of anger” (Odisha, India).

This tripartite distinction between what is normal, statistically speaking, what is conventionally tolerated and acceptable, and what is endorsed as ideal upon reflection matters, and it is ripe

for cooperative inquiry among comparative psychologists, anthropologists, and philosophers.¹

Even without perfect sorting of the three different kinds of norms, the inventory provides resources for exercising moral imagination and exploring some of the varieties of moral possibility. One gets a glimpse of multiple ways to do or not do anger, as well as different functional roles for anger and other moral emotions. And one gets to see or imagine the internal reasons different cultures give for their practices, for why the Ammassik, Utku, Minangkabau, Ifaluk, Nepalese Tamang, Japanese, and Belgians do anger differently from “us.”

In the remainder of this chapter, I put the thirty-item inventory to use. First, I hone in on two societies discussed in the anthropological literature that have entirely different attitudes about anger and ask whether each is internally consistent (for philosophers this is asking about *narrow reflective equilibrium*). I ask what kind of good internal consistency is and answer that it is only a formal good, not a substantive good. Second, I begin to inquire into what sort of tools and standards, in addition to internal consistency, we can use to evaluate emotional norms and scripts. I invite the reader to engage in several imaginative exercises where we try to justify our anger practices against alternatives. These exercises will reveal that we likely have a fair amount of confidence in the legitimacy of the way we do emotions, but we often lack the ability to give objective reasons for the preference. This will position us in chapter 3 to ask whether there are any objective findings about human nature or human social relations that can decisively win the argument that both payback and pain-passing anger are wrong. It may surprise the reader to know that I do not think there are any such objective reasons. I offer instead some uncontroversial facts about what is hurtful, some observations about what kinds of emotional displays

normally achieve their aims, and some reminders about the highest ideals that exist inside our tradition about emotionally charged relations.

An Anger Culture and a Shame Culture

Let us consider two cultures mentioned in the sampling, one Indonesian, one African, with entirely different views on anger as a socializing emotion. Assume for now that each is a monoculture, not part of a multiculture. Consider this to be an exercise of moral imagination with the aim of charitably understanding an alien way of doing emotions with alien rationales for doing them their way. Two standards for appraising how a culture or tradition does an emotion such as anger is (1) checking whether the norms and scripts for the emotion are consistent with its way of worldmaking overall; and (2) checking whether the emotion is working to accomplish what it is supposed to accomplish. Anthropologists distinguish between emotions that are hypercognized and hypocognized. When an emotion is hypercognized, one expects the culture itself to provide answers to (1) and (2) in its own ethnotheory. When an emotion is hypocognized, an observer or participant observer is called upon to check for consistency and good functioning. The fact that a mode of emotional expression sustains itself over time is some evidence that it passes tests for (1) and (2), even if these matters are not discussed. The reason for this is that there are normally ecological pressures to maintain consistency and do what works. Americans talk about anger, but I am not sure we could say we hypercognize anger, since there is little careful analytic or systematic thought given to its varieties. I want to say that our types of anger, some varieties at least, are not consistent with certain legitimate ideals that we value, and, in addition, don't work reliably to accomplish what

we wish to accomplish with anger. Hold that thought. On to the first example.

The Minangkabau of West Sumatra, Indonesia, are peasants who live in matrilineal extended families (Röttger-Rössler et al. 2013). *Malu* (shame), along with positive affirmation of good behavior, is the primary socializing emotion among the Minangkabau. *Malu* marks the threat of social exclusion and induces an associated kind of fear. *Malu* is theorized, adults talk about it, believe that it is the proper response to the violation of any social norm, and small children start to reliably display *malu* when they violate norms. A nascent form of *malu*—where infants display shyness or hide behind their mother’s skirt (called *malu-malu*, a kind of infantile sprout of what will become mature shame)—is encouraged. And *malu* is thought to be properly contagious. One ought to feel *malu* for oneself (ashamed of oneself, as we say) at transgressions of kin, friends, and associates.

Marah (anger), on the other hand, is “viewed extremely negatively” (Röttger-Rössler et al. 2013, 269). *Marah* is considered to be the work of *pengaruh setan*, the devil. The Minangkabau understand that anger is natural and that children often experience and express it. But they work to overcome, suppress, rechannel, and possibly extirpate *marah*, both the feeling and the expression of it. The categorical badness of *marah* is explained in terms of an overall normative ecology that sees *marah* as inconsistent with a high social value. Specifically, *marah* “contradicts the central values of respect for one’s fellows” (ibid.). For this reason, *marah* should not be shown toward children nor “in their presence because caregivers are viewed as role models” (ibid.).²

Meanwhile, the Bara of southern Madagascar are agropastoralists who live in multigenerational patrilineages. While the Minangkabau learn the moral order inside an ecology

that uses *malu* (shame) as the primary socializing emotion, the Bara use strong, fear-inducing (*tahotsy*) anger/wrath (*seky*; *heloky*) to teach the children *hitsy*, the norms of good behavior. The Bara know there are other ways to raise children but believe that praising children spoils them, and that fear induction (*tahotsy*) by way of anger, rather than shame, best secures the normative order. Physical punishment, including beating, is a common method for expressing anger (*seky*/*heloky*). Expressions of anger (*seky*/*heloky*) obey strict rules according to which only elders have permission to enact anger (*seky*/*heloky*), which reliably causes *tahotsy* (fear) and eventually yields good conduct (*hitsy*). Anger and associated physical punishment are considered to be necessary until a child is about fifteen. After the anger/beatings regimen ends, easily enraged omnipresent ancestral spirits provide constant surveillance inside the patrilineage.

Narrow Reflective Equilibrium

Let's continue with the assumption that these are homogeneous monocultures with no appreciable entry of peoples who abide different emotion norms and scripts. Assume further that the contents of the norms of both cultures are acceptable and would pass muster from some wider, impartial, or cross-cultural point of view.³ Both Minangkabau and Bara say things like, "one ought to tell the truth," "murder is wrong," but not that "one's spouse ought to have sex with visitors," or "nepotism is morally permissible." This will keep us focused primarily on the norms governing the use of the main moral socializing emotions: shame (*malu*) for the Minangkabau and anger (*seky*; *heloky*) for the Bara.

This assumption that the contents of the morality are acceptable, even good by our lights—we can imagine that both

the Minangkabau and Bara abide a morality comprising the Ten Commandments (which is logically possible since the commandments don't speak directly about anger or shame or about how the commandments themselves are to be taught and enforced)—will help us think about two questions. If the contents of a morality are good overall or good enough—by contents I just mean what the morality says is good or bad and right or wrong—is there a basis for complaining, objecting to, or normatively disapproving of the socializing emotions that are used to secure the normative order? Are the ways we teach, maintain, and reproduce a morality themselves substantive markers of that very morality and thus open to critique?⁴

Among the Minangkabau, anger is unacceptable. This is indeterminate among three claims: one ought not to experience anger, one ought not to express anger, and one ought not to experience or express anger. Call the last option the “Sbuddhist” view since, in certain interpretations, both Stoics and Buddhists defend it. Sbuddhism might be compatible with “as if” anger or feigned anger of the sort that a schoolteacher might enact to get the children to behave, but only if one could make the case that this kind of anger is neither intended nor received as real anger—imagine that “the anger” only functions to get the kids’ attention, not really to frighten them.⁵

Among Bara, anger is the main socializing emotion; or, to speak more precisely, anger is the socializers’ emotion, which is intended to produce fear in those being socialized. Elders have permission to get very angry toward the youth about missteps during socialization and for norm violations once they have learned what’s right and wrong. But the youth are not permitted to get angry in return. Everyone knows that these are the rules. Elders enact anger. Youth receive it, and comply. The crucial role of anger in moral socialization is indeterminate between the view that anger (the feeling, the expression,

the feeling and the expression) is a virtue or only that anger is instrumentally necessary to secure a good Bara life. In the first case, the right kind of anger is good in itself; in the second, it is good for something else, something important.

Could Bara anger comply with the minimal norm I recommend, that all person-directed anger ought not to aim to avenge a harm, to pass pain, to cause suffering? Or, even better, could Bara anger comply with the maximal norm that it be done from the motive of love toward the person at whom it is directed? It seems a stretch. But it is conceivable that the Bara could claim that the ultimate aim of enacting wrathful anger is the good of the kids and the overall common good. Perhaps in-group anger causes pain and downgrades the recipient, but this is not its intention or aim. Bara out-group anger, however, is clearly aimed to pay back and pass pain, to make the outsider suffer. The Bara themselves say so. It is, of course, an eternally interesting, important, and contested question of ethics whether norms need to be consistent across communities of insiders and outsiders, loved ones and neighbors.

Imagine the Bara and the Minangkabau, respectively, raising internal questions about the roles they assign to anger and shame in teaching, maintaining, and reproducing their form of life, their comprehensive theory of a good life. Narrow reflective equilibrium, when it works well, secures, checks, and recalibrates local normative theory and practice. The Minangkabau might raise questions about whether shaming practices (*malu*) embed or enact what they themselves think is anger (*marah*). They might wonder in terms allowed by their metaphysics whether some instances of *malu* (shame) are in fact instances of disguised *marah* (anger), channeled by the devil (*pengaruh setan*). One can imagine discussion about whether shaming by way of mocking and humiliation is cruel

and motivated by anger (*marah*), or something in its vicinity, and whether the youth experience shaming norm enforcement as embedding anger on the part of the adults.⁶ The conscientious Minangkabau might look closely at the emotional tone of adults interacting with other adults in situations where there are norm violations. Do they judge or sanction each other with anger (*marah*), which is prohibited officially, or only with a different adult version of shaming (*malu*), which is, or might be, allowed? If the Minangkabau are Sbuddhists, we can imagine them wondering whether, for any particular instance or episode or pattern, it has reached the ideal, where anger is neither experienced nor enacted. If it is experienced but not enacted, that is second-best and there is work to do.

In the Bara case, their educational psychology assumes that normative conformity (*hitsy*) can be accomplished by inducing strong fear (*tahotsy*) by anger (*seky/heloky*) and associated physical punishment—slapping, pinching, applying hot chili oil, beating, and the wrath of ancestral spirits. The Bara are correct that anger (*seky/heloky*) cause(s) fear (*tahotsy*), which produces good behavior (*hitsy*). Because we are making the simple assumption that the culture is homogeneous and settled, and there are no global challenges to the Bara's comprehensive view—for example, there is no cohort of Minangkabau immigrants who might challenge the entire emotional-normative economy—then not even the question of relative efficiency is on the table. That is, if there was a mixture of Bara and Minangkabau, then the topic of whether anger or shame is the best method for gaining normative conformity would come up. But I am imagining that the topic is not coming up, is not a live option.⁷

Still, we can imagine internal discussion among the Bara about whether any particular episode of *seky/heloky* is justified,

whether it is apt in terms of intensity of felt or enacted anger, and so on. And we can imagine, in terms of the complex schema and scripts that track audience effects and downstream social consequences, the Bara wondering among themselves whether it achieves normative compliance (*hitsy*) and some milder or more severe or differently targeted kinds of anger (*seky/heloky*) might.

The point is that it seems pretty clear that both the Minangkabau and the Bara could locate, respectively, a narrow reflective equilibrium that would justify and recalibrate their practices and norms regarding shame and anger. Reflective equilibrium normally requires internal coherence plus some sort of explanatory relations among various values and beliefs that make up a way of worldmaking. Anthropology makes clear, in the case of the Minangkabau, that there is a high good, a major value, that explains why anger (*marah*) is not used in normative socialization; namely, it “contradicts the central values of respect for one’s fellows” (Röttger-Rössler et al. 2013, 269). Why exactly they believe both that respect is the highest good and that anger (*marah*) is disrespectful would involve an archaeology of Minangkabau philosophy and moral psychology that I am not equipped to perform. But there is clearly no logical or conceptual necessity, since many traditions that also prize respect (although perhaps not as the Minangkabau conceive it)—for example, various enlightenment views—do not judge anger, especially of the righteous sort familiar from the Abrahamic religions (the Minangkabau, interestingly, are Muslim), as a vice or as incompatible with respect.⁸ It is also a question entirely internal to their indigenous philosophy why shaming (*malu*) is thought to be a respect-preserving and respect-promoting socializing emotion, given that it is definitely so understood (Minangkabau ethnotheory asserts it). One idea is that

shame (*malu*), unlike anger (*marah*), is not cruel; it intends neither payback nor downgrading, and it enacts social solidarity by making the entire group both agent and patient of the normative harm. That is, among the Minangkabau, a violation of an adult instruction by a young person is not simply a matter between these two individuals; it is a group violation. The violation is one that the individual who commits it should be ashamed about, as well as one that the teacher and the community they represent should be ashamed of. Individualists find this bizarre, but this might be a question-begging effect of what individualists metaphysically take for granted and that nonindividualists deny, namely, that individuals are the proper unit of agency, responsibility, and blame.⁹

As for the Bara, their view on anger easily passes internal coherence tests. The anthropology doesn't reveal that there is any central unifying value that explains all Bara practices other than living well, as the Bara conceive it. This is enough to internally justify their practices, since the Bara can say truthfully that anger works to socialize the kids into the normative order; that's all there is to it, and that's enough.

Both views—the Minangkabau view that anger (*marah*) is a vice, and the Bara view that anger (*seky/heloky*) is either a virtue, a “burdened virtue” (Tessman 2005),¹⁰ or an unpleasant necessity at a minimum, not a vice (unless used in unauthorized ways by the wrong people, and so on)—will pass tests of narrow reflective equilibrium. Reflective equilibrium requires only that cultural values and beliefs, and ordinary moral judgments, can be brought into equilibrium. Reflective equilibrium demands internal consistency plus some kind of credible justification for values, norms, and ideals, in terms such as that they are aligned with our values, they work, and they are “ours.”

Two Thought Experiment Variations

One could now vary the exercise and imagine the Minangkabau and Bara mixing in some new, neutral place in a 50–50 proportion. There is a causal question: How will normativity get duked out between the Minangkabau and Bara, imagining implausibly that the content of their respective moralities are not inconsistent? Maybe one is Hegelian and believes there will be some new third way, a new improved hybrid culture that develops a new regimen for normative governance, “shmangering,” which involves a new socializing emotion and rules for governing it. People call it “shmanger” because it has elements of Minangkabau shame and Bara anger but is produced by the moral alchemy of their intersection. But the philosopher will want to know whether the shmanger world is better or worse, or only different from the Minangkabau shaming (*malu*) world or the Bara angry (*seky/heloky*) world. There are negative dialectics—Theodor Adorno’s apt name for situations in which mixing ingredients produces worse results than either ingredient taken alone—after all. For every excellent synthesis—sweet and sour soup, say—there are many ice cream and tuna fish combinations that are best discarded by imagination and never actualized. In reality, neither the Minangkabau nor the Bara are actually closed communities, although the eight million Minangkabau are more intermixed with the diverse and dense population of Indonesia than are the half million Bara who live in more sparsely populated lands in southern Madagascar. In both cases, therefore, it is interesting, and worth noting, that they have each been able to maintain their respective ways of doing anger and shame, despite being subject to the forces of globalization and multiculturalism.

Next, let us introduce a morally serious, independent observer into the evaluation of how the Minangkabau and Bara live, and let us imagine a forced choice about which is better, or what is different, among whom one's children or grandchildren will be raised. The forced choice I am imagining is interesting, because one group of people with whom I discuss such matters (American academics) are down on shame as an emotion for teaching, maintaining, and perpetuating the normative order. But everyone I have asked chooses the Minangkabau shame culture over the Bara anger culture as better, and also as the culture in which, if forced, they would prefer their children or grandchildren to be raised. We are down on shame, and for that reason, we don't find the Minangkabau form of life deeply appealing. But Bara anger is over the top, beyond the pale, vicious (plus they are not kind to strangers). So, although we Americans often favor anger as the emotion with which to judge and enforce both bare preferences (we get angry when the line is long at the coffee shop) and considered norms (when there are lies or injustices), we are not unequivocally on board with using anger to teach expectations and norms to the youth, preferring carrots to sticks in the socialization phase of life.

According to the anthropological literature, the Minangkabau and Bara are not at all unusual. So we might wonder what we are doing when from the outside we state a strong preference for one alien form of life over another alien form of life. Are we stating a bare preference or a considered one? One worry is that the strong choice reaction can be explained largely by the external observer's identification with their own comprehensive view of the good life, plus a measurement of the distance between it and the alien form. Such a response intended as a final response is question begging. It is simply

a judgment of which tradition is nearest to ours, its closest continuer from among the options.

What about American Anger?

Both the Minangkabau and the Bara pass tests for narrow reflective equilibrium. One might wonder whether our American anger practices can pass tests for internal consistency. There are reasons to worry. One is that America is a multiculture, not a monoculture. We contain multitudes. Multicultures, by their nature, involve a multiplicity of normative orders. The adults believe in monogamy; the kids are polyamorous. The New Yorkers are honest, which the rest of the country calls “rude.” The Southerners are polite and restrained, which the Northerners think is passive-aggressive. Many think morality requires religion; many others say it doesn’t. And so it is with emotional norms and scripts; there are regional, religious, country of origin, and racial differences in norms and scripts.

Even the idea that our morality is an anger-guilt morality, rather than a disdain-shame morality, is contested. Recent work in cultural psychology indicates that Americans and Northern Europeans are very familiar with using shame—especially the kind that involves “how one looks in the eyes of others” as a major socializing emotion (Mesquita, Boiger, and De Leersnyder 2016; Henrich 2020). We, especially Americans, are officially down on shame, but we are adept at using it.

Furthermore, when cultural psychologists describe three different anger styles found inside the three developed nation-states of America, Belgium, and Japan as the American, Belgian, and Japanese styles, they do not claim that these are the kinds that they find distinctively in those three nation-states (Mesquita, Boiger, and De Leersnyder 2016). In fact, all three

kinds or styles—the American, Belgian, and Japanese styles of anger—are found in all three countries but in different ratios.

The American type of anger assumes sharp boundaries between individuals, that individual agents are the proper unit of blame and responsibility, and that payback and pain-passing are legitimate. This is the dominant type (43 percent) in America. But the “American” type of anger is not the majority type even in America. Relatively large percentages of Americans also abide the “Japanese type” (which by other measures looks like a “disdain-shame” morality, rather than an anger-guilt morality) and the “Belgian type.” That is, all three types are found in all three cultures, but to different degrees. Japanese anger is experienced and enacted in a way that is not confrontational, vengeful, or pain-passing, and that harms “relationships with others least.” Some Americans, and not only Japanese Americans, display this kind of anger.

So one point is that there is not, even now, normative consensus about how to do anger inside nation-states such as the United States, Japan, and Belgium. Instead, there is variation in judgments about acceptable reasons for anger (“wasting my time” is a uniquely good reason for Americans), appropriate expression, felt intensity, and duration. Furthermore, if one imagines, as is not entirely implausible, that there are representatives from all the cultures listed in the thirty-item inventory—plus several hundred more—in great multicultural cities like New York, Brussels, and Tokyo, then it is a fiction that in such places there is some stable or univocal set of anger norms and scripts that a people know and enact. What is more likely is that there are subcultures (organized along socioeconomic, age, gender, educational, ethnic, religious, etc., dimensions) that define one’s primary normative community in which one enacts (at least prior to assimilation or homogenization) the emotional norms favored by that community.

There are norms—for example, governing who has permission to enact the first move in an anger game. First-move norms are monadic; they provide permission for the angry person to get or be angry. There are also dyadic and n-person norms or scripts that provide permission, norms, and scripts for the “to and fro” of angry exchanges. These differ vastly across traditions. In a very hierarchical culture or subculture, dominant persons can initiate anger episodes, but subordinate persons may not have permission to respond with anger.

In addition to the identity constitutive norms for emotional expression, practiced especially in personal or familial spheres—the way we Irish Catholics “are” or do things—there may well exist a separate set of practices for doing the emotions that maintain a *modus vivendi* among people of different worlds in the places where they intersect, on public transportation, at work, and in commercial relations. Once again, we see variation in different spheres of life, in family and friendship, in the marketplace, and in government.

One upshot is that it is unlikely that there is a philosophical consensus among ordinary Americans, or even among American philosophers, to the effect that moral anger is anger authorized from a special standpoint of “full and impartial engagement” (Gibbard 1990, 127), or that payback or pain-passing is acceptable when there is wrongdoing, or that the wise are permitted to get angry at the crude and unenlightened. There are Dominicans, Taoists, Hopi, Sicilians, Jains, Maasai, and Confucians in our midst. It seems likely that claims about “our morality” and what “we think” are rhetorical conceits in ethics, disguised ways of excluding unwelcome moral data. If so, this is a problem, because the legitimacy of the method of reflective equilibrium counts on the existence of a relatively homogeneous community recalibrating its practices with its considered judgments and ideals. But when there isn’t homogeneity,

consistency checks and recalibrations of norms inside subcultures that make up the multicultures is the best we can do.

Real Patterns

I don't mean to overstate the problem. Multicultures are made up of cultures that are comprised of subcultures. Because these cultures and subcultures interact, there are various kinds of normative assimilation and accommodation. And there are also zones of life in which the norms and scripts of some power subculture reign supreme. Sometimes these are the norms and scripts imposed by a subculture who first controlled a domain—WASPS in New York finance, Jews in the diamond business, the Irish in fire and police departments. And in public spaces where everyone comes together—parks, public transportation, businesses—there will often be an overlapping consensus for how we do emotions in those spaces. This establishes mutual legibility and efficiency in those spaces.

Even if there is no unified code for doing emotions across all spheres that are “ours,” there are nonetheless patterns about how we Americans do anger that deserve a closer look in the contrastive setting that evidence from cultural psychology and anthropology provides.

When we ask whether some practice is good, it helps to ask, compared to what? Here are some patterns from the thirty-item inventory given earlier that describe some features of American anger and provide contrast with other styles:

- On average, Americans associate anger with the behaviors (and the associated desires) of yelling, shouting, and hitting.
- American anger (unlike Belgian anger) is strongly associated with “blaming the other person” and “giving him a piece of your mind.”

- When Americans are asked about the bad effects of anger, they tend to mention bad physiological (“she’s causing my blood pressure to go up”) and psychological effects on oneself, not bad moral or interpersonal effects.
- American anger is scripted to escalate. Japanese anger is scripted to de-escalate.
- American (and German) mothers meet a child’s anger with anger; Japanese mothers meet a child’s anger with disappointment and sadness.
- Psychology books describe anger as an approach emotion: yelling, shouting, hitting, and giving someone a piece of your mind.
- Japanese-style anger involves the desire to leave the room and escape the interaction. Leaving the room and escaping an interaction involve avoidance. So is anger an approach emotion or an avoidance emotion?
- American children’s books depict anger much more frequently than Belgian, Romanian, Turkish, East Asian, and South Asian children’s books.
- American children’s books model anger as an appropriate response to frustration (or meeting an obstacle) for achieving one’s goals and achieving mastery.
- Anger is not modeled—in any country—as useful in children’s books that promote egalitarian ends, harmony, equality, and group success.
- American college students think the world is filled with obstacles and sources of frustration, and that these are reasons for anger; Indian college students see fewer obstacles (although there may well be more in India than America), and generally feel less angry than American college students.
- The wide acceptance of the ventilationist view in America legitimizes a certain amount of pain-passing anger that is simply unacceptable in other cultures.

- There is cultural permission in certain quarters in America for vengeful, payback anger. Perhaps this is because we have some Aristotle in our blood and bones. Recall, Aristotle in his *Ethics* authorizes payback for slights, and in the *Poetics* he also gives license to catharsis, emotional release of negative emotions.

So consider this a scorecard on American anger, extracted from the earlier inventory. I promised to exemplify how the method of examining findings in cultural psychology and anthropology can prevent us from being “imprisoned by our own upbringing,” while at the same time inviting reflection on the “varieties of moral possibility.” I have done what I said I’d do. The final exercise for this chapter is *your* homework: think how much you fit this profile of the angry American (or angry European, Canadian, etc.) and ask yourself whether you think the American way of being angry is good. If the American way is unappealing, or has unattractive features, then think about what makes it so. Is it that it is inconsistent with other high values and ideals you hold? Is it that enacting it undermines your flourishing, and that of those with whom you share a common life? I think the answer to both questions in moral ecologies that I live in is “yes.” If so, the next questions concern what aspects of anger, or which varieties of anger, are the problems and how to make necessary changes. In chapter 3, I will proceed to clear up a few (of many more than a few) loose ends about anger, and about the method I propose for thinking about it.

Anger and Flourishing

I ENDED CHAPTER 2 with suggesting that we critically compare the Bara's use of ferocious anger, the Minangkabau's use of shame, and the American use of a mixed bag of emotions to teach and maintain the normative order. What can we say about which is best that does not presuppose some value antecedently favored inside one form of life? Are there objective reasons external to all three forms of life under discussion that favor one way of normative socialization over the other? Suppose Minangkabau shame reduces fertility and that Bara anger causes early death, whereas Americans are fertile and long-lived. Such facts, if they were facts, would provide a reason for the Minangkabau and Bara, but not the Americans, to rethink their socializing practices so long as they valued fertility and longevity. Of course, there are no such facts.

When we evaluate competing norms and scripts for enacting anger, is there any escaping the internalist predicament of judging how we do anger (and the other emotions) in terms of values and practices of the form of life in which anger is

done that way, with the functional role it already has? Do we—for any people, culture, or subculture—judge our own ways of doing anger (and the other emotions) more favorably than they deserve because they are ours, and judge unfamiliar ways less favorably than they deserve because they are not ours? Does “being ours” have value, perhaps the value of being identity-conferring or -constituting, which is independent of its normative value? Does “being ours” have value because, unlike every alternative, it incurs none of the costs that changing a practice would?

Contingent matters about the ways one is already doing a moral emotion deserve some weight in evaluating how one ought to do that emotion. And virtues such as tolerance likely entail that one ought to get used to different styles and scripts for doing emotions.

The analysis thus far might make a certain variety of ethicists worry, since it suggests that none of the main certified methods of ethics—universalizability, impartial observers, fully rational agents, narrow reflective equilibrium, or overlapping consensus—can resolve disagreements about how to do emotions and help us locate the right way to do them. The method of critique by way of philosophical anthropology provides a basis for rational conversation about the quality of the various ways of doing the moral emotions but does not provide a procedure to rationally resolve such disagreements. I claim that this is not due to a weakness in the method but rather to the complexity of the emotions, the historicity of moral ecologies, and the holistic character and path-dependency of every way of worldmaking; it is, in any case, a good result in multi-cultural worlds where debates about how best to do emotions are tied up with legitimate questions of identity and how best to live a human life.

Well-Being and Emotional Balance

There is an industry of happiness and well-being research, what I call “eudaimonics” (Flanagan 2011), after Aristotle’s idea that everyone aims for *eudaimonia*, the Greek word that means “to be a happy spirit,” to flourish, to be fulfilled. Eudaimonics is the study of which psychological and social conditions produce fulfilling, meaningful lives. It is normative in the way medicine or psychiatry are. The main instruments used to measure happiness and well-being are subjective well-being measures—asking people how satisfied they are overall with their lives, or asking them how satisfied they are domain by domain (at home, at work, and so on)—and objective measures of such things as income, years of school, availability of meaningful work, clean water and air, the quality of a social support system, sustainable development, and so on. The *World Happiness Report* uses both kinds of measurements and has been producing annual rankings of countries in terms of well-being since 2011.

Bhutan, a landlocked Himalayan Buddhist kingdom surrounded by China and India, has been involved in these efforts from the very beginning. It was a Bhutanese king who, in 1979, coined the concept of “Gross National Happiness” (GNH) when he claimed it was far more important than gross national product. In 2008 GNH was formally written into the Constitution of Bhutan as the goal of government. One initiative the Bhutanese government has taken since then is to check on the emotional well-being of its own people. Emotions that are officially considered wholesome include compassion, generosity, forgiveness, contentment, and calmness, while unwholesome emotions are selfishness, jealousy, anger, fear, and worry.

Bhutan can make such a list, and have a wide social consensus on what is considered wholesome and unwholesome

as far as emotions go, because it is a Buddhist monoculture; there is no need for internal bickering about which varieties of each are authorized. People know. One interesting thing about this inventory is that the wholesome emotions all have positive valence and the unwholesome ones have negative valence. But it isn't valence—at least not valence alone—that makes these emotions wholesome and the others unwholesome. It is that these emotions feel good, and they feel good because enacting them is part of what makes for a good life as a Bhutanese Buddhist. The unwholesome emotions feel bad and have their sources in the Buddhist poisons of the soul: ego, unquenchable desire for things one doesn't need and shouldn't want, and anger when one doesn't get what one wants.

In a multicultural, such an inventory could not achieve consensus, let alone be understood, because each culture has its own consensus concerning what is wholesome or unwholesome. For example, there would be disputes about what kind of compassion and how much generosity is good. There is the generosity of the Sermon on the Mount Christian and the socialist, both of whom believe in equally sharing all of the earth's bounty, and that of the capitalist and the prosperity gospel Christian who believe that they have the option to share some of the bounty after the economy delivers the rewards of mixing their labor with what they own. And in any case, in my multicultural no one is allowed to tell you which emotions to have, which ones are good for you, and so on. Even if this was allowed, there would be fights, possibly angry ones, about which varieties of compassion and anger were good, how much generosity is okay, and so on—and which are not.

The Bhutanese inventory that distinguishes wholesome from unwholesome emotions, where anger is on the unwholesome list, works because Bhutan is a Buddhist monoculture. Once inside this form of life, anger is unwholesome.

It is objectively unwholesome given the form of life. Exactly which varieties are unwholesome? A Bhutanese person could tell you.

*Are There Truly Objective Well-Being
Reasons against Some Kinds of Anger?*

We rightly treasure conclusions that logically follow from true first principles. The Pythagorean theorem says that the square of the hypotenuse in a right triangle is equivalent to the square of the other two sides. What are the axioms of ethics and politics from which one could make objective inferences about anger or any other moral emotion? Starting from Christian or Buddhist or Confucian or secular liberal first principles is to start with historically contingent truths. These first principles will be the first principles of a people. They might be self-evident to people committed to the relevant form of life, but they will not be self-evident to others who have different first principles in their own cultural genealogy. One might wonder whether there are any objective reasons for or against any emotion, for or against any way of doing or enacting it, that are not just the reasons for a people who make some varieties of anger bad. Call such reasons “truly objective reasons.”

Can the method of wide reflective equilibrium help ground a rational preference between the two regimens, the shame regimen of the Minangkabau and the anger regimen of the Bara, or between these two regimens and our mixed-method regime, or between these three and the Bhutanese normative ecology of emotions? Wide reflective equilibrium differs from narrow reflective equilibrium. Whereas narrow reflective equilibrium tests for internal consistency, wide reflective equilibrium goes further; it provides tools for both internal critique and principled comparisons by allowing us to bring to bear

more than just normative information about actual practices, considered judgments, and ideals. Wide reflective equilibrium involves not merely equilibrating beliefs, values, and practices with one another, it requires that we also bring credible philosophical theories and empirical theories to bear on our assessment (Daniels 1979).

To see what wide reflective equilibrium allows that narrow reflective equilibrium does not, consider this analogy. Imagine several theories of folk medicine that achieve narrow reflective equilibrium; they are internally consistent, and some internal justificatory relations exist—for example, they were developed by trusted ancestors, a shaman hallucinated them, and so on. We now ask from a wider pose whether their respective theory and practice are consistent with the germ theory of disease, modern biochemistry, genetics, and immunology. A not very good folk medicine is inconsistent (either in theory or practice) with some or all of these theories, a good theory is consistent with them, and a very good theory incorporates them.

Is there any similar way to perform wide reflective equilibrium to judge the quality of three (or four, if the reader wishes to engage the exercise by adding the Bhutanese example) normative conceptions of how to theorize and do anger: the Minangkabau, the Bara, and our way, where “our” way is conceived as an anger-guilt system with (I assume) Aristotelian permission to pay back in certain cases of wrongdoing? What in the moral domain plays the role of credible and well-established philosophical and empirical theories akin to the germ theory of disease, genetics, and so on? Are there objective facts—for example, facts about morality, human well-being, and a fulfilling social life—that can help me win the argument that our anger practices are unhealthy, off-kilter, immoral, and ought to change? It would help my argument if I could find objective facts that reveal that both payback and pain-passing

anger undermine well-being, period, not just for a people or a tradition that claims that this is so.

Psychology seems like a promising candidate discipline to play the role in my forced choice between the three emotion regimens that the germ theory of disease might play in evaluating competing folk medicines. Psychology is the science of the mind. Sciences seek to make helpful generalizations, and there are large areas of psychology devoted to the study of happiness and well-being. Thus, we might think we could at least exclude some anger practices when the evidence reveals that they objectively undermine well-being.

Martha Nussbaum tries this tactic (2016). She proposes that some people who aim for revenge assume, consciously or unconsciously, that they will get back what was lost—the marriage, the lost loved one, the self before the rape. But she points out that this is “magical thinking,” an illusion. Illusions are one kind of false belief. So if payback anger assumes restoration of what was lost, it involves an objective mistake.

This might work somewhat to pull the rug out from under the rationale beneath some kinds of payback. But it makes a difference whether we think the person who seeks revenge believes that the restoration will happen—or only entertains the thought, which may well not be enough for a belief—or whether they only wish to get back what was lost. For there to be an illusion, one needs a false belief. A wish can be an idle fantasy, and a hope can be unsatisfiable. But false beliefs are needed for illusions; wishes and hopes do not require beliefs at all.

Let’s allow that some people believe revenge will regain what was lost. Is it plausible to think it is common that individuals who enact payback anger believe, or seriously expect, that what has been lost will be regained? I don’t think so. This could be tested empirically, but I think this would be a waste

of research dollars. This is, I think, a case where just a moment of reflection by you the reader about what you assume when you engage in payback anger will reveal that you do not typically believe or expect the magical result. The aim is to pay back for its own sake, to see the other hurt.

That said, there is a conditional standard that has objective grounding: If any individual desires revenge because they think it will get them back the romance as it was before the cheating, or will get them back their pre-rape self, or their intact family before Dad was killed by the drunk driver, then they are just wrong. They have an objectively false belief. For such individuals, if there are any, revenge will not bring back or restore what was lost. This is an objective fact, and it will be objectively disappointing for the person with the magical thought.

There is, as I mentioned earlier, a finding that revenge is not nearly as satisfying as people think it will be, and, in addition, there are costs involved, such as embarrassment, shame, regret, and guilt (Carlsmith, Wilson, and Gilbert 2008). This finding is not that there is a false belief that what was lost will be restored by revenge, but rather an incorrect prediction about the emotional satisfaction one will get from revenge. Like Nussbaum's point about cases where there is a false belief about regaining what was lost, these cases involve an objective mistake about how one will feel when one tastes blood. Both findings chip away at some reasons for payback. Individuals who believe that revenge will magically restore what was lost and those who think that revenge will be very, or entirely, satisfying make objective mistakes.

How universal is the finding that an "eye for an eye" strategy is less satisfying than people expect or hope? We don't know. Since the publication of the groundbreaking paper,

“The Weirdest People in the World?” (Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010), it is generally accepted that one should not make inferences about human nature from psychology, because most psychology is based on experiments with North American college students, and this is one of the most unrepresentative populations in history. Students are WEIRD: Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic. Thus, we cannot say that over world history and among all peoples, revenge isn’t deeply satisfying. But we can say this of contemporary Americans. So we have at least a local generalization about well-being or happiness that indicates that there are internal reasons to our form of life, not to enact payback. It might be that, in a monoculture firmly committed to “an eye for an eye” vengeance, revenge really is satisfying. And, in fact, the generalization just cited comes with a warning, a possible set of exceptions inside America: there is some evidence that among Scotch Irish settlers of the South, and thus of their descendants, *lex talionis* is endorsed and is satisfying (Nisbett and Cohen 1996). But suppose that, to a large extent, Americans are aware of and get arguments, both moral and practical, against payback.

One might expect or hope (I do) that we’d find similar negative effects of pain-passing anger in America. Despite widespread acceptance of the ventilationist view (Tavris 1989), most people I know really do not like to be the victim of another’s venting, especially when they are not in any way the cause of that anger. We tolerate to some extent the moods of the depressed and traumatized, especially when we love them. But it is no fun, nor is it helpful to the wounded person for me to serve as their punching bag, to be the one they vent at. If this is generally true, then there are objective reasons, possibly across cultures, to wish to get your pain-passing tendencies under control and to discuss them with your shaman or your

therapist. But it won't work out for either of us to indulge your desire to spread your pain in angry ways.

Objective Evidence about Bad Effects of Anger?

One could offer up a different kind of objective finding to criticize emotional norms and scripts of a more metaphysical sort. So, in the three-way face-off between the Minangkabau, the Bara, and us, one might claim that the Minangkabau make a mistake about the metaphysics of persons, since shaming assumes collective agents (it is not clear to me from the ethology that the Minangkabau actually assume this, but make believe they do). A well-respected philosophical theory is individualist. Therefore, the Minangkabau form of life fails an objective metaphysical test.

But this objection, as I have already said, will founder on the fact that the metaphysics that favors individual agents over collective ones is hardly settled; rather, it is contested across the very normative theories being discussed (see Flanagan 2017 for a discussion of metaphysical variations in views of the self). And, in any case, the Minangkabau do socialize individually, shaming individual children who do wrong. It is later, when there is evidence that the shame socialization failed in a particular case or set of cases—among “the youth today”—that the community feels shame.

What about objective empirical findings about the bad effects of harsh anger and/or shaming? Until 1950 many cigarette manufacturers recommended their brands for general health, especially for sore throats! But cigarettes are terrible for us, so we changed our habits. Maybe we are just confused about what good anger is, and learning this would lead us to change our anger habits. Again, one might hope that psychology, the science of the mind, could provide such findings. But

this might not be so. There may be no such objective findings. Röttger-Rössler and others write:

Child-rearing practices such as shaming or corporal punishment have extremely negative connotations in Western cultures. Numerous studies in developmental psychology purport to show that they are harmful to healthy psychosocial development and to successful norm internalization (e.g., Hoffman 1983; Lepper 1983; Smetana 1997; see also Gershoff 2002; Tangney, Stuewig & Masjek 2007a). Studies in cultural anthropology (Briggs 1998; Chisolm 1978; LeVine & LeVine 1996; Levine & Norman 2001) have shown that numerous societies successfully apply the child-rearing practices of shaming or corporal punishment, which Euro-American developmental psychology classifies as being so counterproductive, for the internalization of norms without any indications that their children are impaired in their psychological development. (2013, 260–61)

There is a lot to unpack here. But the important empirical claim is that alleged objective harms of shame and anger as socializing emotions cited by WEIRD psychologists are not seen among the Bara or Minangkabau.¹ Problems in “internalization of norms” and impairments in “psychological development” are not found in cultures if, or so long as, the anger or shame practices are widely and wholeheartedly endorsed.

Röttger-Rössler and others list the many alleged bad effects of shame cultures—passivity, low self-esteem, depression, and low empathy—and then write: “The aforementioned negative effects of shame experiences are generally not to be found among the Minangkabau or in Indonesian society in general. We consider that this is due particularly to the positive

connotation of the emotion *malu* in the Indonesian context” (2013, 283).

In the case of the Bara, some of the bad effects that psychologists of the North Atlantic associate with angry socialization are seen (Röttger-Rössler et al. 2013). But they do not have the normal bad effects they have in North Atlantic cultures because of other features of the Bara social ecology. Norms are in-group and not applicable to both the in-group and out-groups. So what might seem like a lack of internalization or superficial learning is actually something like nimble, perceptual acuity about when, where, and to whom norms apply or don't. For Bara, it is bad to steal cattle within a patrilineage, but it is heroic to steal cattle outside the patrilineage. Likewise, what might seem in Europe or the United States as “prone[ne]ss [of the Bara] to aggressive anger” is generally not prone[ne]ss to anger or aggression toward equals in the in-group but is mostly highly scripted anger directed at normative novices for very specific norm violations. Bara anger displays might look like explosive or gratuitous or mean-spirited types of anger to outsiders, but they are normally legible inside Bara society as “a kind of sanctioning anger” (*heloky*) that signals communal, not personal, harm and whose aim is serious, namely, protecting the normative order. Furthermore, inside Bara society, scripted rituals of comforting and reintegration almost invariably follow episodes of terrifying fury, often by the very perpetrators of the severe punishment.

The point is this: Suppose one insists that there are objective findings, such as John Bowlby's (1969) and Mary Ainsworth's (1976), which show that children need to be raised in environments that are secure, and that teach and engender attachment to caregivers; otherwise the child fails to thrive, has no chances at *eudaimonia*, and so on. Accept that this is

an objective truth across human ecologies. Still, it is not clear from the evidence that the Bara do not grow up in such an environment. Even if volatile caretakers in some environments do terrible harm, it may be that in ecologies like the Bara culture, where such anger is predictable and is always followed by rituals of loving reintegration, the effects disappear, or never appear in the first place.

If these points generalize, then even “nice” normative socialization practices like positive reinforcement and/or building self-esteem might lead to weak internalization and various impairments if the message is in the air that some elders worry that these practices might do so—for example, by engendering strategies for free riding when visible rewards are removed or impairments in personality depth due to the superficial coin of constant self-affirmation for simply showing up to life.

Self-Sustaining Normative Loops

We were looking for objective findings that might give us reason to favor North American-style anger (assuming, contrary to the psychological and anthropological evidence, that there is such a single kind) over Bara fierce anger or Minangkabau shame as socializing emotions. But the empirical findings suggest the possibility of a new variety of self-fulfilling prophecy effect that confers immunity from harmful effects on overall well-being to a range of socializing emotion practices—at least to wrathful anger and shaming practices—so long as they are widely assented to (not internally controversial), applied consistently, and so on. This means that, in fact, there might be no baseline objective truths about the effects of such practices on overall well-being.

Ian Hacking (1995) calls one variety of self-fulfilling prophecy effect the “looping effect.” In psychology, the “Rosenthal

effect” or “Pygmalion effect” are names for related patterns, where a social practice encourages its own success by, as it were, endorsing itself, vouching for its quality and legitimacy. In the Bara and Minangkabau cases the effect is one where if a culture clearly, consistently, and confidently deploys certain socializing emotions, then this normalizes them in such a way that the youth are immunized from the usual bad effects of those socializing practices. Potential toxicity is diminished by ubiquity and wholehearted, public normative endorsement.

Ethical and Metaphysical Reasons against Anger

There is another tactic for trying to locate objective reasons for or against certain practices where one looks to metaphysics and ethics, to the nature of things and the nature and aim of ethics, rather than to the psychology of well-being. Stoics and Buddhists offer admixtures of these kinds of reasons against anger, especially against payback and pain-passing anger.

In *On Anger*, Seneca (first century) is responding to Aristotle, who he understands as defending the idea that payback anger is a virtue, or a potential virtue, so long as it is apt for the situation and abides the doctrine of the mean as regards expression and intensity. Seneca’s ethical challenge is straightforward:²

1. One ought always to work to build virtue and eliminate vice.
2. The aim of anger is transparent. Anger is the “desire to repay suffering.”
3. No virtue aims to cause suffering. Only vices do that.
4. Therefore, we ought to “extirpate [anger] root and branch. . . . What can moderation have to do with an evil habit?”

Śāntideva (eighth century), the Indian Buddhist philosopher, offers a similar argument:

1. The aim of ethics is to end suffering. (An enlightened Buddhist person vows to alleviate the suffering of all sentient beings.)
2. Anger is caused by ego and aims at revenge or to pass pain, that is, to cause suffering.
3. Anger is incompatible with the aim of ethics, whose virtues are compassion (*karuna*), the desire to end suffering for all sentient beings, and lovingkindness (*metta*), the aim to bring well-being wherever there is ill-being.
4. Therefore, we ought to eliminate anger.

Both Stoics and Buddhists also offer metaphysical and psychological reasons against anger (Flanagan 2011, 2017). For example, Stoics instruct that the cosmos is indifferent to human desire, and thus it would be good to see one's desires as less urgent than they seem, or even, *sub specie aeternitatis*, as not urgent at all.

In the Buddhist case, the argument is this:

1. Everything is impermanent.
2. I am one of the impermanent things (no-self).³
3. My no-self is an impermanent node in what unfolds, the mother of all unfoldings.
4. But I am the kind of node (no-self) that is endowed (by the mother of all unfoldings) with certain poisonous, egoistic tendencies and dispositions.
5. The poisons of ego make me want much more than I need, and to get angry when I don't get what I want. When I get what I want, it gets old fast. I want something new. I remain always unsatisfied.

6. Realizing that I am no-self, that my ego's satisfactions will not last, and that they are not ultimately important (this is part of what it means to be "enlightened"), I should want to tame my desires, my ego.
7. Doing this will align my ego with its relative unimportance in the greater scheme of things. *I*, such as *i* am, will no longer get angry when things don't go my way.

These kinds of arguments are interesting, important, and worth evaluating on their merits (Nussbaum 1994, 2016; Flanagan 2000, 2011, 2017). One quick response is that, even if it is true that the ends of ethics require that we never intend to cause suffering, seek revenge, or pass pain, this does not provide an objective, final, or decisive reason against payback and pain-passing anger. One needs the additional premise that the moral good is sovereign, that moral reasons are overriding. One can think that the meaning of one's life projects depends on seeing certain evil creeps who crossed me suffer, and that this trumps the demands of ethics (Callard 2020). Or one might not care that payback or pain-passing anger hurts others, claiming only that it works for me. I get to lick my lips in payback, and I get some relief from venting.

Furthermore, in the case where we set the task as finding a rational basis for the preference for the Minangkabau shame-based moral socialization over the Bara anger-based moral socialization, where neither culture approves of anger among adults, the Stoic and Buddhist arguments against payback and pain-passing anger are tangential. The reason is this: The Minangkabau are globally opposed to anger, so they are already, as it were, on board with the Stoics and Buddhists—they are Sbuddhists—before these arguments are offered. The Stoics, Buddhists, and Minangkabau have something akin to what Charles Taylor calls an "unforced consensus." They all

think anger is bad, but for different reasons, which are given by axioms at the center of their respective philosophies or ethnotheories. For the Minangkabau, payback and pain-passing anger are wrong because they embed disrespect for persons (no, they are not Kantian!). For the Stoic and Buddhist, they are wrong because they cause pain and suffering.

As for the Bara, they are opposed to anger except when the youth misbehave. And then all hell breaks loose. But they can still, for all I have read or said, claim that they do not approve of payback, pain-passing, or downgrading anger, only corrective, instrumental anger. No Bara wants to make the children suffer because they personally hurt the elders. Imagine that the adults do not feel personally hurt at all. The Bara want to scare the youth into normative conformity. The stakes are high, nothing less than the economic order and social harmony depend on it, and this method is tried-and-true among them. This will give the Stoic and Buddhist pause, since both allow places for “as if anger” and, at least in the Buddhist case, they allow for real but instrumental anger, that is, anger that is phenomenally robust so long as it aims at what is best for the other. The aims of ethics are violated only when anger aims to make another person or community suffer solely because they hurt or harmed me or mine, or, even worse, when they did nothing but are simply a convenient, weak target for my impulses to vent or strike out. This leaves both instrumental anger, which aims to gain normative conformity, and anger at injustice, which aims to improve the moral quality of a society—both of which might hurt some individuals along the way but do not have such harm as their aim—entirely immune to the critique.

In addition, the Stoic and Buddhist arguments incorporate psychological and metaphysical premises about the cosmos, the self, the virtues, and the intrinsic badness of pain

and suffering that are controversial. This matters because wide reflective equilibrium warrants confident challenges to a moral conception when there are strong, objective, empirical, or philosophical resources one can bring to bear against it. But in the present case, it is not clear that we can find any that are not contested, controversial, or possibly question begging.

The upshot suggests that it will not be easy to deploy the method of wide reflective equilibrium in making cross-tradition moral judgments by bringing to bear well-confirmed philosophical or scientific theories in the way that I am supposing can be done for theory choice in science or engineering, or in comparing folk medicine traditions.

Multicultures and Dominance

One reply at this point is that the exercise is notional, purely mental, not a real existential one. We don't really have to choose in this three-way exercise (or four if one wants to include Bhutan), nor do we have to choose among the wider range of possibilities on the thirty-item inventory. "We" are WEIRD people, North Americans or denizens of Northern Europe, not Minangkabau or Bara, not Utku Eskimos, or Tibetan Buddhists in exile, not Japanese, Jain, Stoic, or Somalian.

Except, well, we kind of are all those things, and this gives the lie once again to methods that speak about how "we" do things and that try to equilibrate our actual judgments and practices with our best thinking. Even if some homogeneous culture in some isolated Waddington valley doesn't face the prospect of having to change, adjust, and recalibrate its norms, the Minangkabau and Bara, the Bhutanese, and all the rest do face exactly this existential problem when we reach one another's borders or shores and intermix.

Many modern ecologies—cities like Amsterdam, London, Los Angeles, New York, San Paulo, Mumbai, Singapore, Sydney, and Toronto—are multicultural, multiethnic, and cosmopolitan. How does the multiplicity of comprehensive conceptions interact, intersect, accommodate, and change in worlds in which there is sociomoral diversity and heterogeneity among them? How are norms governing anger changing? One thought is that these conceptions are duking it out for supremacy on their merits. One could imagine that one is in a situation where one converts to an entirely new form of life. For example, one could imagine “an eye for an eye” type becoming a Stoic or a Buddhist because vengeance isn’t working out so well for them. Or, just as plausibly, one could imagine a committed Buddhist finding that their patience, equanimity, and forbearance doesn’t advance the good, as they conceive it, in fractured and fractious social worlds. One could imagine the conversion situation as minimalist, as akin to the way a person might introduce one kind of foreign cuisine—tacos or pho, let us suppose—into their dietary rotation because they like it. Here, the picture is of a person who becomes a stoic (small “s”) or buddhist (small “b”) as far as anger goes but changes nothing else. I find the Stoic mantra “Be indifferent to indifferent things” very useful, but I am not any kind of capital “S” Stoic. Modern people sometimes do this sort of thing, borrow a cuisine or fashion or practice from an alien tradition because they like it or it looks good on them or it improves mental or moral health. Another possibility is wholehearted conversion in either direction, where everything changes—basic beliefs, morals, the economy of emotions. One becomes a different person or different kind of person, as we say. Doing this incurs large costs in identity and thus probably also in one’s important social relations.

Another thought is that in multicultures at any given time, and thus right now, a variety of anger norms are competing in the usual undisciplined, causal fray governed by multifarious relations of political power, economic power, status quo power, ethnic and racial alliances, gender power, and class power, but without reflection on the relative merits of these different ways. What happens in such multicultural worlds? What should happen?

There is an answer to what will happen. Batja Mesquita and her colleagues (De Leersnyder, Mesquita, and Kim 2011; Jasini, De Leersnyder and Mesquita 2018; Mesquita, Boiger, and De Leersnyder 2016) have studied exactly this question. They write: “Consistently, immigrants’ emotional fit with the new culture’s emotions could be predicted from the number of years spent in the new culture and number of contacts with majority members of the new culture. This was true for Turkish immigrants in Belgium and Korean immigrants in the United States” (Mesquita, Boiger, and De Leersnyder 2016, 8).

Call this empirical regularity *dominance*. Dominance says, all else being equal, when there is competition among scripts for moral emotions such as anger, there will, in relatively short order, be dominance of the majority script,⁴ the one already in place. In research in Belgium, the findings are that in three generations immigrants abide the dominant scripts.

One worry about dominance is that anger in particular has certain specific features that can make the anger norms and scripts move in an angrier direction when a particularly fiery variety meets cooler kin (imagine that Buddhist and Bara meet at Ellis Island, enacting their particular anger norms). Anger is a particularly noisy emotion. It calls attention to itself like a thunderbolt or a tornado in a way quite unlike other emotions. Noisiness asks for the stage, and it sometimes wins

all the attention. This is one reason why how we do anger, for any “we,” matters to public affairs and social philosophy. Other familiar emotions—including very powerful ones like sadness, sorrow, grief, happiness, and joy—invite others to witness or share empathically. But anger is different: it invites, often commands, the other to engage. It hopes in its payback and pain-passing modes to see the mayhem, the wound, the damage.

So, besides the worry that dominance is a purely causal mechanism, not a rational mechanism, one might worry that the angry folk especially, those who enjoy revenge and passing pain and making scenes that call more attention to themselves than they deserve, will win the battle of the anger norms in competition with those who think that revenge and pain-passing anger are bad. Why? Because they know the smirk of a satisfied predator, and that look has its appeal. Cruelty tantalizes. Extracting blood from the other is food for the ego. Bad behavior gets attention, and behavior that gets attention is normalized and emulated. We are animals that imitate, and norms are contagious (Christakis 2019).

The Moral Self Effect

Does dominance carry any moral weight independent of and in addition to whatever causal weight it carries? Here is an idea that might provide reason to assign some extra weight to the norms that are constitutive of the ecological landscape that one was raised in or now lives in—the one that one is “used to,” as we say. The idea makes use of recent work on the so-called moral self effect.

What makes for identity is complex. My identity consists of my autobiographical self, the story I know from the inside about the course of my life. Other aspects of my self include

my distinctive personality profile, my career, special relations, my aesthetic sense, my “looks,” my body, and my moral sense. Nina Strohminger, Joshua Knobe, and George Newman (2017) find that, across several cultures (American, Russian, Indian Hindu, Tibetan Buddhist, and Singaporean), a person’s sense of themselves as the same person over time attaches especially to the aspects of themselves that the person judges as morally most important, their core values, their moral compass. In experimental manipulations, a person is judged first and third personally to have changed more if they descend morally, that is, get morally worse, than if they become temperamentally chill after being a high-strung or anxious type, or if they lose a career or a spouse or a memory of their childhood. Interestingly, if the direction of the moral change is in the direction of becoming a saint or a bodhisattva à la Saint Augustine or Siddhartha Gautama, rather than a sinner, the moral self effect doesn’t kick in, and the person judges themselves to be the same person, just an improved version of themselves!

With respect to the present topic, one implication is that asking anyone who is well socialized in their morals to change their moral beliefs is a big deal, and thus it is a big deal to ask anyone, at least any adult, to change their heartfelt beliefs about the legitimate contours and norms of anger. Possibly, if one were to be convinced by my view that payback anger and pain-passing anger are bad, and if one also felt that this called for a self-change in the direction of the saints, one would not be subject to the disturbing, self-alienating kind of moral self effect the psychologists claim to find. But that is a lot of “ifs.”

The most plausible conjecture is that the moral self effect is real in WEIRD cultures and also in some non-WEIRD ones. If I am right that multicultures are often sites of competitions among multifarious norms, including in the present case, norms of anger, then some people are being asked to change

their norms all the time. We know from dominance that, all else being equal, majority norms will win causally. But any equilibrium dominance achieves will be simply causal, not reflective, unless simply observing how dominance works is considered to be a species of reflection, which seems like a trick. If we assign weight to minimizing suffering caused by losing one's moral self—or dramatically changing one's moral self—per the moral self effect, then we could (I guess) say that dominance achieves that by the majority norms winning but only gradually. That is, dominance as a causal regularity shows a kind and gentle side, because it does not immediately demand assimilation. The first generation of a subculture or immigrant group is not required to instantly alienate themselves from their identity-constituting emotion norms and scripts. They are given generational time to make the necessary adjustments.

*Superwide Reflective Equilibrium:
A Method or a Kind of Madness?*

Cross-cultural philosophy opens up horizons of possibility. Attention to diversity inside multicultures also opens up horizons of possibility. Often, in deploying the standard methods of ethics, we do not pay attention to the diversity in our midst, intracultural diversity, depending instead on the use of the royal “we,” which names the dominant cultural form of anger norms, or perhaps, even less representatively, the dominant philosophical tendencies in the academy.⁵

Can cross-cultural, empirically informed philosophy do more than this? One thought is that it permits us to see cross-cultural consensus if it is there, perhaps something like what John Rawls called an “overlapping consensus.”⁶ But in the case of anger, there is no such consensus.

Superwide equilibrium—if there could be such a thing—is the procedure of allowing all the best normative thinking across cultures, and all the best philosophical and scientific theorizing, to be brought into the mix in order to settle on the best way of living and being, or to settle on which ways of living and being are contenders for us, or “on a par,” and which ones are not good for us or not good at all.⁷ What exactly would superwide equilibrium be? How could it work? What would it do? I do not see how, from any cultural perspective in which there is great diversity of norms and diversity of rationale for those various norms, it could work either to locate an equilibrium or, what is a different matter altogether, to find the truth. The data are too much of a cacophony. And many sociomoral truths are created, not found. There are many truths about money and democracy, but both are entirely human inventions. Morality is also an invention. We created it to meet certain needs, especially the need to live convivial social lives.

What superwide reflection can do is something less than finding a universally acceptable equilibrium, or the truth about morals and how to do emotions, given the truth. What it can do is open up the possibility space for reflection on both our own anger norms and their rationale, and those of various others. For a people, and at a time, such reflection is an enormously useful tool. It is protection against being “imprisoned by our own upbringing.”

Conclusion: Changing How We Do Anger in Multicultures

This concludes what I have to say about anger here. Over the course of the first part of this book, I have offered a mix of considerations, reminders, and observations for why I think anger is causing trouble, and which kinds are especially problematic.

I have offered some findings from cultural psychology, cross-cultural philosophy, and anthropology as a methodological resource for exploring and imagining ourselves into different and better ways of doing anger, even by our own lights.

Two final thoughts: I have tried to reveal how much variation there is in how different people do anger, and why they do it the ways they do. There is not even universal agreement about what anger is. Among WEIRD people, anger is an approach emotion (“I’m coming at you”) followed by escalation in some, but not all, WEIRD cultures, but it is an avoidance emotion followed by de-escalation in others (“You are angry, I’m leaving the room—possibly before I respond in kind”).

What is universal is that anger is unpleasant; it has negative valence for the person who experiences it, and it is unpleasant for the recipient, producing pain, fear, anxiety, and sadness. There are exceptions who find giving and receiving anger and the pain it embeds enjoyable: bloodthirsty sadists and masochists. But normally anger is negative. Good sense suggests, therefore, that the best world is one in which anger doesn’t arise—where I don’t want to hit you or leave the room.

There are two ways that anger could go extinct, or, if not extinct, go quiet. It could become obsolete in a world in which people found a way to do without anger altogether by developing other ways to call attention to obstacles, wrongs, and injustices. If the substitute was sadness or shame, we’d be saved from some of the noisiness of anger. But sadness and shame are still negative, so there is no gain in that regard. Anger would also be unnecessary in a world in which there were no obstacles, wrongs, and injustices to get angry about, or in which obstacles, wrongs, and injustices were rare. Neither world is in the immediate offing. In the meantime, both strategies can be developed. Extinguish the genuinely bad varieties of anger, payback and pain-passing, while raising standards

on what we take as good reasons for anger (because you want something or because the cosmos is not attentive to your every wish are not good reasons), and, at the same time, work to reduce, and eventually end, the kinds of selfishness, inconsiderateness, wrongs, and injustices that reliably and reasonably make us angry. The moral arc of the universe is long. And we can bend it.

PART II

Shame



CHAPTER FOUR

Generic Shame

Over the last 200 years in the history of modern societies, shame has virtually disappeared. The denial of shame has been institutionalized in Western societies.

—THOMAS SCHEFF, “SHAME IN SOCIAL THEORY”

IN THIS PART of the book, I ask the same set of questions I asked about anger in the first part. What work does shame do in morality? What work ought shame to do in morality? Is shame an outdated emotion, one we would be better off without? What are the costs of using shame to enforce norms? How does shame differ from guilt? Is shame always outer, the emotion that results from the real or imagined scrutiny of others, the disapproving gaze, whereas guilt is always inner, the voice of a stern parent metabolized eventually into one's own conscience? Is there something about the nature of shame that causes antisocial responses—withdrawal or “humiliated fury” (Lewis 1971)? Is there something about the nature of guilt that yields dispositions to apologize and make reparations? Are there really shame cultures and guilt cultures? What are the arguments that favor the use of one or the other in inculcating

and enforcing a morality? Is there some third emotion that is neither shame nor guilt, perhaps some more domesticated hybrid that could be substituted for either or both if we judge the costs of standard-issue shame and guilt to be too high? What do psychology and anthropology teach us about cultural variation in the nature and function of guilt and shame?

As before, I claim that examining a range of different conceptions of what shame and guilt are, what they can do, their functional roles in different cultures and subcultures, and their costs and benefits can be enormously helpful in considering how we—where the “we” is pegged to some regional, political, socioeconomic status, religious, educational, ethnic, gendered, age, or other cohort—do shame and guilt, and what we might, upon reflection, want to do differently with these emotions. My aim is to mount an argument in favor of an appropriately targeted, mature sense of shame. The defense matters because we live in shameless times. There is the shameless hypocrisy of simultaneous commitment to the Golden Rule and to disrespecting out-group members; there is the shameless disregard for truth-telling, and shamelessness about selfishness and greed.

One set of obstacles to making the argument that these things are shameful involves distinctively American views about the priority of liberty even over truth, love, and solidarity, so that, in effect, it is an individual right to be a liar, a misanthrope, or an egomaniac. Another obstacle to making the argument in defense of shame is the widespread view that shame is a primitive, easily distorted emotion, generally useless for advancing personal, interpersonal, and moral good.

In certain respects, the situation is hard to read. Some psychologists find that guilt and shame are used almost as synonyms by American college students (Tangney et al. 1996). Others find, especially when subjects are asked to theorize

emotions, that WEIRD people prefer not to normatively certify any emotion that authorizes others to judge them or their behavior. The cultural psychologist Batja Mesquita writes:

Shame is “wrong” in WEIRD cultures. European Americans have all but banned shame out of their everyday lives. When do you hear someone talk about being ashamed? Feeling “funny,” maybe; but ashamed? Not much chance. . . . In WEIRD cultures, we do not *like* to imagine being dependent on others, least on their judgment: We should be feeling good about ourselves, independent from others. And because of this, shame itself becomes uncomfortable. Shame is a taboo emotion. Instead of acknowledging their shame, European American individuals will feel “uneasy,” maybe “a bit distracted,” they will stammer, play with their hair, but they won’t say, or admit to themselves, that they feel shame. In European American communities, shame itself is shameful. When I did the interviews [for her research], I found that shame was the hardest emotion to talk about for North American respondents. Quite a few, especially in the non-student European American sample, told us that this type of event had never happened to them. (2022)

Shame has an undeserved bad rap in WEIRD countries. This bad rap has nothing, exactly zero, to do with any natural features of shame as a complex social emotion, and entirely to do with bad values. To put it bluntly, shame’s bad rap has to do with appalling values that result in people being taught or encouraged to be ashamed of things that no one should ever be ashamed about—the color of their skin, their sexual orientation, their gender, their whole self. The badness of these kinds of shame has to do with their terrible content, not with shame itself. The problem in these cases is with the values that

shame is recruited to endorse and protect. Shame about breaking promises, or about being rude to service workers, or for being a malicious gossip, or shame at being a racist or a sexist are all fine, because one ought to feel ashamed of these things.

The next four chapters proceed this way: In this chapter, I explain what shame is and begin the argument against the bad rap. In chapter 5, I argue specifically against what the science of shame says about shame, which, if true—but it isn't—might support the bad rap. Then in chapter 6, I examine some of the ways that shame works in other cultures to advance the project of appreciating shame, and, finally, in chapter 7, I lay out the defense of shame as an ideal protector of deep value commitments.

Shame is an emotional instrument that can be used to teach and protect values. Good shame is the kind of shame that starts out feeling bad but is eventually autonomously endorsed as a positive self-monitoring emotion. The emotion or, more likely, the complex affective disposition is the mature sense of shame.

What Is Shame?

What is shame? It depends on how a culture defines it. How does shame differ from guilt? It depends on whether and how a culture marks the difference. But, so as not to violate ordinary usage, I'll stipulate that, for my purposes, shame in its basic form is the emotion that normally has the following properties:

- Shame is one kind of bad feeling (first pass, “bad” simply means it has negative valence) that one has when one is judged by actual others or by oneself to have violated an accepted, and eventually first personally endorsed, social and/or moral norm.

- The distinctive feeling of shame, insofar as it has a distinctive feeling, is commonly reported to involve some combination of feeling embarrassed, fearful, anxious, and sad about being judged to have done something, or to possess a trait or characteristic, that is disvalued or disapproved of. Note: the distinctive feeling, the qualitative character of shame, involves the metaphorically described inner part plus the fact that the feeling is about having done something that is disvalued or disapproved of, or about possessing a trait that is disvalued or disapproved of. Shame marks the possibility of social exclusion. It is, as Heidi Maibom says, “a profoundly social emotion” (2010, 567). Cheshire Calhoun puts the basic idea this way: “Shaming moral failures are paradigmatically ones that might, if exposed, reduce one’s social standing in some actual group or might degrade the quality of one’s social interactions” (2004, 130).
- Genealogically, shame is initially a group-based, as opposed to an agent-based, emotion (Maibom 2010). The norms we are called upon to feel shame for violating are never, at least at first, of our own making.
- Whereas guilt typically focuses on acts, deeds, or doings that are disapproved of, shame typically focuses on aspects of the person that are personal or characterological weaknesses that, in many cases, are judged to cause bad acts, deeds, or doings.
- But there is no necessity here. Often, in Anglophone countries, “shame” and “guilt” are used synonymously (Tangney et al. 1996; Boiger, De Deyne, Mesquita 2013; Boiger et al. 2013; Henrich 2020; Mesquita 2021). It is commonplace for children to be told that they should be ashamed of doings and deeds. It is actually rare for a young child to be told that he ought to feel guilty for

taking more than his fair share of M&Ms. The more natural way of speaking is to say that he ought to be ashamed.

- The initiator of shame (caretakers at first) follows cultural norms and scripts that specify what kinds of acts, traits, and dispositions are shameful, the kind and amount of shame warranted, and how the shame is expressed and enacted. The object of shame (children at first) learns how to avoid shame at the same time they learn what shame is: don't do that again, avoid detection, extinguish the bad disposition, self-cultivate, self-modify.
- Shame can be initiated or enacted by others, as when a mother says a child ought to be ashamed for not sharing his M&Ms with his sister. This is being shamed. Its aim is to produce feeling ashamed and to change future behavior. "Being shamed" and "feeling ashamed" both come in degrees and are not connected to each other by conceptual or empirical necessity. Disappointment, disapproval, and anger are not typically forms of shaming, but they are common invitations for the child to be ashamed. The case of the mother saying to the child who is not sharing his M&Ms with his sister that he "ought to be ashamed" is simple, benign shaming. There is also malicious shaming and humiliation, which is cruel, an overreaction rarely proportional to the norm violation.
- The initiator of shame is not normally ashamed. Although they might be if, for example, their child's behavior reflects negatively on them by revealing deficiencies in how they raised the child, in the kind of parent they are.
- Shame can be initiated by and enacted upon oneself, as when one fails at one's resolve to keep a pledge to

oneself, not to drink, for example. Agent-based, for one's eyes only, shame increases over time as values are internalized.

- Across all cases of shaming and feeling ashamed, actions are entailed and enjoined. The child who shrinks away after being told she has done something shameful is doing what comes naturally when one feels shame, perhaps in this limiting case, by nature's design. The adult who judges herself to be shameful for failing to keep her resolution is moved to try something different, to step up her game, to find a work-around in order to align her behavior with her resolve.
- The mature sense of shame involves endorsing as one's own norms, values, and virtues that were originally not one's own. It is agent-based and autonomous.

Shame: Heteronomous or Autonomous?

This is what basic shame is and what, in the last step, it can be transformed into—a mature sense of shame. Two wise theorists of shame, Cheshire Calhoun (2004) and Heidi Maibom (2010), point out that we are born into communities in which the conventions, norms, values, and virtues are already in place. We did not choose them. This is true. They conclude that this makes shame about normative violations heteronomous, not autonomous. This is false.¹

All normative learning starts with heteronomous value. No one enters the world knowing much about its ways. But values that are at first accepted purely on the authority of others can come to be accepted autonomously. The situation is identical for shame and guilt. Guilt is encouraged for bad acts but not for acts that a child initially sees as bad herself. She did not choose to be born into a world in which she must share M&Ms

with her sister. But eventually she comes to endorse the values that she did not invent or choose. The point is simply that an emotion that begins as a protector of heteronomous values needn't remain heteronomous.

Maibom concludes her excellent analysis of the evolutionary descent of shame in the animal world by writing: "Primarily concerned with the opinion of others, shame *is* heteronomous. It cannot be the case both that morality is an essentially autonomous practice and that shame plays an important role in it" (2010, 590). But this does not follow if what starts as heteronomous values, and even what starts as a heteronomous emotion, can be reflectively self-authorized, internalized, and cognitively and affectively self-sustained. I love to play tennis, but everything about the game, and the norms and scripts that govern playing it, are heteronomous. The game was invented six centuries prior to my conception, and pretty much all I bring to it is that I am a featherless biped.

Calhoun pays special attention to the fact that sexism and racism can make one feel ashamed to be a woman or a person of color, even when one knows reflectively that there is nothing whatsoever to be ashamed about. She explains, what is almost certainly true, that this is possible because, as gregarious social animals, we are extremely vulnerable to positive and negative social messages about perceived statuses. She then concludes that shame "is not the emotion of a critical, normatively reflective, autonomous agent" (2004, 145).

This, too, is one step too far and too fast. We don't work for shame. Shame is something that works for us, an emotional syndrome whose shape and function(s) is determined by us, collectively. There is nothing about shame as such that keeps us from enacting it in a "critical, normatively reflective, autonomous" way. That said, so long as powerful people hold terrible values, many of us will feel entirely unwarranted shame.

The long-term solution is to turn the tables by advancing pride movements while simultaneously teaching that racism and sexism are something to be ashamed about.

Shame and the Whole Self?

In addition to its heteronomy, it is important to mark another feature that shame is thought to have but needn't have, and that in fact it does not have nor is theorized to have except in WEIRD countries, possibly only in America or North America or, even more parochially, only in Anglophone precincts of North America. This is the alleged feature of taking the whole self as its evaluative object and judging the entire self to be a failure (Sedgwick and Frank 1995; Wong and Tsai 2007). That is, it is the received view that shame asks an individual to feel bad about their global self.

But, in fact, shame doesn't normally do this. The mistake comes in part from misunderstanding the grammar of sentences like "You ought to be ashamed of yourself." There are extreme cases where the whole self is really being globally disdained; normally, however, context shows that a person is not being asked to be ashamed of their global self but, at most, about some global trait they possess—dishonesty, sloppiness, or lack of conscientiousness at work.

I just said shame doesn't *normally* do this. There are exceptions. First, there are some abusers who wish to make others believe that everything about them is wrong. This is loathsome, and we describe it best in words of the pathology of sadism. Second, there are varieties of racism, sexism, queerphobia, and ableism that really do take an essential, identity-constituting feature of a fellow human being and deem that essential feature as worthy of disdain and shame. There are about a million things wrong with racism, sexism, queerphobia, and ableism,

one of which is that shame is weaponized to serve these evil masters. But the abuse of shame is not the main problem we need to aim to resolve. The psychological, historical, sociological, political, and institutional causes of racism, sexism, queerphobia, and ableism must be addressed directly and insistently, every day in every way, by people of goodwill. When the causes of these forms of disdain, fear, and hatred are rendered impotent, shame will have no place to take root.

Generic Shame

The picture of shame abides in the view of emotions as functional syndromes, which I proposed in the introduction. Generic shame has this structure:

1. The child is invited to feel bad in shamelike way(s), which involves feeling scared, anxious, and sad, or these plus embarrassment about being judged to have done something wrong, and/or to possess a trait or characteristic that is disvalued or disapproved of that is thought to be connected to doing the wrong thing.² Shame marks the possibility of social exclusion if the child does Φ in situation S, where Φ names a violation of a social or moral norm and protects some value v. Feeling bad in a shamelike way is designed to inhibit future acts of Φ type, as well as traits, habits, or dispositions that might dispose the child to Φ .
2. The mature person accepts that Φ -ing in S, or being disposed to Φ in S, violates the social and/or moral order and embraces the value system V ($v_1, v_2, \dots v_n$) that makes it so. S (situation) matters because Φ or dispositions to Φ can be fine in some situations but not in others. Lying in a play is fine; lying in real life is

shameful. Talking is fine, good, necessary; talking during a wedding or a funeral is shameful. Once a person accepts, avows, and internalizes a set of values that set standards for things that they would feel ashamed to do in their own eyes, as well as things they would feel ashamed not to do in their own eyes, they have a mature sense of shame in the formal sense.

The first step focuses on generic shame from the side of the caretaker, who invites the child to be ashamed. The object of shame—in the generic version, the child—learns how she is supposed to respond to shame judgments. There are complex socially constructed norms for how to do shame on both sides, that of the giver and that of the receiver. Usually, the giver is not experiencing or expressing shame but anger, disappointment, or disapproval. Although sometimes they might also feel shame—for example, in situations where their child misbehaves in a restaurant or other public space. In the second step, the mature person knows when to make shame judgments of others or themselves to protect value.

In both steps 1 and 2, the person experiencing shame is acting. They are perhaps, at first, more scared than ashamed (because the caretaker is angry; normally, not herself ashamed), and disposed to stop what they are doing, either in shock at the caretaker's anger, or—if they get that the caretaker is judging what they are doing or disposed to do as shameful—disposed to hide, shrink away, or otherwise indicate appeasement by way of conformity to the will of the more powerful. At the mature stage, the community's intention is that the person has inspected and approved of the value system *V* that makes certain actions in certain situations shameful, and comes to naturally abide the normative order, works to sand its rough edges, and works on himself as need be.

My view is that judgments about the badness of shame are almost never judgments about the intrinsic badness of expressing and receiving judgments of social disapproval or about informing others (the objects of shame) of the possibility of punishment or social exclusion. This is true even if cultured shame maintains some features of evolutionary, ancient protoshame, such as deference and appeasement. Negative judgments about shame are about how we fill in the variables Φ , about the judgments that deem Φ -ing in S , or being disposed to Φ in S as bad, or about the quality of some value v or the overall value system V that shame is called upon to protect. Shame can go wrong in four spots: Φ , S , v , V .

If the values that shame enacts or protects are bad, the shame is bad. Mature generic shame, in the formal sense, can protect good values or bad ones, because it is only formal. If the values that shame protects are good, accurately assesses an individual's disposition to Φ , calls attention to why not Φ -ing in S is good by indicating the way not Φ -ing protects v and V , is proportional to the importance of the value (v) being protected, then the main consideration that remains is whether some other disciplinary emotion that doesn't feel bad, or feels less bad, or feels bad in a different way—such as guilt, sadness, or fear and trembling—might substitute for shame in step 1 or in the internalized sense of shame achieved in step 2.

The difference between shame that is careless with the truth or frivolous with promises—or that treats other people as a mere means to your ends—and shame about being a minority is that the first serves good values and the second serves terrible values. Shame isn't the problem; the value it is deployed to defend is the problem. If this is right, then it opens the conversation to reconsidering shame as a useful disciplinary emotion, thus saving it from its undeserved bad rap.

Shame: The Bad Rap

We are social animals. We have numerous ways of influencing and shaping each other's hearts and minds, and making social relations reliable, orderly, and harmonious. Uptake by others is of maximal importance to a good human life, whereas disapproval, downgrading, and social exclusion are extremely painful. In an important sense, we do not really even know what we are doing until others read our actions for what they are. Simone de Beauvoir explains the necessity of parental uptake to make a child's act—in her example a drawing—the act that it is:

As soon as a child has finished a drawing or a page of writing, he runs to show his parents. He needs their approval as much as candy or toys; the drawing requires the eyes that look at it. . . . These disorganized lines must become a boat or a horse for someone. So the miracle is accomplished, and [the child] proudly contemplates the multi-colored paper. From then on there is a boat, a real horse there. By himself, he would not have dared to put confidence in those hesitant lines. (2005, 116)

A child or adult who doesn't receive uptake eventually feels alienated and unwelcome. Loving, attentive parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, neighbors, and parents of playmates uplift us, teach us what we are doing and how to be a person. We also fear their disappointment and disapproval as they convey dos and don'ts, norms and permissions, rules and values, schedules, and the rest. In WEIRD cultures, the received view is that all the carrots—positive reinforcement, building self-esteem, self-respect, pride—can and should be used first to convey the normative order. If the negative disciplinary emotions need to be used, then guilt that focuses

on the wrongness of particular actions is to be favored over shame, which allegedly undermines the global self.

It is widely believed in WEIRD countries that shame is amoral or, at best, morally superficial, that it takes the whole person as its evaluative object and leads the shamed person to flailing about aggressively, which is met with more shame. The moral superficiality of shame comes from the fact that it is allegedly heteronomous rather than autonomous. One is shamed by the judgment of others, not by failure in one's own eyes. It is a common, self-congratulatory view in certain philosophical and theological quarters that shame is both a more primitive and a more superficial moral emotion than guilt, and that shame cultures are typically ancient and/or non-Western. Guilt, we are told, aligns nicely with the judgmental pose of an omniscient God, whereas shame aligns with the less epistemically and morally attuned judgment of ordinary people and whatever social consensus they reach. Guilt is internalized; shame awaits nosy third parties and finger wagers. Shame is an ugly and worthless emotion.

This is shame's bad rap. Good shame, if there is such a thing, has none of these properties. Let's see if I can make the case for there being such a thing.

Shame and Fitness

First, I should say something about what psychobiological function, if any, shame is thought to serve. There are two plausible hypotheses about the evolutionary basis of shame: *appeasement ritual hypothesis* and *social devaluation defense hypothesis*. They are different but not incompatible.

The *appeasement hypothesis*: Protoshame involves behaviors such as eye aversion and making one's body smaller and more diminutive (the opposite, as it were, of puffing up one's

chest) in the face of a dominant conspecific. One sees protoshame in humans and in nonhuman primates, as well as in seals, rabbits, crayfish, and many birds. The thought is that, in such cases, protoshame indicates some fear and anxiety and is a display of subservience and/or appeasement, a signal indicating that I aim to cooperate, to do what you say (Keltner and Buswell 1996, 1997; Keltner and Harker 1998; Gilbert 2003; Maibom 2010). The appeasement hypothesis can, in principle, go with the view that protoshame was assembled phylogenetically as something like the unified basic emotion of shame, the genuine item, or with the view that shame is easily and quickly assembled ontogenically, as soon as, say, the caretakers assert their power to endorse and enforce norms and cause the child to blend feelings of anxiety, sadness, and fear into what we call “shame.”

The thought behind the ontogenetic assembly hypothesis is that shame is not a basic emotion but rather is quickly assembled ontogenically from basic emotions or core affective systems for sadness, anxiety, and fear (whereas guilt incorporates sadness, anxiety, fear, and anger—eventually turned inward). Shame, in this view, is a complex emotion assembled from the alchemical binding of sadness, anxiety, and fear.

Bernard Williams (1993) thinks of shame and guilt as pretty basic, but not “basic” in the basic emotions sense, where basic emotions are adaptations that involve innate ballistic situation-feeling-action syndromes, such as the manner in which fear of snakes or ledges causes movement away from the feared object. Like Gabrielle Taylor (1985), Williams thinks shame is rooted in certain natural and self-protective dispositions, including fear of losing power, dislike of being blamed and punished, and the desire for social acceptance and love.

Whether protoshame is atomic, unitary, and basic, or molecular and assembled, it is an adaptation. Heidi Maibom

writes: “Ultimately, shame in animals is adaptive because living in groups is (Bekoff 2007)” (2010, 578). Maibom follows the primatologist Frans de Waal (1996) in conceiving the shame system in primates as coevolving with norms that regulate mutuality (picking fleas, disciplining youth, sexual permissions), and that work to maintain a sense of social regularity (2010, 581).³

The disposition to cooperate with caretakers is fitness enhancing. We are gregarious social animals who both need and want convivial social relations, the trust of others, and so on. In the human case—perhaps in some of the other cases as well—protoshame can then be extended by socializers to yield cultured forms of shame that safeguard social and moral norms.

But because shame has its roots in appeasing the dominant and more powerful, we can also see how shame can be weaponized by oppressors in nonegalitarian systems—for example, in patriarchies, in the caste system of India, and in racist, sexist, and queerphobic precincts the world over. Here, the solution is to turn the tables. Transvalue the bad values. Don’t give up on shame. Make these terrible practices the shameful ones.

The second evolutionary hypothesis, the social devaluation defense hypothesis, starts from the general assumption that the fragility of human life and the extraordinary dependence of humans on caretakers make social uptake a matter of survival. Thus, “preventing social devaluation—and minimizing its costs if it occurs—is a major adaptive problem” (Sznycer et al. 2018, 9702). A reasonable hypothesis is called “the information threat theory of shame,” which says that “the emotion of shame is the expression of a neuro-cognitive system that evolved to defend against social devaluation” (ibid.). Just as pain evolved to protect the body from tissue damage, shame evolved to protect the person from social ostracism.⁴

The appeasement hypothesis and the social devaluation defense hypothesis are not inconsistent with each other. Perhaps they can be combined into a hybrid theory. Either or both are compatible with my defense of shame. The appeasement hypothesis emphasizes our natural species sensitivity to the judgment of others, which accounts for the primitive feelings of protoshame. The social devaluation defense hypothesis provides a plausible evolutionary explanation for how and why a well-honed predictive and proleptic sense of shame would have a foothold in our nature as socially dependent animals.

Cultured Shame

Here are some safe generalizations about how, on such a basis, we learn about the nature of cultured shame and guilt, and acquire the norms and scripts that govern doing them:

1. Cultured shame and guilt are learnable either because there is an initial shame setting (protoshame) or because there are initial settings to experience sadness, anxiety, fear, frustration, and anger that can be quickly assembled (in early childhood) into shame. If caretakers (perceived either as threats or as loved ones or, more likely, as both) disapprove of something a child is doing, this can activate the shame system directly, or it can do so by arousing fear, anxiety, or sadness (shame), or these plus frustration/anger (guilt). In the first hypothesis, the basic emotion of shame is engaged. In the second hypothesis, associative mechanisms are called upon to bind some subset of the possibly more basic affective responses of fear, anxiety, sadness, or frustration/anger into composite emotions, shame or guilt. Cultured forms of shame reflect and depend on

the lower-level phenotype in the ways dances reflect and depend on the ability to walk.

2. The intensity of shame and the power of disapproval to motivate normative compliance are proportional to the desire for love, solidarity, friendship, and union with caretakers and other conspecifics. Shame and guilt work because social connection is overwhelmingly important to us as gregarious social animals. Caretakers encourage children to associate good actions with love and affection, and as warranting pride, and bad actions and dispositions with shame and guilt.

There are several more things we can say about how we acquire the scripts for enacting shame and guilt:

1. “Shame” and “guilt” are theoretical terms, because they name emotions, and all emotion terms are theoretical for reasons that I discussed earlier. The words “shame” and “guilt” cannot be taught by ostension. Caretakers cannot see or point to instances of feeling ashamed or feeling guilty in others. They don’t even try to do this. Individuals learn about these emotions, what they are, what they are for, and how to enact them, not by way of some inner eye that captures phenomenal feelings but rather, especially in the first instance, by detecting patterns that connect what they do with external situations and the responses of others, which cause changes in the emotional feelings and expressions of all involved. Learning about the emotions of shame and guilt requires learning a complex theory about how one is “supposed to be in the world.”
2. If a culture differentiates between two emotion concepts—one that is to cover feeling bad about some aspect of oneself (trait, characteristic, habit,

disposition, common act type) and another to cover feeling bad about one's actions—and if, in addition, the culture teaches different scripts for reconciling, reforming, or making restitution after the two different kinds of violations or transgressions, then such a culture might be said to make a distinction between shame and guilt. Such a culture has differentiated between shame and guilt by what they are about, typically aspects of the person or acts of that person, respectively, and by the scripts governing what the violator and audience are entitled to or ought to do next—for example, change some aspect of oneself or pledge not to do the offending action again.

There is a further way in which shame is theoretical (I now mostly drop guilt from the discussion, but the reader is invited to keep thinking about it⁵): What exactly shame is, what it does, and what it is supposed to do is always embedded in a complex form of life that incorporates a theology or metaphysics, a psychology and philosophical anthropology, and ethics. Shame is entirely, but diversely, cultured.⁶ That said, it is an interesting and important question whether and how social shame, especially in its mature form, retains the features it has in its primitive form, either inborn or quickly assembled. The caterpillar is two steps away (with the pupa or chrysalis in between) from being a butterfly. There is considerable metamorphosis since the caterpillar digests itself and becomes soup inside the pupa before the butterfly—its closet continuer—emerges. Can shame metabolize itself and become something very different from its early forms? I think so. This is exactly what happens in the transformation of other-imposed shame to an autonomously endorsed and self-orchestrated mature sense of shame.

Theoretical Views of Shame

Shame and other emotions—what they are, how they feel, what actions they enjoin in the “to and fro” of everyday life—are nowadays understood in terms of the roles they play in forms of life with complex philosophical foundations. Often, the philosophical view is detectable and revealed, although not usually in a precise and orthodox way, in the ethnotheories of different folk. Understanding shame in multicultures presents special difficulties, because there are multiple, mutually inconsistent theories of what shame is, its functional role, its warrant, and so on, in the blood and bones of different folk in multicultures.

One theoretical view of the nature and origins of shame is the Genesis story, which places shame and guilt at the origin of the Abrahamic traditions. Adam and Eve’s nakedness in the garden of Eden becomes shameful after they are revealed—by committing the original sin of disobeying God’s order not to eat from the tree of knowledge—as filled with unruly carnal desires.

Aristotle discusses shame in three texts: *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Eudemian Ethics*, and *Rhetoric*. He thought that shame (*aidos*; *aischune*) is an emotion important for socializing the youth. Shame, like every other emotion—anger, pity, fear, love—can be used for good or ill; it can be overdone or underdone, and it can protect bad values. A mature and fully virtuous person would never feel shame, because she would not do wrong, nor even be tempted to do wrong. Virtue aims at what is good. The aim of shame is to avoid disrepute.

Aristotle judges shamelessness to be vicious. What is a shameless person? The best answer is that he fails this test: were he to want to do such and such, where such and such is shameful, he would not feel shame for wanting to do such and

such, nor upon doing such and such. The shameless person's not feeling shame is due to the fact that he is indifferent to the normative order (Raymond 2017). He is a wanton. He goes whichever way the wind blows.⁷

Aristotle doesn't discuss guilt or distinguish it from shame. We do, and we make a good deal of the distinction. Gabrielle Taylor offers a sensitive analysis of shame and guilt as they are conceived in some Anglophone precincts. Shame is linked with being exposed in spheres of life where privacy is normally expected, and with experiencing disapproval by a real or imagined audience for failure to comply with shared social norms. She gives two examples, one from Sartre, where a man makes a vulgar gesture and then realizes he is seen and feels shame (1985, 57–60); the other from Scheler, where an artist's model feels shame when she realizes that the artist no longer sees her as a model but as a woman (60–61). The second case is one in which the ashamed person did nothing wrong. It is a different and interesting question, worth pondering for extra credit, whether the model has any reason to feel ashamed despite not having done anything wrong, and if so, what the reason could possibly be. Taylor writes: "Guilt, unlike shame, is a legal concept. A person is guilty if he breaks a law, which may be of human or divine origin" (85). "Guilt and liability are conceptually connected" (89); "repayment and punishment are appropriate to guilt but not to shame" (90).

For Confucius, appropriate shame is an essential component of virtue. *Analects* 13.20 reads: "Zigong asked, 'How must one be in order to deserve being called a gentleman?' The Master said, 'One who conducts himself with a sense of shame and who may be dispatched to the four quarters without disgracing his lord's commission, such a one may be termed a gentleman.'" Mencius, Confucius's philosophical heir, anticipates both the appeasement hypothesis and the social

devaluation defense hypothesis and sees shame as an inborn psychic disposition that both detects and resists being downgraded by another human being.⁸ The sprout of shame is then cultivated into a mature virtue or sense of righteousness (*yi*), the disposition to perceive what is right and wrong, to do what is right, and to experience shame when one doesn't.

Bongrae Seok (2017b) distinguishes among subordination shame, social shame, and moral shame in the Confucian tradition. Subordination shame is shame about status, such as the shame of a son who does not defer to his father's judgment about how to run the family business. Social shame is experienced because one has been sloppy or indifferent to ceremonial duties. But it is only moral shame, specifically, the desire not to experience it, because one always does what is right that is associated with excellence. An excellent person lives shamelessly. The Confucian sense of moral shame is a virtue, not a price, cost, or punishment. It involves an inner set of boundaries that a good person would not think of crossing or touching. Tactile-kinesthetic metaphors pertaining to inner control—so as not to touch and be tainted and not to cross certain boundaries—are the embodied metaphors that describe the virtue. Anglophone shame typically involves visual threats from the outside, not tactile-kinesthetic threats that are produced by one's own impulses to overreach. However, there is another Chinese virtue that involves “saving face,” and that does involve being seen and judged by one's actions or because of how one's actions look. But the Confucian tradition is not univocal in its admiration for shame. Although Confucius and Mencius praise a refined sense of shame, Xunzi, who thought human nature was undisciplined, compared us to “crooked wood” long before Kant thought shame was not good, only necessary, like jail, say, or the threat of jail.

For Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha, moral shame (*hiri*) and moral dread (*hiri-otappa*) serve proleptically. When one is tempted to do wrong, or positively imagines doing wrong, the prospect of experiencing shame announces itself, and ideally one catches oneself up short: “(1) When there is no sense of moral shame and moral dread, (2) restraint of the sense faculties lacks its proximate cause. . . . (1) When there is a sense of moral shame and moral dread, (2) restraint of the sense faculties possesses its proximate cause. . . . When there is restraint of the sense faculties . . . the knowledge and vision of liberation possesses its proximate cause” (Bodhi 2012, 1070). Thomas Aquinas analyzes shame and guilt in terms of the desire to be unified with the divine and failing—humans’ desire to be beloved by God while on the earth and to eventually live with him for all eternity. For Aquinas, guilt is a psychological sign of the legitimacy of God’s disapproval, possibly his anger, for things one has done. Shame, meanwhile, calls into question one’s worthiness to be in communion with others; it marks the possibility of repudiation by judgmental others, possibly by God. “A person who is and feels shamed . . . may suppose that what he has done warrants in real or imagined others (or in himself) a repudiation of *him*” (Stump 2018, 340–41).

Eleonore Stump explains how in Aquinas the earthy dialectic of guilt and shame reflects in mundane ways one’s ultimate predicament vis-à-vis one’s relationship with God: “With regard to a person who is guilty, others would be warranted in being angry at him or wanting to punish him or extract satisfaction from him—in other words to visit on him things that he himself would find not good in some sense or other. With regard to a person who is shamed, others would be warranted (on one scale of value or another) in rejecting not his good,

but him, that is, putting distance between themselves and him” (2008, 45).⁹ Many philosophers and psychologists claim that shame is an extremely painful emotion and guilt less so. I think this is not obvious and depends entirely on how these theoretical terms operate in a sociomoral ecology. I was raised as a Roman Catholic, and I learned that shame was something to deal with, but only sins could get you a ticket to hell. Sins are things that God can be justifiably angry about, that one should feel guilty for, and that one must atone for. God sees you naked and doing socially graceless things all the time, but he is not going to bring those things up on Judgment Day. If this is true about how the terms functioned in my youthful moral ecology, then one lesson is that we—1950s and ’60s New York Irish Catholics—used these terms with different senses and in different ways than Stump’s highbrow, Aquinas-inspired Catholics do. Bernard Williams (1993) supports my view by arguing that guilt in the North Atlantic is associated with morality in the narrow sense, the system theorized by Kant in his pietistic Lutheran mode, which is severe, stern, punitive, and guilt-inducing (see also Kristjánsson 2010, 81). Shame in its origins is associated with abiding social norms, but not with eternal damnation.¹⁰

Freudians and neo-Freudians read the roots of guilt and shame in the psychic economy of a nuclear family, which produces the stern voice of the father (guilt) and the set of aspirations or ego ideals that one can fall short of and be seen doing so (shame). Whereas Aquinas grounds shame and guilt in desires for union with God, orthodox Freudians ground them in desires of the narcissistic child to always get its way.¹¹

Meanwhile, as we have seen, philosophers and psychologists impressed by Darwin’s theory of evolution see shame as an extension of an ancient mammalian submission ritual designed to appease disapproving or dominant others (Keltner

and Buswell 1997; Maibom 2010), or as a new emotion, easily assembled from the basic affects for sadness, fear, and anxiety, which is also an appeasement response to disapproval, downgrading, and disrespect.

Scholars in countries dominated by the Abrahamic religions favor guilt over shame as the more mature moral emotion, and as the proper tool for maintaining and enforcing moral rectitude. A single, all-loving, and all-knowing God—Yahweh, God, Allah—is the only judge you need to worry about. Listen for the voice of the Father to authoritatively mark what is right and wrong. This voice will warn you off acts you want to commit that are sinful. If the voice fails to stop you from sinning, it will continue to threaten you, possibly with eternal damnation, until you atone for the sins you are guilty of committing.

Many North American psychologists claim that shame is a very destructive emotion because it requires downgrading one's entire self (Tangney and Dear 2002). But by now, and partly in response to irresponsible scholarship on shame, there is pushback. There is slowly increasing agreement among scholars that shame does not in any way require a negative evaluation (by self or others) of a whole person. I can be ashamed that I did something shameful, or ashamed that I have certain recurring shameful desires, without thinking I am a bad or unworthy human being.

One consequence of the fact that shame and guilt are theory-laden is that normative critiques cannot be about the goodness or badness of the relevant emotion simpliciter, especially if this is taken only to involve analysis of the narrow phenomenal properties of shame. Shame feels bad, that is a given. It is supposed to feel bad. In this respect, shame is like fear, anxiety, and sadness (which some say make it up), and unlike happiness, joy, bliss, and pride. How bad shame feels depends largely on intensity settings, which depend on how

the community sets the “shame-o-stat” (think of a thermostat but one that governs when shame is supposed to kick in, and at what intensity), what values shame is designed to protect (conventional and moral), what kind of metaphysical or theological enforcement mechanisms back up shame judgments, and the extent to which the individuals themselves endorse the values shame is designed to protect. What shame is, even how shame seems, depends on all these features of a social ecology that uses shame as a disciplinary emotion.

The upshot is that normative critique requires wide social, cultural, and theoretical appreciation and analysis, and this requires charitable interpretation of the functional role the emotion plays in the sociomoral life of a people, culture, social group, or subculture. It also requires sensitive assessment of background or implicit metaphysical and epistemological views about the nature and fate of persons, the order of the universe, what is knowable, and so on (Nisbett 2004; Flanagan 2017). People prefer what they are used to, and by way of the confirmation bias will often judge that the way they do things, including how they do emotions, is the natural or the right way. Patient attention to other ways of doing emotions, and being a person, can open up possibility space for being better or doing things better than one—individually or as a people, lineage, or subculture—now does. So it is with shame. We, my people, would be better off with more of it.

Three Kinds of Holism for Emotions

In thinking about what emotions are, the norms and scripts for doing them, and how to critically assess them, it is useful to think in terms of three kinds of holism. First, there is *conceptual holism*, which has two components: (1) the concept of an emotion like anger or shame—what the emotion

is—is best understood in wide functional terms, in terms of a schema comprising typical causes + inner phenomenal features/feelings + characteristic content + typical dispositions to act + typical action (Roseman, Wiest, and Swartz 1994); and (2) emotion concepts are connected inside a linguistic community, culture, or subculture, in community-specific ways, to other emotion concepts and evaluative concepts.

To illustrate: The Ifaluk word *fago*, which we might translate as romantic love, is conceptually linked to a poignant recognition that the lovers might, indeed they will, one day be lost to each other. There is no similar conceptual connection reliably in play when Americans experience love. Both sociolinguistics and psychology offer overwhelming evidence that emotion concepts across cultures differ in meanings, in frequency of use, and in proximity or distance relations to other emotion concepts. There are places where grief and regret are interdefined and thus conceptually linked and places where they are not, and places where envy is conceptualized as a type of anger and places where it is not. Because conceptual holism abounds, so does variation of meaning (Lutz 1988; Lakoff 1990; Wierzbicka 1999; Beatty 2014, 2019; Jackson et al. 2019). One implication is that the word for an emotion will not always capture the complexity of the concept, which often requires an archaeology of concepts, an excavation of a concept's history and semantic connections. In principle, conceptual archaeology could reveal that people in different cultures parse the world so differently that they can't think the same thoughts or have the same emotional experiences (Dorter 2018).

The second kind of holism is *normative holism*, which says that the value of an emotion depends, and thus is legitimately assessed, on the basis of its role across personal, commercial, and political life. Because conceptual holism is true, the

evaluation of whether or not an emotion is justified or functioning as it is supposed to cannot simply be based on whether the narrow phenomenal qualities of the emotion are pleasant or unpleasant. Narrow feel doesn't reliably distinguish among emotions; think how confusing it can be sometimes to decide whether one is sad or scared or angry without thinking hard about causes, effects, and behavioral dispositions. The normative rationale for an emotion requires analysis of the socially endorsed norms and scripts for that emotion. Whether a norm for experiencing and enacting an emotion, and a script for what to do next, are good depends on what causes one to feel the emotion + how it feels + what the emotion is about + what one is disposed to do. Some causes warrant shame, and there are positive, constructive things that shame can lead one to do.¹²

Third, there is *network holism*, which is modeled on a thesis from the philosophy of science about confirmation and theory adjustment when there is feedback that something in a sociomoral ecology is off, causing trouble. If I test that water is H_2O , I am testing not only my belief that water is H_2O but also my belief that hydrolysis is the right method to determine whether water is H_2O , plus my beliefs that my instruments are in working order, that I am awake and not dreaming, and so on. If I come upon what seems like a sample of water that is not H_2O , I can give up any of these beliefs. I can conclude that water is not H_2O , or that hydrolysis is a bad method to reveal the molecular structure of liquids, or that the catalyst used to start the separation of water molecules was contaminated, or that I am asleep and dreaming, and so on.

Network holism says that the same situation applies to ethics. The evaluation of moral values, principles, and moral emotions takes place inside a complex form of life, and implicates the entire way of worldmaking. If I believe that killing is wrong but also find myself thinking that it was acceptable for

some individual to kill in self-defense, I can reject one belief or the other by thinking that one was ill-advised, a semi- or quasi-belief, but not deserving of all-things-considered assent, or I can modify my belief that killing is wrong to the belief that killing innocents is wrong.

If I value filial love but also value the law, and find that a loved one is a killer, I find myself intrapersonally in the situation that Confucius and the Duke of Sheh found themselves in interpersonally (*Analects* 13.18):

1. The Duke of Sheh informed Confucius, saying, "Among us here there are those who may be styled upright in their conduct. If their father has stolen a sheep, they will bear witness to the fact."
2. Confucius said, "Among us, in our part of the country, those who are upright are different from this. The father conceals the misconduct of the son, and the son conceals the misconduct of the father. Uprightness is to be found in this."

What is the right answer here? Which is the shameful act, protecting one's father from legal punishment or testifying to one's father's crimes? Is the Duke of Sheh right that justice is impartial, or are there special relations that allow one to protect, without shame, a guilty loved one from justice?

If I highly value filial loyalty but find out that my father steals sheep or is a killer or, what is different, that he is a homicidal psychopath, there is pressure for something in my value system to be changed or adjusted. There are a million ways to perform the adjustment from outright rejection of my former commitment to unconditional paternal loyalty to reconceiving what loyalty to him means. For example, I could rethink things and decide that loyalty means saving my father from his worst self or that loyalty requires standing by the values

my father himself espoused in his best fatherly moments, or would have espoused in such moments had there been any, and so on. Moral ecologies are real-world dynamic systems in which a sociomoral version of maintaining homeostasis, or re-equilibrating, is constantly called for. This requires continuous tinkering and adjustments in a system of moral beliefs, values, and emotions.

Most psychologists and philosophers from WEIRD cultures think that shame is exposed as an ugly emotion because ashamed people are depressed, self-hating, and antisocial—either withdrawing from social interactions or engaging with others with “humiliated fury” (Lewis 1971). This is thought to count against shame as a suitable socializing emotion. I recommend utilizing the insights offered by these three kinds of holism, especially normative holism, and reading the situation in another way: Read the problem as due to the fact that the only kind of shame studied in WEIRD precincts is an unhealthy and unnecessary variety that takes whole persons as its evaluative object, and that has been weaponized to enforce terrible values. Interpreted my way, the sensible response is to give up the bad values. Shame, the general purpose emotion, is not what is causing the problem. My proposal: Turn the tables. Attack the bad values as shameful. Ask the people who hold them to change themselves, and then teach the children well—really well (Flanagan 2017, chap. 12).

The opponent of shame who accepts the received view that shame is bad might suggest that we use guilt to turn the tables. But I don’t see how that can work if we assume the orthodox view, that guilt takes wrong deeds as its object. The problem with racism, sexism, queerphobia, and ableism is not solved only by demanding that the racist or sexist or queerphobic or ableist persons stop acting in these ways. The problem lies inside; it is some state of their souls that needs fixing. The

fixing might involve purging certain well-ingrained beliefs, values, and dispositions; removing themselves from poisonous social networks; aligning what they know to be right with how they act; and working for generational change. But it involves more than just not doing certain deeds. Shame is better suited than guilt to focus on the deed, the doer of the deed, and the aspects of the self that need work.

Shame's strength is related to a feature of shame that many judge to be shame's main weakness. It is said, but is not true, that shame takes the global self to be deficient and judges it to be a failure. There is a complex emotion that does something like this, but it is self-loathing not shame. However, shame does typically focus on dispositions, traits, and habits as much as it does doings and deeds. And thus it asks for more than simply refraining from doing some wrong thing. It calls upon the person to do work on themselves, to do something inner, to self-modify, to realign their inner dispositions with their outer behavior. Guilt asks for behavioral conformity; shame asks for aligning the self with what is valuable. If a culture cares about protection of deeply held values, shame has its merits.

The Science of Shame

The WEIRD View of Shame

WEIRD people, Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic ones, are a very unrepresentative group considered over time or even considered at the present time (Markus and Kitayama 1991; Nisbett 2004; Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010; Henrich 2020). Humans have been around for 250,000 years. Literacy is only 5,000 years old, Western-style democracy is at best 250 years old, the Industrial Revolution was 275 years ago, and so on. Even if we ask about representativeness of WEIRD people in the early twenty-first century, such people represent only about 10 percent of the citizens of the earth. Thus, we need to be wary of generalizing from WEIRD samples.

In the case of shame and its bad rap, the dominant view that shame is an “ugly emotion” with bad consequences for the person who experiences it (self-hatred, depression) and for society (shame causes antisocial behavior in the forms of withdrawal and/or anger and aggression) is not drawn from scientific experiments on WEIRD people, which would be bad

enough because it would be highly unrepresentative. It comes from two bodies of theorizing that are WEIRD but not based on experiments at all. One source is a development of psychoanalytic theory that begins with Freud and culminates in British American psychoanalytic object relations theory, which is speculative and unscientific. The second source is a research program that emerged in clinical psychology, much of it also inspired by psychoanalytic thinking, which gave us the Test for Self-Conscious Affect (TOSCA, which I'll explore in detail below), and that is bad science.

Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory

I'll use Martha Nussbaum's rendition of the object relations theory of shame because it is clear, logical, and relatively tame in its use of psychoanalytic concepts. Nussbaum's commendable method for thinking about emotions is to look "closely at the type of emotion in question, asking about its structure, its thought content, and its likely role in the economy of human life" (2004, 13). But I think her critique of shame is implausible and largely overdetermined by a commitment to an implausible theory.¹

In *Hiding from Humanity* (2004), Nussbaum is responding to social critics who propose adding shaming to the law's dominion. For example, one might signal that a driver was previously convicted of drunk driving by indicating this on their license plate. The proposal that she examines and critiques is that in lieu of, or in addition to, paying fines, doing jail time, losing one's license, and so on, a society can permissibly and usefully shame people who cross certain lines. Nussbaum is against this on the grounds that "shame and disgust are . . . especially likely to be normatively distorted and thus unreliable as guides to public practice, because of features

of their specific internal structure.” I agree with Nussbaum’s arguments against using shaming, stigma, and humiliation in the law. Shaming and humiliation are almost always wrong for pretty much the same reasons that payback anger and pain-passing anger are wrong. The main aim is to hurt by way of humiliation. Shaming and shame share the same linguistic root but are not close conceptual kin. Shame is not normally produced by shaming or humiliation but by disapproval, disappointment, or anger. Thus, experiencing shame and having a mature sense of shame has no normal developmental or logical relation to the practices of shaming and humiliation. That said, Nussbaum’s view of the nature of shame is such that, were it true, the reader ought to be wary of my aim to revive it, even in less institutionally formal ways than those Nussbaum considers. She thinks feeling shame is closely linked psychologically to loathing one’s entire self and also to reactive aggression. I don’t agree with this.

According to Nussbaum, there is a type of shame that she dubs “primitive shame.” Primitive shame is universal, occurring naturally in early childhood when a child discovers that he is not omnipotent and judges himself as a failure. Primitive shame, once experienced, abides as psychic infrastructure for the rest of a human life. Here is the view as Nussbaum develops it (2004, 177–89):

1. A child enters the world and takes “the step from an absolutely self-sufficient narcissism [its state *in utero*]” to a world in which, quoting Freud, it is “very weak” and “very powerless.”
2. In the first months after birth, a newborn begins to come to the rude realization that it is a separate being, and thus not the only entity that exists, as it moves from the (allegedly) blissful and self-sufficient state

of the womb to “an alternation between fullness and comfort and emptiness and torment.”

3. As the realization that it is a separate entity dependent on a caretaker (or caretakers) sinks in, the child starts to experience “some rudimentary emotions: of fear, when hunger strikes and relief is not in sight; of love for the source of food and comfort.”
4. At first the infant’s desires are entirely ego-centered. “His Majesty the baby” wants the mother’s breast exactly when he wants it. There is still no comprehension that there are other subjects in the world with desires besides itself.
5. The narcissistic child is frustrated when he is cold or wet, or when his mother’s breast does not appear the instant he desires it.
6. This frustration flowers into anger directed at the caretaker.
7. In stages 5 and 6 the child is ambivalently attached to the caretaker; there is affection and love mixed with anger and hate.

At this point we are positioned to ask: “Where in this history should we locate shame?” (2004, 182). Nussbaum answers this way, after endorsing the story that Aristophanes tells in Plato’s *Symposium*, to the effect that humans were once whole, spherical, self-sufficient, and akin to the gods. Zeus responds to this situation by dividing people into two and making them dependent on caretakers (and, in later sexual life, on another person). The fantasy or wish for omnipotence remains, and thus:

8. “Aristophanes portrays shame as a painful emotion grounded in the recognition of our own non-omnipotence and lack of control, and he suggests that

a memory or vestigial sense of an original omnipotence and completeness underlies the painful emotion as it manifests itself in life. We sense that we ought to be whole—and we know that we now are not.” Nussbaum adds: “It seems plausible that Aristophanes is right: a kind of primitive shame at the very fact of being human and nonwhole underlies the more specific types of shame that we feel later about handicaps and inadequacies” (2004, 182–83).

9. Primitive shame is the painful response to the discovery that the “whole self” is deficient.
10. The child’s narcissism, which was an admixture of “primitive fantasies of symbiotic merger, omnipotence, and grandiosity” (2004, 185), meets defeat as it discovers its own impotence and neediness. Quoting the psychoanalyst Adam Morrison, “Inevitably, *shame* follows narcissistic defeat” (ibid.).
11. Nussbaum adds that primitive shame is not dependent in any way on an audience. Its thought content is “I am a failure.”
12. “Shame, in this picture, is an awareness of my inadequacy that precedes any particular learning of social norms, although in later life it will become inflected with social learning.”
13. “A primitive shame at one’s weakness and impotence is probably a basic and universal feature of emotional life. . . . Thus primitive shame and aggression that accompanies its narcissism may lurk behind a more acceptable form of shame” (2004, 192–93).²

Let’s reflect on this theory of shame. Nussbaum admits that the early analysts were “too inattentive to experimental evidence about infant behavior. They were more like great

imaginative artists than like clinicians or experimentalists” (2004, 179). But she points out that several of the theorists she depends on were brilliant pediatricians and clinicians and not simply “great imaginative artists.” This is true. But let’s just look at the merits of the theory as she presents it, not reviewing the considerable credentials of all the theorists who have built that theory.

This theory of primitive and abiding shame suffers from several problems. First, psychoanalytic theories are notoriously vulnerable to complaints about the quality of the underlying evidence, and in particular to concerns about falsifiability: What would an advocate of the theory allow as evidence against the claim that the child is a narcissist who believes it is omnipotent? The general worry is that psychoanalytic theories do not naturally invite scientific testing (Popper 1963; Flanagan 1984, 1992; Grunbaum 1985; Crews 2017). Second, observations of children by those antecedently convinced of the theory are pretty much guaranteed to yield confirmations. If a child is demanding, then if I believe Nussbaum’s thirteen points, this is evidence of narcissism. But confirmations are cheap. Exactly the same behavior confirms other contenders, such as hedonistic theories (child as pleasure seeker) and behavioristic theories (child seeks to avoid aversive stimuli and locate reinforcers). Third, there are a host of incredible claims in Nussbaum’s thirteen-point list that have the common characteristic of overdramatization of the child’s situation. Once the child was in bliss. Really? Does anyone know what intrauterine life is like? Then there is the thought that children have some sort of species memory of once being whole and omnipotent. This explains why they come into the world as narcissists and with overweening confidence. Or, perhaps it is not really a memory of once having been omnipotent,³ but instead it’s that the child is born with a desire for omnipotence. But why think that?

Can the child be credibly described as having either grandiose, phyletic memories of omnipotence or grandiose desires for omnipotence? It is not clear that babies have any beliefs, desires, or memories, let alone grandiose or narcissistic ones. A baby's brain is about three-quarters of a pound in weight and 320 cubic centimeters in volume, and it is not that well connected even to itself. It has about 50 trillion connections, whereas an adult brain has on the order of 500 trillion. People who have grandiose thoughts and genuinely deserve to be called narcissists have brains that are three pounds with a volume of 1,400 centimeters.

So one thought is that this view of the child as narcissist is not really based on observation but rather is a theory-inspired projection back onto infants of a psyche that is literally, mythically, and theatrically inspired. Grandiosity, narcissism, and deep existentially fraught family relations are the stuff of Greek tragedy and myth. It is just not clear that the situation of the newborn or the situation of the newborn and its caretakers, is nearly as psychically complex and as consequentially so as Nussbaum paints it. Note that, according to this view, primitive shame is a universal experience that follows on the discovery that not only are we not omnipotent but we are failures, and this feeling penumbra shadows us, penetrates our thoughts and feelings, for the rest of our lives.

It is not clear on this account how social shame is built on primitive shame, or if it is, *how* it is. Nussbaum says that primitive shame lies at the basis of later shame "about handicaps and inadequacies." And she says that "shame, in this picture, is an awareness of my inadequacy that precedes any particular learning of social norms, although in later life it will become inflected with social learning." The simplest view about how primitive shame and socialized shame connect, which also

explains why socialized shame is totalizing (if it was, but isn't), says this: The primitive shame the child feels is totalizing. It is "I am a failure" shame. Other kinds of shame, shame for hitting your sister, not sharing toys, breaking promises, and so on, either reactivate this totalizing shame or are built out from this totalizing core and embed the totalizing.

But it is easy to explain shame about disability in terms of social perception and judgment, rather than reading it as involving additional wounds to broken fantasies of narcissism and omnipotence. As for learning later social norms for when it is appropriate to feel ashamed, the idea seems to be—depending on what "inflected with" means—that this kind of shame utilizes and thus embeds primitive shame, which is aimed at the whole self and pronounces (perhaps it only whispers) that "I am a failure."

Is it that once you know you are not omnipotent and have suffered the humiliation of discovering this, you are now sufficiently defeated by your own totalizing failure to measure up to what you thought you were? That now your caretakers, with whom you have a love-hate relationship, can add insult to injury and teach you some more stuff that you, not being omnipotent, can't do? The picture as dramatized seems to be that once the ego is defeated and one is sufficiently weakened and suffering from primitive shame, caretakers can effectively start instruction in the long list of social and moral dos and don'ts, with the warning that they can humiliate you further themselves and also in the eyes of all those other "objects" (which category now includes people) who have a say in how you are allowed to live. Described this way, it does sound awful and very painful.

The trouble is that all the theatrics are necessary only because they are produced by the theory itself to create the

impression that the child is in a sufficiently weighty existential predicament that could result, at point number 8 in the list, in the emergence of shame as the “painful emotion grounded in the recognition of our own non-omnipotence.” Recognizing one’s own lack of omnipotence could come as a shock and disappointment only if one antecedently thought one was omnipotent, only if one was narcissistically deluded. But the thought that the child is so deluded is produced entirely by the theory, not from patient observation and parsimonious theorizing about child development. The theory in the form presented is not taken seriously except by theorists impressed by psychoanalytic models. In psychology and neuroscience departments, it might be taught as an example of a fraught theory, but not as a serious contender for a true, or even plausible, theory of child development.

The good news is that there is no evidence that the varieties of shame, as we see them in ordinary life, need a foundation in anything as exotic as psychoanalytic primitive shame.⁴ No theory of the descent of shame that takes evolution seriously offers a psychoanalytic theory of primitive shame. Remember, broadly speaking, there are two evolutionary theories of the origin of shame and the nature of protoshame (discussed earlier): One view posits a primitive shame affect system that is attuned to deference to dominant conspecifics (appeasement ritual hypothesis). Another posits a primitive shame system designed to predict which actions and traits will be judged negatively by conspecifics (social devaluation defense hypothesis). The two views are compatible. Furthermore, they permit taking shame itself as a basic affect or viewing shame as quickly assembled from the basic affects for anxiety (of separation), fear (of unusual sounds, punishment, and the like), and sadness (in anticipation of downgrading or social exclusion). These are the psychic atoms from which shame emerges. As

soon as shame is assembled, it comes to serve exactly the same functions that it is thought to serve on the first view. It is available to support smooth social regulation and normative compliance. In neither case is the low-level shame system a system that harbors memories of former bliss in an amniotic sea, or narcissistic fantasies of omnipotence that are then dashed and wound the psyche to its core, causing the child to be eternally suspicious that “I am a failure.”

Nussbaum’s theory entails believing that primitive shame is about the totality of one’s being. Remember, primitive shame is the shame I feel about myself when I come to the rude awakening that I am not omnipotent. It isn’t that I did anything wrong. It is that my entire being is unsuited to being who and what I thought I was. I utterly fail at the project that, when I emerged from the bliss of the womb, I thought I’d succeed at. My nature, my self, my life, my projects can never be what I had hoped. I am not what I thought I was.

But shame in most cultures doesn’t work this way. In fact, especially in cultures that use shame as their main socializing emotion, children are not taught, and thus do not normally learn, that the entire self is the appropriate object of shame. There are exceptions—for example, cultures in which certain people, slaves, untouchables, or women are deemed to be deficient human beings. In such worlds, the social message is loud and clear that the whole person—slave, untouchable, woman—is the unit of disregard (Bartky 1990). The message received is the one that is culturally enacted and intended, and it is entirely unwarranted. But normally, shame, like guilt, doesn’t take the whole person as its proper evaluative object, and such cases teach nothing about the internal structure or character of shame, but rather only about the ability of bad people and bad social practices to cause totalizing shame and humiliation about statuses that only deserve respect and love.⁵

Interlude on Psychology as a Science

My criticisms of psychoanalytically inspired psychology deserve a further short reflection that will also position the reader to better understand the critique I will make shortly about TOSCA, the main diagnostic tool used to measure shame and guilt, and to determine shame-proneness and guilt-proneness.

- Psychology is a young science that began in 1849 in Leipzig when Wilhelm Wundt applied experimental methods to the study of the mind.
- Psychology continues to varying degrees to be influenced by a priori views about the mind that are sometimes assumed rather than tested. Psychoanalytic theories are an example.
- Psychology, especially on the clinical side, continues to have theory proliferation in ways that more mature sciences do not. There are many models of the mind: neo-Freudian, Jungian, behavioristic, existential-phenomenological, computational, neuroscientific, and so on. There is also deep disagreement among personality psychologists, social psychologists, and neuroscientists (Flanagan 1984, 1992; Gardner 1985; Von Eckhardt 1992) about the most important causes of mind and behavior.
- Very recently, psychology's claim to have discovered general truths about the mind has suffered two important criticisms: First, there is the criticism that most psychological findings are based on WEIRD people and do not generalize across cultures (Markus and Kitayama 1991; Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010). Second, there is the replication crisis, which claims that many classic experiments do not pass inspection

when they are rerun (Ioannidis 2005). The latter could be taken to suggest that the original experiments were not scientific or, as likely, that they captured only local, temporally circumscribed generalizations, rather than anything truly general or universal about human psychology. Together, these criticisms are of great importance for the study of moral emotions. WEIRDness should make us worry that findings about the way Americans do emotions of anger and shame (guilt and all the rest) are specific to Americans, but not necessarily true across the board with other populations. This indeed appears to be the case, so the finding that shame leads to what is called “humiliated fury” among Americans does not generally apply to Japanese populations (Boiger et al. 2013; Kirchner et al. 2018).

These observations about psychology should make us especially wary about accepting confident assertions about human psychology without, as it were, carefully checking the answers. In terms of shame’s bad rap, we just saw that part of its reputation is due to the acceptance of psychoanalytic theories that are not experimentally vindicated and, frankly, are implausible. In the case of TOSCA, the most popular tool for investigating shame, which I’ll now discuss, the situation is at least as bad. TOSCA was developed and refined among Americans, an especially unrepresentative kind of WEIRD people. It also assumes or stipulates, rather than tests, the finding that shame is the emotion that involves a global negative self-evaluation of the whole self.

One is reminded of William James’s remarks about the nature of the science of psychology in 1892: “A string of raw facts; a little gossip and wrangle about opinions; a little classification and generalization on the mere descriptive level;

a strong prejudice that we have states of mind, and that our brain conditions them: but not a single law in the sense in which physics shows us laws, not a single proposition from which any consequence can causally be deduced. This is no science, it is only the hope of a science.”⁶

TOSCA

The psychoanalyst Helen Block Lewis, author of *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis* (1971), worked with neurotic patients who, she judged, suffered disproportionately from problems associated with shame. Lewis promoted the correct view that the shame-guilt distinction did not turn exclusively on the dimensions of public-private or seen-unseen. She thought that the distinction rests primarily on whether a neurotic patient experienced or judged themselves as deficient or whether they judged an action they had done as inappropriate, misguided, or wrong. According to Lewis, shame involves the judgment that “I am deficient,” whereas guilt involves the judgment that something I did was wrong.⁷ She writes: “At least in our culture, shame is probably a universal reaction to unrequited or thwarted love” (1971, 16). “Shame is an acutely painful experience about the self, in which it feels as if ‘it could die’ or ‘crawl through a hole.’ At the same time that the self seeks to hide and is reduced, it is at the center of experience” (ibid., 197–98).

An ecologically sensitive investigation of the folk psychology of shame and guilt would study, among other things, how ordinary people and psychologists use these concepts, possibly only inside a population (college sophomores, Americans, Catholics, and the like). This has been done and the finding is that among Americans, both psychologists and ordinary

folk, “shame” and “guilt” are often used interchangeably (Tangney et al. 1996; Tangney and Dearing 2002; Li, Wang, and Fischer 2004). It has also been found that, among the varieties of shame, most kinds take aspects of the self as their evaluative target, not the whole self. Furthermore, how the self receives an evaluation (from others or oneself) that some aspect or feature of the self is deficient, or could be improved, and thus how painful the evaluation is experienced, depends on what one thinks about prospects for changing and cultivating different aspects of oneself. There is considerable variation in views about the prospects for changing oneself inside cultures, across cultures (Dweck and Leggett 1988; Dweck, Hong, and Chiu 1993), and between cultures (Seok 2017a, 2017b).

For example, I might be embarrassed, even ashamed, that I don’t dribble very well on the first day of basketball practice. How much I improve will depend on whether I have confidence that practice might make perfect. If I think I am constitutionally bad at basketball, I’ll never even try to improve. But even then, if I judge myself to be a total failure basketball-wise, I do not thereby judge myself as a total failure, at least not unless I, or my culture, holds some really strange view about the importance of basketball proficiency. Confucian culture emphasizes the project of self-cultivation throughout a life, even for what we might think are core personality traits. Cultural beliefs and associated practices for self-improvement can make social criticism less painful, as can understanding how desires, traits, and dispositions are parsed.

Another ecologically valid method for investigating the concepts of shame and guilt, as I have suggested, would be to examine different cultures to see how these concepts are used, and also to use the expertise of historians, cultural

anthropologists, religious studies scholars, and philosophers to understand the background metaphysical and theological views that partly determine how shame and guilt are conceived.

June Tangney and her colleagues, the creators of TOSCA, will have none of this, even though they admit that neither college students nor psychologists nor clinicians use the concepts of shame and guilt in the way their measure does. What they have done instead is create the most widely used instrument to measure shame and guilt, and shame- and guilt-proneness, by exaggerating Helen Block Lewis's view that, in shame, "the self is at the center of experience," and by defining shame as the emotion that takes the entire self as its evaluative object. Quoting Lewis, Tangney and Dearing accept the stipulation that "the experience of shame is directly about the self. . . . In guilt, the self is not the central object of negative evaluation, but rather the thing done or undone is the focus." They write that shame involves "a negative evaluation of the global self" (2002).

This is odd. First, as I have just said, shame often takes an aspect of the self, rather than the whole self, as the object of evaluation. In fact, Tangney and others (1996) find that, among American college students, both shame and guilt are often experienced in private and do not require an audience, that there is no difference between shame and guilt as far as motivation to make amends goes (it is common for both), and that students feel both guilt and shame over both specific actions and specific aspects or dispositions of the self. If usage among college students aligned with the dominant theory, one would have expected guilt to be used for behavioral transgressions (for instance, a lie) and shame to be used for characterological problems (being prone to lying). But this is not the case. Furthermore, and most importantly, there is no evidence

in these experiments that the concept of shame is associated with “a negative evaluation of the global self.” None.

This makes sense. I might feel ashamed that I am clumsy and thus broke the vase, or that I am not doing very well in calculus, or that my manners are poor, but in each case I can decide to step up my game in the relevant domain and not think that I am bad, or stupid, or deficient. Second, norms governing guilt do recommend it as an appropriate response for acts, but also for habits over which one has control but hasn’t yet gained control. One can feel guilty or ashamed that one is not yet able to stop smoking. Among Catholics, there is a view that one is responsible for bad habits that lead to bad actions, not just for the bad actions. TOSCA is unable to align with these phenomena because of the way it defines shame and guilt. Remember, shame involves “a negative evaluation of the global self” (Tangney and Dearing 2002).

It is important to distinguish two kinds of global evaluation: there is (1) a negative evaluation of the entire person, “a negative evaluation of the global self,” and (2) a negative evaluation of a global trait of the self. So, for example, one might say of a person that he is anxious. This ascribes a global trait in the sense that you say that the person is reliably anxious, and he might also share this view of himself. Even if one views anxiety as unfortunate, one might think the anxious person is wonderful. He might wish he was not so anxious, be somewhat ashamed of it, and work on it. His self-esteem and self-respect might be entirely intact.

Likewise, one might say to a child who is not sharing toys with her sibling, “You ought to be ashamed of yourself.” Context makes it clear that the parent is asking the child to stop the selfishness. The parent is not suggesting that the child feel bad about herself for the person she is. Interpreted this way, shame

judgments are potentially self-empowering, not necessarily self-undermining. They do not add fuel to the flame of the “I am a failure” shame that allegedly already burns in everyone’s soul. The child has been informed about what aspects of herself to change, and it definitely doesn’t apply to her whole self.

TOSCA shame answers are mostly global in the whole person sense. Here are a few representative questions from TOSCA (Tangney and Dearing 2002). Answers are to be given on a sliding 1–5 scale, where 1 = not likely and 5 = very likely:

1. You walk out of an exam thinking you did extremely well but then find out you did poorly.
 - a. You would think: “Well, it’s just a test.”
 - b. You would think: “The instructor doesn’t like me.”
 - c. You would think: “I should have studied harder.”
 - d. You would feel stupid.
2. You are driving down the road, and you hit a small animal.
 - a. You would think: “The animal should not have been on the road.”
 - b. You would think: “I’m terrible.”
 - c. You would think: “Well, it was an accident.”
 - d. You’d feel bad you hadn’t been more alert driving down the road.
3. At work, you wait until the last minute to plan a project, and it turns out badly.
 - a. You would think: “There are never enough hours in the day.”
 - b. You would think: “I deserve to be reprimanded for mismanaging the project.”
 - c. You would think: “What is done is done.”
 - d. You would feel incompetent.

Shame answers are d, b, d. Guilt answers are c, d, b. Externalization (b, a, a) and detachment (a, c, c) are the two other response profiles.

Here's the rub. TOSCA is designed in such a way that guilt answers are the only ones that are epistemically plausible and normatively acceptable pretty much anywhere on earth. The shame answers are always characterologically global, the externalization ones involve never taking any responsibility, and the detachment ones display, not a Stoic or Buddhist detachment but rather that of an indifferent creep. To be shame-prone is to make global evaluations that one is unworthy or an inadequate person, and the prime cause of whatever goes wrong when one is present. Thinking this about oneself is very unhealthy, but it is not what shame is or requires.

The philosophers Corey Maley and Gilbert Harman are interested primarily in the nature of guilt rather than shame, but they also judge that TOSCA is seriously flawed. Here, they are focused on TOSCA's alleged finding that guilt is a prosocial emotion in its effects, whereas shame is antisocial:

If we look closely at these answer choices, there is a significant problem. . . . The guilt-indicating answer choices consist of a thought or desire to engage in some kind of pro-social behavior (returning a favor, helping clean up, thinking one needs to fix a broken item). This poses a problem for claims about the pro-social nature of guilt: The very instrument used to measure whether a person is prone to guilt does so by operationalizing guilt as the tendency to engage in pro-social behavior.⁸

The same sort of point applies to how TOSCA operationalizes shame. TOSCA defines shame as a psychologically unhealthy state that is also epistemically and morally unwarranted—no sensible parent would ever teach their children to think they

are defective as a human being every time they are judged to have done wrong, or to have a characteristic that could not be improved by attention and diligence. So it is no real surprise that this research program finds that shame is bad (it is defined that way) and is associated with a host of other negative features or outcomes (Tangney and Dearing 2002):

- Shame “involves a negative evaluation of the global self” (Tangney and Dearing 2002).
- Shame is “acutely painful.”
- Shame is accompanied by a “sense of worthlessness and powerlessness.”
- Shame-proneness is self-focused and correlated with narcissism. “Shame-proneness is positively related to pathological aspects of narcissism.”
- Shame undermines self-esteem.
- Shame, guilt, and empathy “are generally regarded as ‘moral’ emotions that help us ‘keep to the straight and narrow.’” But, in fact, shame (but not guilt) reduces empathy. “Shame is an acutely painful experience, involving a marked self-focus that is incompatible with other-oriented empathy reactions. . . . Our findings indicate that the shame-prone person is not an empathic person.”
- Shame (but not guilt) produces either anger and aggression or social withdrawal and disengagement.
- “Moral emotional style in the fifth grade predicts critical ‘bottom line’ behaviors in young adulthood (ages 18–19).” Shame-proneness predicts drug and alcohol use, risky sexual behavior, involvement with the criminal justice system, and suicide attempts. “Guilt-prone fifth graders were more likely to later apply to college and do

community service. . . . Guilt, not shame, is the moral emotion of choice.”

This cascade of negative consequences of shame is entirely unsurprising given the way shame is operationalized by TOSCA. It is inevitable given the criteria for shame. The definition of shame and the criteria for shame and shame-proneness consistently assimilate negative judgments about global traits to negative judgments about the global self. There is abundant evidence that, even in WEIRD cultures, shame is not typically constructed to take the global self as its object.

Conclusion: Two Dogmas of Shame

Julien Deonna, Raffaele Rodogno, and Fabrice Teroni discuss two dogmas in the shame literature, both of which they think are false. The first dogma is that “shame is an essentially *social* emotion, ultimately a response to the disapproving eyes of others” (2012, 16). If “essential” means “necessary,” then we have seen that shame does not necessarily require the gaze of another, especially once an individual has a mature sense of shame. That said, I would not want to deny that shame, like guilt, is a social emotion used to build an inner moral sense that suits us as social animals living in communities. Shame protects the sociomoral order, even if it does not require the gaze.

The second dogma is that “shame is directly *morally* bad in that it distinctively correlates with a variety of insidious emotional conditions and action tendencies.” Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni write, “The Test of Self-Conscious Affect (TOSCA) that constitutes the measure employed by most of the studies supporting the second dogma exhibits a bias in favor of guilt and against shame” (2011, 160).

It should be obvious in advance of any testing that people who think they are worthless are mistaken, and that, in addition, thinking this will be very bad for one's psychological well-being and interpersonal relations. But what does this have to do with shame? Shame in the wild simply isn't a state of global self-denigration or self-loathing, nor is it "directly *morally* bad." If it was, then most people on the earth, but possibly not WEIRD people, would be regulating moral life to some significant degree with an emotion that directly undermines morality, as well as self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-respect. But this isn't the right conclusion. Shame is an entirely respectable and useful moral emotion, which in itself has none of the characteristics its critics claim.

The project of rehabilitating shame faces strong headwinds. The WEIRD view, as expressed in psychoanalytic object relations circles and in experimental research that uses TOSCA, dominates thinking about shame in academic and clinical psychology in North America. This view has deeply penetrated popular culture. It is the official view in circles that read magazines like *Psychology Today*, *InStyle*, *Shape*, and *Women's Health*, and it dominates daytime TV shows like *Dr. Phil*, *Ellen*, and the *View*. Addiction is caused and then sustained by shame. Eating disorders are caused and sustained by shame. Except it isn't true. Or it has an element of truth in it, which is only this: There is a variety of shame that is global and that undermines self-esteem and self-respect. It is encouraged by misanthropes, racists, sexists, queerphobic individuals, and ableists, and it is totally unwarranted.

This kind of ugly shame is not a variety of ordinary shame, and is certainly not a variety of shame that can be morally certified. It is cruel and always overreaches because no person is ever deserving of global disdain. However, there are many

kinds of shame, as well as several personal and social roles for shame, that are good—good for the individual who has a proper sense of shame, and good for societies in which such a sense is cultivated. Having finished the argument against those who wrongly think shame is always ugly and destructive, in chapter 6, I'll proceed to give the positive argument for shame.

Shame across Cultures

IN THIS CHAPTER AND IN CHAPTER 7, I take up the defense of shame, specifically, a refined and active sense of shame. My aim is not simply to make an argument for philosophers and psychologists that leads to some interdisciplinary, scholarly reconsideration of the virtues of shame but also to make any reader appreciate the actual work shame is already doing in real-world ecologies, even one like ours in which shame has a bad rap.

In this chapter, I try to reveal the merits of shame by continuing to explore variation in how shame is done. I'll discuss a culture that uses shame as its main socializing emotion in order to say how shame can work in a philosophically unified culture, the Minangkabau of Indonesia. The Minangkabau wholeheartedly endorse shame as their favored socializing emotion. They also provide an example of a culture in which a mature, internalized sense of shame guides adults in the conduct of life.

But first, in order to make things as ecologically real as possible, I'll say a bit about how shame and guilt have figured in my life and world, and how I understand these concepts. This

will remind the reader of how much variation there is in our midst about what shame and guilt are, and what, if any, social role they fulfill. I'm hoping that how I understand and do these emotions is representative of a certain strain of thinking about shame and guilt among older, educated, white males with a very particular educational, theological, and regional genealogy, in what is, admittedly, a WEIRD culture. I have reason to think my understanding of shame (and guilt) generalizes across some segment of American culture. It might help the reader to be somewhat sympathetic to the premise in my argument, which claims that shame can go right as well as wrong, and that which way it goes has almost entirely to do with the values it is recruited to protect, not with the fact that shame is recruited to protect those values.

I say "*almost entirely* due to the values it [shame] is recruited to protect," because the intensity of the shameful feelings might be tuned too high for what the shame is about, and be unnecessarily hurtful for that reason. The settings for how much shame one ought to feel per the type of violation are determined by the sociomoral community, sometimes in microecologies, and embed judgments about the seriousness of particular normative violations. The "shame-o-stat" can be set to be very sensitive to small deviations from conventional and moral norms, or to be forgiving of deviations.

Warm-Up

- In late winter 2020, on NPR radio, I heard an interview with Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan of Minnesota, the second indigenous American to be elected to a statewide executive office in America. Upon hearing her being introduced, my first thoughts did not go to the history of genocide and degradation that the original

people of the Americas suffered and that made this fact about Peggy Flanagan possible, but to a magical thought that by way of Peggy Flanagan, I, Owen Flanagan—as Irish as a leprechaun, according to Ancestry.com—was somehow connected to the original peoples of America, and that in addition, we Irish are naturally in solidarity with the ongoing freedom fight of indigenous Americans. I was awash briefly with a kind of pride. But it makes no sense; or does it? Pride inflates. It fills the bosom with relief and self-satisfaction, warranted or not. It is, some say, the opposite of shame and can emerge unbidden to quash it. I have always known that my people really were failed potato farmers (helped to fail by the policies of absentee British landowners) who emigrated from Ireland in 1848–49, and who were for many generations more shanty than lace-curtain Irish. Gabrielle Taylor writes of the oddity of claiming to be proud of the beautiful fish in the ocean or of a desert animal: “For me to be proud of something I must regard it as my such-and-such, or as my so-and-so’s such-and-such, but the ocean or desert are not mine, nor did I have a hand in the creation of the beautiful fish or the animal. But a person may, crazily, believe that he did” (1985, 27). And so it is with my crazy pride about Peggy Flanagan.

- Yesterday, I wondered for about the millionth time whether my children, both in their late thirties, might feel social pressure to have children. I worried about them experiencing what I judged, in this particular rendition of the monologue, to be the entirely unwarranted, stigmatic gaze of judgmental others, if they did not, by choice or chance, have kids. This harsh judgment of those who might dare judge my loved ones for

not abiding by conventional norms was immediately swallowed by the audible echo of my own voice saying to them: “When you have your own children . . .” Rather than simply accepting my complicity in creating the very conditions that might make my children feel shame for what was now a mere possibility, I immediately produced an absolution in imagination for any weight felt about reproductive obligations. As soon as my head cleared of all the vicarious sympathies for misbegotten, unbidden, and unwarranted expectations that might make my kids feel disappointment, shame, or guilt for going childless, I wondered if I didn’t or wouldn’t feel a wee bit disappointed, even a bit ashamed about being the last patriarch in a dead-end line, and that when asked if I had grandchildren I would lower my head a bit and sheepishly say “no.” The whole episode is of a familiar sort. On its surface it contains multitudes, including love, compassion, ambivalence, bad faith, self-serving thoughts, and an acknowledgment of the ways certain things can matter a lot in spite of thoughts that they ought not to matter.

- Many years ago, I was in the grip of an addiction. Alcohol owned me. At the end, every day was the same. I’d wake up at 6:15 a.m. awash in shame and self-loathing for drinking the previous day. I’d promise myself that today would mark a new sober beginning. But the pattern would repeat: swear off booze, drink, shame, self-loathing, promise again, break promise. There were many days when the shame and self-loathing made me wish to die, even by my own hand, in a coup de grâce of pills and booze. But I worried that when you are dead, you can’t drink, and I lived to drink. I was also motivated not to abandon my family financially. Eventually,

I stopped drinking. According to my story, the shame of not living up to my own standards of a good life was motivating. Without the shame over how I was living, and the guilt over my violation of a host of obligations to specific others and institutions, I do not see what could have made me care enough to want to stop drinking, and then stop. Then again, truth be told, it was also this shame that made me want to die, to be gone, to be done with it. Shame would have won either way. Sobriety or suicide. How do we know when shame will yield good results rather than have its receptacle shrink to nothing, disappear, self-annihilate, be gone?

- There's a line from the Billy Joel song "Only the Good Die Young" that says, "You Catholic girls start much too late." We Catholics get this. Catholics learn that sex is sinful. Luckily, sins can be confessed. But it is important to number them. Sins are things you do. So if, as a child, you hit your sister or didn't share with her, you could tell a priest that you hit or didn't share with your sister seven times ("since my last confession"). And if you were a Catholic boy who "made out" with a Catholic girl on two consecutive Saturday nights, you could say you had made out with that girl twice. I leave aside perverse priests who might have wanted to hear more details and had different methods for individuating sins (and no doubt, in those days, same-sex "making out" was an altogether different kind of shameful thing). I believe that, in my day, "making out" without roving hands was a venial sin (akin to a misdemeanor), whereas getting to "second base" (breasts) was either a mortal sin (akin to a felony) or close to one. Further bases culminating in intercourse were definitely mortal sins and could get you a ticket to hell if not confessed. The background theory

is that you are guilty for the sins you commit, and if you have a working conscience you will, to some degree, feel subjectively guilty about the sins you are objectively guilty of having committed. Guilt cuts and splices. It can be enumerated and excised. Of course, harms that can be forgiven, if only by God, but not repaired fully, can and do remain as sources of regret, remorse, and shame.

- Antiblack racism in America can poison the souls of black people and cause some to feel shame for being black. The people who ought to feel shame, of course, are white racists. The civil rights movement aimed to overthrow legal and structural racism exemplified in the American South by Jim Crow laws, and maybe eventually to excise the racism in the hearts and minds of white racists. A favorite tactic was nonviolent civil disobedience, which in one standard form involved sit-ins by blacks in places where they were not welcome and were sometimes legally prohibited from being—in segregated bathrooms, the fronts of buses, at lunch counters, and so on. Martin Luther King Jr. saw sit-ins as prideful exercises, where one literally took one's rightful place at the table. But Malcolm X thought sit-ins were entirely demeaning: "The day of the sit-in, the crawl-in, the cry-in, the beg-in is outdated." A sit-in mimics evolutionarily basic protoshame where one makes oneself smaller and averts the eyes in the face of the more powerful and dominant. Who was right here? Martin Luther King Jr. or Malcolm X? I don't claim to know. This looks like a genuine disagreement about how to read a certain kind of action: a sit-in as a prideful expression of rights, a way of standing up to the racist, versus a sit-in as a submissive gesture of a weakling—"a cry-in" or "a beg-in"—a plea for mercy from the racist, who has all the power.

A person who is ashamed makes themselves small and innocuous rather than ferocious. Shame, some say, has the nasty property of misplacing itself, seeping into where it does not belong and has no place. Tactically, revealing that one gets the message that one is perceived as shameworthy—as lesser than or in the wrong—can be read as confirmation that one has received exactly the message intended and is thus merely asking for mercy, to be upgraded some. Furious anger, and not so peaceful civil disobedience, therefore, can seem at least as rational a response to downgrading, with the upside that it can be understood as unambiguously prideful.

Some Observations and Lessons

Before I draw some lessons from these vignettes, recall the three kinds of holism I distinguished analytically earlier: *Conceptual holism* says, first, that emotions are complex acts with opaque aspects, and thus that emotion terms are theoretical terms not observation terms, and second, that emotions invariably have complex relations to other emotions (both linguistically and in reality) that are often culture specific. For example, the English distinction between shame and fear is not made by the Gidjingali Aboriginals of Australia (also known as the Burarra) (Hiatt 1978). Both are covered by the single word *gurakadj*. Shame and embarrassment are not distinguished by the Japanese (Lebra 1983, 194), Tahitians (Levy 1973), the Newars of Nepal (Levy 1983), or the Ifaluk (Lutz 1980, 209). The Ilongot use the single word *betang* for shame, timidity, embarrassment, awe, obedience, and respect (Rosaldo 1983, 141). The Javanese use *isin* to cover shame, guilt, embarrassment, and shyness (Geertz 1959, 233). Bedouins use *hasham* to describe shame, embarrassment, shyness,

and modesty. And Americans do not reliably distinguish between guilt and shame, although Americans who are well versed in the Abrahamic traditions, and thus familiar with the concept of sin, are more likely to hive off guilt somewhat from shame. Each of these conceptual differences warrants thinking that they affect the phenomenal structure of shame, how it seems experientially, in these different places.

Normative holism says that normative assessment of the role that emotions such as anger, shame, guilt, and pride play in a sociomoral ecology requires attention to the way they contribute or don't contribute to personal well-being, as well as to well-being in wider ethical and political spheres. This requires evaluation of the quality of the values they are designed to protect. Pride, shame, guilt, and anger can all be called upon to serve bad values as well as good ones.

Network holism says that when, as in the present case, an emotion such as anger or shame appears to be causing trouble, we cannot automatically assume that it is the emotion as such that is causing the trouble. It could be, as in normative holism, that the values the emotion is protecting are bad. Or it could be certain background metaphysical or theological views that are the culprit. For example, when people talk about "Catholic guilt" or "Jewish guilt" or the shame that Irish Catholic women experienced about pregnancy out of wedlock in the second half of the twentieth century (Hogan 2019), they are gesturing at a problem with the metaphysics or theology of guilt and shame in certain cultures or subcultures, not to any intrinsic features of guilt or shame.

So, what follows from these vignettes about how I understand shame and guilt? Possibly nothing very interesting or generalizable. Remember, we live in cultures with multiple views in play. I'll leave it to the reader to judge, but here are some patterns I have noticed, each of which supports the three

kinds of holism I claim obtain: *conceptual holism*, *normative holism*, and *network holism*.

First, I think of shame and guilt as different to some extent, although I often use the terms interchangeably. My experience is that Catholics, who are familiar with ritualized, confessional practices, have a concept of guilt that is associated with sin, which then generalizes to actions that are bad but not sinful, like not doing one's chores properly. Not everyone parses emotions this way, which is why psychologists have trouble finding principled criteria in WEIRD folk psychology for distinguishing shame from guilt. Recently, I discovered that two Chinese scholars, one a PhD student writing a dissertation on emotional detachment in cross-cultural philosophy, the other an assistant professor at an elite American liberal arts college, and an expert on comparative philosophy, both of whom are entirely bilingual, and with whom I have worked for years, did not know that there was any distinction in English between guilt and shame until we read an article recently on the topic (Wong and Tsai 2007).

Second, nothing in the way I was taught about shame led me to think it was ever appropriate to extend shame to whole persons, although I got that it (guilt, as well) could apply to bad habits and dispositions. That is, I understood early on that guilt and shame were appropriate responses to acts or actions, but were also appropriate responses to general behavioral tendencies and dispositions. I was a painfully shy child. As we arrived for Thanksgiving or Easter visits with my Connecticut cousins (all ten of them), my parents would say: "I want you to shake hands with everyone when we get to Uncle Bill and Aunt Grace's." It was obvious then, as it is now, that this reminder was designed to mitigate the effects of my shyness that might lead me to show, but not intend, bad manners.

Third, there was explicit instruction in my family, school, and church that one ought never to judge another human being on the basis of their physical appearance, race, or disability status. One ought to feel ashamed if one did. This instruction came with a warning that some people would, in fact, judge people for their looks, race, and disability status, and that, furthermore, such judgment might well cause the people so judged to feel ashamed of themselves (this was the intention), which was entirely undeserved. This, we were taught, warranted additional obligations to work against such practices, and extra sensitivities, when interacting with those who suffer unwarranted shame. The whole normative edifice was very complicated, but learnable.

Fourth, I am very familiar with the kinds of cases where shame seeps beyond the borders it was intended to cover. People with low self-esteem or who are oppressed and discriminated against are especially vulnerable to this kind of penetrative, oily shame. I felt global shame when deep in the grip of addiction, and I experienced the desire to die or kill myself when I experienced that kind of global shame. It is a terrible kind of shame—one that is never warranted. My shame of addiction came from one perfectly sensible source. I was not living up to my own standards (Flanagan 2013). Why did I wonder, in this particular case, about my entire being, and feel sometimes that I was a total failure? I ask, in part, because the case has similarities with psychoanalytic shame and TOSCA shame insofar as, at times, it felt global, about me, about the entire being I am. My tentative suggestion is that, once one learns what shame is and how it works—it does call attention to oneself as one major source for how things go in a life—there are some bewildering patterns; addiction is one, where there are no good explanations in terms of a single, modifiable

character trait that is easily isolated as the cause that needs to be modified. The temptation therefore is to blame one's global self. Other kinds of cases, involving unalterable traits—such as the color of one's skin, one's sex or gender, or one's sexual orientation—invite global shame, if the society one lives in is racist, sexist, or queerphobic.

Fifth, guilt and shame are invitations to change oneself. In the simple view, guilt is an invitation to stop doing what one ought not to do. Shame is an invitation to change some aspect of oneself so as to be a better person. When a person has been shamed about the entire person they are, or has generalized shame about who they are as an entire person, the shame, I've insisted, is entirely unwarranted. Furthermore, such shame might be so debilitating that the individual cannot any longer or easily take up the invitation to change for the better. The problem in such cases is not due to shame as such; it is due to various kinds of system failures and harms caused by certain fragile learning mechanisms and by bad cultural values—for example, sexist or racist practices that take advantage of certain cognitive vulnerabilities.

Sixth, shame and guilt feel bad; they are designed to feel bad, and this fact can make it hard to focus on the invitations to stop doing what is wrong, to improve, and to step up one's game. If shame and guilt only aimed to make one feel bad, then they would both be morally unacceptable for the same reasons I argued that anger that aims to pass pain or gain revenge is wrong. When shame and guilt are used to introduce a child to the normative order, or to keep an adolescent or adult in normative conformity, they are acceptable *prima facie* so long as they aim at the good.

But seventh, aiming at what some culture or subculture thinks is good, and having it *right* about what is good, are not the same. The culture I grew up in made people feel ashamed

about aspects of sex and sexuality that no one should feel bad about. Many cultures and subcultures still think being gay is shameful. Gay pride denies that there is anything for gay people to be ashamed about. Some cultures shame women who are victims of rape. This is wrong. In all these cases, the problem is with bad values. It teaches nothing about shame as such. Shame can be weaponized by terrible values (Bartky 1990; Piper 1996; Calhoun 2004). And shame can wound even when one knows that it has been so weaponized, and even when one entirely rejects the values it protects—white supremacy, patriarchy, mandatory heterosexuality. It is the same with other emotions such as fear and sadness. Being afraid because one is black—there are stories in the news that during the coronavirus pandemic, many black people feel uneasy about wearing masks, lest they are thought to be robbers or muggers—feels terrible. But the problem isn't fear itself; it is the evaluative object of fear, one's race, and the reason behind the fear to the effect that black people are dangerous. Similarly, it can feel terrible to be treated as an object of patronizing sympathy and sadness because one is neuro-atypical, deaf, blind, gay, or transgendered. Sympathy and sadness are not the problem. The problem is the evaluative object and the reason for the sadness.

Generic Shame

Recall, generic shame has this structure, first for the child new to the normative order, and second for the individual with a sense of shame.

1. The child is invited to feel bad in a shamelike way if it does Φ in situation S, where Φ names a violation of a social or moral norm. Feeling bad in the shamelike way

is designed to inhibit future acts of Φ type, as well as dispositions that might dispose the child to Φ .

2. The mature person accepts that Φ -ing violates the social and/or moral order and embraces the value system V, which makes it so. Once a person accepts, avows, and internalizes a set of values that set standards for things they would feel ashamed of doing in their own eyes, as well as things they would feel ashamed of not doing in their own eyes, they have a mature sense of shame in the formal sense.

I say “formal sense” to mark an idea from John Rawls, who said certain good traits of character, like sincerity, integrity, and authenticity, are virtues of form. They are desirable only if and when they protect good, substantive values. Hitler had the formal virtues of sincerity, integrity, and authenticity.

Philosophers who are impressed by autonomy should be pleased by the fact that (1) the child has a heteronomous relation to Φ and Φ -ing, but that (2) the mature person affirms for their own reasons that Φ -ing is wrong, and that traits or dispositions that lead to Φ -ing require self-modification and cultivation of better ones. This, at least in philosophical quarters, is the mark of autonomy: one reflectively endorses, as one’s own, values that one did not initially embrace.

Generic shame, like generic guilt and generic pride, awaits socializers to provide the content, Φ . Pride that one has gotten better at tennis is fine. Pride that one is an exemplary neo-Nazi is not fine. The difference is what the pride is about. If not Φ -ing expresses a good value, then the shame associated with Φ -ing is sensible and protective of good values—the same with guilt and pride.¹

Shame and guilt are tools designed in the first instance to make people feel bad, or aware that they will feel bad if they

violate certain kinds of norms. In a multicultural community, or a very liberal community with value diversity, or in an edgy community of artistic types who aim to defy conventions, shame may be very audience-specific or, in the case of edgy artists, have no purchase at all in certain expressive zones of life.² If I know that some, perhaps many or most people, think that the way I dress is weird—suppose I am an orthodox Jew or orthodox Muslim in an American city—this may not be experienced as embarrassing or shameful at all, if the community whose opinion I value approves of the way I dress, and most of the others seem, at any rate, indifferent. How I feel about myself might not depend on the opinions of all, but rather, at least in certain zones of life, only on those in my identity community.

Shame is an emotion that, along with its sibling guilt, is associated with normative conformity and designed to eventually do self-monitoring normative work. A person with a sense of shame knows that if they were to Φ , they would feel ashamed. Shame has a negative valence. But because a person with a sense of shame endorses the values that deem Φ -ing to be a normative violation (conventional or moral), they are disinclined to Φ . The sense of shame has a positive valence. Ideally, it is associated with prideful feelings of having sincere value commitments, being a team player, and possessing a working conscience. Shame, when activated, is designed to make individuals feel bad about not being in normative conformity, including when they anticipate doing something wrong. A person with a sense of shame isn't inclined to want to do something wrong, in part because it is shameful.³

There are many ways one can feel bad: physical pain feels bad, sadness feels bad, fear feels bad. Shame doesn't use physical pain to produce its kind of feeling-bad feeling. But, according to one plausible theory, it does recruit sadness, fear, and anxiety, which have been assembled phylogenetically and

come with the equipment, or are quickly assembled in ontogeny as the proper affective response to threats of social disapproval and exclusion. Evolutionary or psychic alchemy unites or blends these lower-level emotions into the complex emotion of shame and links it to the situations and act types that warrant shame. Some such situations provide a prototype, exemplar, or schema upon which the emotion is constructed and refined.⁴ A person with a sense of shame knows the bad, shamelike feeling, as well as what kinds of actions on their part will cause others to judge an act as shameful. Once a robust sense of shame is acquired and developed—including by self-cultivation—it constitutes a space of embraced, autonomously endorsed values.

In *Analects* 2.4, Confucius offers his autobiography and discusses the long journey to the stage where his inner sense of shame is aligned with what is right. “The Master said, ‘At fifteen I set my mind upon learning; at thirty I took my place in society; at forty I became free of doubts; at fifty I understood Heaven’s Mandate; at sixty my ear was attuned; and at seventy I could follow my heart’s desires without overstepping the bounds of propriety.’” Does it really take seventy years to develop a mature sense of shame? Maybe.

This question of how long a mature sense of shame takes to develop is an interesting empirical question. This moment in Confucius might remind one of the moment in book 1 of Plato’s *Republic* where Cephalus says that, although he doesn’t know what exactly morality is, it is easier to be moral when one is old. A philosophical naturalist has to be open to the possibility that the development of a mature sense of shame, a reliable moral compass, and a well-honed conscience takes lots of experience, and, in addition, is helped by less “fire in the belly” and less sexual and aggressive passion, which reduces temptations that violate conventional and moral norms.

The Feeling-Bad Feeling of Shame

Fear, guilt, shame, sadness, and anger are all negative emotions. They feel bad; they are negatively valenced. But they can do positive work—expressing, enacting, and protecting value commitments—and they are part and parcel of living a full and meaningful, embodied human life.

The feeling-bad feeling of shame is often, though not necessarily, associated with the experience of being seen and judged by an audience because one has violated an important social or moral norm.⁵ Once internalized, the survey is one's own; no real audience is required. In the classical Confucian text *The Doctrine of the Mean* (before 300 BCE), three virtues are celebrated: self-watchfulness, sincerity, and leniency. We are told that the noble person is “watchful over himself alone.” Here, the metaphor is visual, but it is not about being seen by others, as is the Chinese virtue of “saving face.” It is about passing self-inspection.

Often, as mentioned earlier, Chinese metaphors for a well-honed sense of shame are tactile-kinesthetic (Shun 2001; Geaney 2004; Seok 2017a, 2017b). The positively valenced sense of shame one ought to develop involves a sense of things one should not touch or boundaries that one should not cross.

For guilt, socializers can produce the feeling-bad feeling by using the example of a creditor who has come to extract some measure of rectification for a debt gone wrong.⁶ The feeling-bad feeling of guilt in its mature, internalized form comes from self-directed anger, where the creditor is one's own conscience. At least something like this is the ethnotheory in WEIRD precincts.

Shame is classified as a self-conscious emotion. Anger is not, although it is extremely self-expressive and speaks in the loud voice of a demanding ego. Anger typically expresses the

aims or goals of the self, insofar as it is a response to something that gets in my way. Anger targets what is outside the self in service of the self but is not, as it were, an emotion that makes oneself focal. What is focal is the obstacle—except, of course, if guilt is anger turned inward, in which case anger metamorphosizes into the self-conscious emotion of guilt, shame’s sister.

We teach children that they ought to feel bad about themselves—either ashamed or guilty—for their wrongful actions, and/or for the reaction they get from others when they do what is wrong. The norms are not, even in the first instance, just moral ones. Children are often taught about norms of decorum in eating, table manners, cleanliness, and dress, where satisfying the standards for these things is a reason for pride and being ill-mannered or sloppy is a reason for shame for both the child and their family (Stohr 2012; Olberding 2020). Even in liberal, individualistic quarters, we think that our children’s poor manners reflect badly on us. That said, poor manners are not considered full-on moral violations; they are not sins, not the kind of thing that God gets angry about or is likely to bring up on Judgment Day.

We can say we feel shame by saying “I am ashamed” or by saying “I feel really bad about that” or “I feel like shit for that.” Context will determine whether we feel bad or like shit for physical reasons or because we have committed a norm violation. If the former, shame makes no sense; if the latter, it does. Saying “I’m very sorry,” again depending on context, can be an admission of remorse for shameful behavior or for an accident, such as bumping into someone in a crowded space. One can be embarrassed, and rightly so, for making a mistake; one might also feel ashamed for making a mistake, but *not* rightly so.

Bill Buckner, the Boston Red Sox’s first baseman, made a costly error in game 6 of the 1986 World Series that led to

Boston's defeat. Buckner did something embarrassing. Normally, a professional baseball player would have caught that grounder. A pro is someone who is supposed to reliably catch the ball. Buckner had bad knees, and he made a mistake, a consequential error. And because his error was in a big game, as big as they get in baseball, and caught by a worldwide TV audience, he was seen, and knew he was seen, making his error. This is enough to make embarrassment sensible. The laws of physics and human physiology guarantee that baseball errors will happen (the highest lifetime fielding average for a first baseman is .997). But Buckner did not commit the error on purpose (he intended to catch the ball and tried) and thus did not violate the sort of norm that would make it sensible for him to feel shame. If Buckner's error had been caused by drinking between innings or taking a bribe to commit a consequential error, then he'd have had reason to feel shame. But Buckner didn't drink between innings or take a bribe, so he should not have felt any shame. But reasons against emotions don't always defeat or override other causes that make us experience these emotions. So Bill Buckner might have gone to his grave feeling ashamed for what he shouldn't have felt shame for. If so, shame didn't cause the problem; mental laws of association and cruel people did.

Shame as Socializing Emotion

In America, there are many distinctive child-rearing practices. Positive reinforcement, pride, and guilt for failing to abide by social and moral norms are all considered acceptable, and there is at present some overlapping consensus that using shame is bad. If my argument in chapter 5—that shame has an undeserved bad rap—is correct, this consensus is unwarranted. But, in fact, each method of socialization has benefits

and costs. It is true, due to the laws of association, that shame (guilt also) can seep in where it doesn't belong or do any good.⁷ Pride can also do this. Some children entirely raised on regimens that only praise good behavior develop into entitled, self-satisfied egoists who feel too good about themselves.

In some parts of the world, there is a wide cultural consensus about how one ought to raise children and, in particular, which socializing emotion to use in teaching social and moral norms. A socializing emotion is one that is normally highly, emotionally arousing and is effective in helping the young internalize social and moral norms. Recall that every culture ever studied uses high-arousal socializing emotions to teach social and moral norms (Quinn 2005).

Socializing emotions, especially when they are culturally universal and not part of a plural package,⁸ are interesting because they provide something of a controlled experiment to see how commitment to a single socializing emotion works in a single ecology. Socializing emotions are used to teach and fix norms, including norms for doing other emotions. Often, the socializing emotion is enforced by itself (this might always be true in a culture that is univocal in its support of a single, dominant socializing emotion). The Minangkabau, recall, use shame (*malu*) to socialize the youth. Furthermore, shame is policed by shame itself. If one overreaches in using shame (or even more so if one uses *marah* [anger]) to teach a child moral and social norms, one ought to feel shame.

Röttger-Rössler and others write that “these special emotions [univocal socializing emotions] have the psychological power to develop into a general psychological control function through which children are able to adjust not only their behavior but also their repertoire of other emotions such as anger, embarrassment, or pride in the normative prescriptions of the culture” (2013, 263). Another interesting fact about socializing

emotions is that they are normally themselves heavily theorized inside the culture. The members of the culture have views, an ethnotheory (ibid., 265), about why the socializing emotion is used, why it is good, why it is better than the alternatives, and so on.

Emotions that are well theorized by ordinary people are called *hypercognized emotions*, as opposed to *hypocognized emotions* (Levy 1973). Cecilea Mun (2019) and Bongrae Seok (2017a, 2017b) think that South Koreans hypercognize shame. Americans are not clear about how, or even whether, to make a distinction between shame and guilt. Typically, Americans think using either word for a violation is okay, although for reasons having to do with shame's bad rap, Americans will also say, somewhat incoherently, that shame is an ugly emotion—bad to experience and bad to display. This indicates that shame and guilt might be hypocognized among ordinary people. But shame is not undertheorized among psychoanalysts, clinical psychologists, educational psychologists, and philosophers. It is overtheorized, and incorrectly so, as an inherently “ugly emotion.” This involves a host of mistakes (as discussed in chapter 5) that include (1) picking out an unhealthy variety of shame as paradigmatic of shame; (2) failing to distinguish shame, and a sense of shame, from the practices of shaming and humiliation; and (3) failing to distinguish the emotion of shame from the evaluative object of shame (e.g., shame about dishonesty versus shame about the color of one's skin).

Minangkabau Shame Culture, Again

In part 1, I discussed the contrast between the Bara of Madagascar, who use fear-inducing anger as the main socializing emotion, and the Minangkabau of Indonesia, who use shame

(*malu*) in that role, and I discussed the finding that using a pretty ferocious kind of anger, often theatrically scripted, to socialize the youth—as the Bara do—does not cause the problems we would expect from using such anger in socialization. I suggested that this surprising fact is best explained by the generalization that when there is agreement and consistency in the use of a socializing emotion, and when there are well-understood and predictable scripts—theatrical and ritualized—for enacting the socializing emotions, then it works differently from how the same socializing emotion works in an ecology that has plural socializing emotions, disagreement about which ones are best, and that lacks legible rituals for reparation, repair, and reconciliation. Now, I go more deeply into the Minangkabau shame (*malu*) case.

The Minangkabau are an Indonesian ethnic group of about eight million, two-thirds of which live in rural areas in West Sumatra, and these were the ones studied by Röttger-Rössler and others (2013). The culture is Muslim but has a matrilineal kinship structure, so households are female-led and property passes through the mother's line, not the father's. The Minangkabau value formal education highly; children are raised to be bilingual and are in school for many hours a day from age six onward.

Here are the main findings about *malu* (shame) among the Minangkabau:

- Interviews with caretakers indicate that the aim of child development is to raise modest children who are respectful of elders and who internalize and thus comply with social norms (one enters a house right foot forward) and moral norms (theft, adultery, and murder are wrong).
- When very young children display shy or deferential behavior—for example, hiding behind their mother's

dress or avoiding eye contact with strangers—mothers reinforce the behavior, labeling it *malu-malu*, the diminutive for *malu*. *Malu-malu* is entirely positive. Furthermore, mothers never attempt to introduce the child to strangers; nonetheless, a stranger who is otherwise entirely unengaged with the child will normally add their praise for the deferential *malu-malu* behavior of the child.

- When children (over the age of five) violate a social norm having to do especially with bodily modesty or bodily functions that ought to be private—for example, they are seen naked, or caught urinating in public, burping or farting, or are smelly—caregivers and peers will induce *malu* (this is understood in the Minangkabau ethnotheory as what they are doing) by theatrical public mocking.
- When children display anger and defiance toward their caretakers, siblings, or peers because they don't get what they want, they are judged to have committed a serious violation. *Marah* (anger) is the worst emotion among the Minangkabau, and it is constrained and subdued by *malu* (shame). The script that caretakers, siblings, and peers use is this: “When a child starts to use abusive language or show aggressive behavior, the caregiver immediately stops interacting with the child, steps back, and displays embarrassment in a theatrical manner toward the audience. The caregiver continues to ignore the child until he or she has calmed down. We never observed any acts of social reintegration initiated by caregivers” (Röttger-Rössler et al. 2013, 270).
- Sometimes, in cases of in-school *marah* (anger and defiance) or public social rule breaking, teachers and peers will mock the transgressor. The schoolchild will

be asked to come to the front of the room and then is dressed down for the transgression. *Malu* is induced by mocking and sometimes, in addition, by a degrading punishment—for example, cleaning the school toilets.

There are three interesting additional features of inducing *malu*. First, the child is introduced to successively wider audiences who have permission to use *malu* to provide commentary on its behavior. At first, only parents, grandparents, and older siblings are authorized to use *malu* as the socializing emotion. Eventually, teachers and peers are authorized to publicly comment, sometimes in a theatrical manner, on normative transgressions. By thirteen years of age, everyone is a competent “social juror” (Röttger-Rössler et al. 2013, 283). Socializing a child into the Minangkabau way of life is a communal exercise—not one left only, or even primarily, to its parents and family.

Second, the locus, focus, and object of shame is, in the first instance, the child who doesn’t know the norms (she is just learning them) or knows (or is on the way to knowing) them but violates them. There is also the norm that if my child violates norms and it becomes public, then I, the parent, should also feel shame. It is unclear from the ethnography whether this norm of shame sharing is due to a view about the individual responsibility of parents to raise their own children correctly, such that the child’s bad behavior is understood as the parent’s fault, or, alternatively, whether the *malu* (shame) of the group is due to an expansive ontology of the self, where the family is conceived as an interconnected or extended whole, or both (see Flanagan 2017, 228–31, on culturally variable conceptions of the self).

Third, *malu* is not equivalent conceptually, semantically, or practically to shame, as we are likely to conceive it.⁹ The

reason is that it includes, or authorizes, the use of mocking to induce shame. In WEIRD and non-WEIRD cultures that use shame, sometimes (America) or often (China) as a socializing emotion, mocking is not normally encouraged as a tool in shame induction (although some research finds that Chinese parents comment publicly, especially in front of family members, on children's bad behavior). There is no necessary connection between using shame as a socializing emotion and thinking that mocking, shaming, or humiliation are good practices.¹⁰ Usually, when norms are violated, the invitation to feel shame is conveyed by disappointment, disapproval, or anger. Sometimes, in socialization, the reasons for shame are introduced at the same time as the reasons that warrant the norm being taught. It is good to share, and not sharing is a reason to feel ashamed.¹¹

There are several important findings about the nature, function, and scope of shame among the Minangkabau and also about the mental and moral health of the society. Recall from chapter 5 the received view about WEIRD shame:

- It is entirely negative, an “ugly emotion.”
- It is totalizing: one judges one's entire self negatively.
- It undermines self-esteem.
- It undermines prosocial engagement.
- It leads to social withdrawal or aggression.
- It leads to depression.
- It leads to high drug and alcohol use, unsafe sex, law breaking, suicide attempts, and lower college attendance rates.

Malu has none of these characteristics. First, *malu-malu* is encouraged in children. It names a personal style that is modest and respectful rather than immodest, ego-promoting, and demanding a wide swath for individual expression. *Malu* is

introduced in early childhood “as a blend of virtue and social fear” (Röttger-Rössler et al. 2013, 272). Shame-proneness is a virtue.¹² Adults understand the positive side of *malu*, conceiving it as yielding a mature sense of shame: “*Malu* makes us behave carefully so that we don’t do something wrong or bad” (ibid., 273). Second, *malu* is only attributed to actions, emotional expressions, and dispositions that violate social or moral norms. There is absolutely nothing about the concept of *malu*, or the way it is taught, that asks the child to apply it to their entire self. Its aim and scope are aspects of an otherwise good and worthy self that can be shaped, disciplined, and improved, including, eventually, by self-monitoring and self-cultivation. Third, an internalized sense of shame (*malu*) enables the child to become a mature and adept participant in common life. It equips the child for prosocial life. Fourth, *marah* (anger) is the worst emotion, and it is tamed by *malu* (shame).

What about the claims that shame is extremely painful, more so than guilt, or that shame leads to low self-esteem, depression, and suicide attempts? Neither generalization holds among the Minangkabau.¹³ In chapter 3, the reader will recall that I suggested that there is a kind of looping or self-fulfilling prophecy effect that can be seen in these types of cases. If a culture theorizes an emotion—shame in the present case—as a dangerous socializing emotion, or as a dangerous emotion period, and especially if it advertises an ethnotheory that claims certain reliable negative effects for that emotion, the emotion will have those effects. The self-fulfilling prophecy effect is even more likely to achieve confirmation if it characterizes the social emotion as only coming in one unseemly variety. But Minangkabau *malu*, unlike WEIRD shame, is advertised in positive terms. It works to socialize the youth; it leads to internalization of social and moral norms, and thus to the conditions of peaceful and cooperative social life.

Shame and Honor?

Ruth Benedict's famous book on Japanese culture, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946), was based entirely on anthropological and political records. The book was commissioned to explain Japanese culture during the Second World War, and thus at a time when Benedict could not go to Japan as a "participant observer." The division between shame versus guilt cultures led to lots of premature generalizations. One generalization is that shame cultures are honor cultures. But Minangkabau culture is a shame culture, not an honor culture. And shame and honor do not reliably go together.

The cultural anthropologist Unni Wikan (1982) argues:

1. Shame is an "experience near" concept in Cairo, Egypt, and in Oman (the "near" versus "far" distinction is Clifford Geertz's). The word *'eb* means shame; it is understood by every toddler and is used constantly in ordinary discourse.
2. Honor is an "experience distant" concept in both Cairo and Oman. It is rarely used by anyone to describe behavior. It is a theorist's concept, not an ordinary person's concept, and furthermore, it doesn't apply all that well to what motivates the normative order in either Cairo or Oman.

Wikan believes that this second point generalizes: the concept of honor figures hardly at all in everyday discourse in the Mediterranean or Middle East.

1. Shame is the main socializing emotion (both *'eb* and *fudiha* = scandal), and it is always used to mark shameful actions or dispositions, never a whole person. This means either that *'eb* is not WEIRD shame, which allegedly applies to whole persons, or it is false

that shame applies to whole persons (which is what I believe).

2. Even if both Cairo Egyptian culture and Omani culture are accurately described as cultures in which shame (*ʿeb*) is the main socializing emotion, close observation reveals, especially in Oman, that the evaluation of how one lives by one's own lights matters at least as much for many people as how their actions are seen or evaluated by others. This means that in Oman, as happens the world over, norms that are initially accepted heteronomously, because socializers avow them, become accepted reflectively and autonomously because the individual eventually judges them as good and the reasons behind them as sound.

Here are two more examples of cultures, Taiwanese and Javanese, respectively, in which shame is positive, often assigned to social units rather than to individuals, and not linked to honor: (1) Heidi Fung (1999) and Fung and Chen (2002) have studied shame socialization in Taiwan. One practice is for teachers to criticize (shame share) both parents and children for the child's poor school performance. Then parents shame share further by explaining to the children that they are vulnerable to being judged badly and need to find a solution (earlier bedtime, more effort, etc.). (2) The anthropologist Andrew Beatty (2005, 30; see also Beatty 2014, 2019) writes of the intricacies of emotional communication between caregiver and child:

In Java, as elsewhere, children in everyday situations are repeatedly presented with words which, in the circumstances, refer to emotions they are presumed *not* to be feeling but should be. . . . For the small child, *isin*, "shame,"

indicates a prescribed pattern of behavior before strangers or elders; the word, as presented, does not refer to a feeling which then motivates a certain pattern of behavior. The adult uses the word because the child is not *acting* ashamed; but this prompting of shame . . . only indicates what the child has to *do*. . . . The prompt is intended to alter the child's behavior, and the emotion word encodes what is required (a certain posture, action, or speech).

There is a parallel in WEIRD cultures where one can say "you should feel ashamed" without thinking that the person—especially if it is a young person being inculcated with the cultural norms—does, in fact, feel ashamed. The speech act is an injunction or imperative that announces, with considerable associated verbal and emotional fanfare, that I intend eventually for you to reliably feel ashamed when you do this again, or, even better, to anticipate that you will feel shame if you do it, and therefore not want to do it in the future.

The Minangkabau, Cairo Egyptians, Omanis, Taiwanese, and Javanese are the possibility proofs of successful ways of living in which shame serves an entirely positive role and is not linked to honor. The children are well adjusted. The adults know the norms and scripts for doing shame and pass on respectable and stable forms of life.

The Shame Critic

One response is to point out that contemporary Western liberal societies are too complex, multicultural, and heterogeneous to adopt the practices of a largely rural, Muslim, matrilineal minority group from Indonesia or these other relatively homogeneous alien societies. Fair enough. But I only intend for

the Minangkabau and these others to serve as evidence that, when shame goes wrong and produces bad sociocultural moral effects, it has to do with bad values, not with shame as such.

I'll use the possibility proof, the proof of concept, provided by these cases to explain how shame could work for us. Remember the predicament that concerns me: We live in shameless times. More shame, rather than less, for violations of genuinely important values would be good for us.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Mature Sense of Shame

*Never do anything which you would feel ashamed to do and
always do what you would feel ashamed not to do. I adopt
this as my Golden Rule.*

—VIRGIL ALDRICH, “AN ETHICS OF SHAME,” 1939

THERE ARE SEVERAL familiar categories of shame that the critic will call to our attention that seem normatively peculiar and hard to explain, unless shame, as such, has some unfortunate features. These are shame at being caught naked, shame at being a minority or abiding minority customs and habits, and racist, sexist, queerphobic, and ableist shame(s).

Naked Shame

The shame of nakedness, of being seen by unwelcome eyes, especially while doing things that are normally done in private, is widely discussed. Some think this shame is innate, others that it is learned. Critics of shame think that naked shame is

irrational, and that more culturally specific and refined forms of shame—for example, Victorian sexual modesty norms—inheritor this irrationality. And some think that primitive naked shame accounts for, or even is, the disposition to take one's entire embodied self as the object of shame.

Recall that there are three different kinds of shame that are thought to be “primitive,” according to different models. First, there is primitive shame of the sort that disposes humans to indicate submissiveness to dominant conspecifics by averting their eyes or taking on a more diminutive, and thus more submissive, posture and to conform to social evaluations. Second, there is psychoanalytic primitive shame, which is activated allegedly in infancy when the child is narcissistically wounded upon discovering it is not omnipotent, and that the world is not completely at its service. Third, there is the primitive shame about one's body, either just for being a body, or for being a body that is seen by others. Assume that all three models of primitive shame have ways of explaining naked shame. The first two must explain naked shame as a natural extension of their more primitive, theory-specific kinds of shame—appeasement shame or narcissistic wound shame; the third explains naked shame as the original shame itself. In each case, the idea is that some kind of original shame is positioned to take my entire developed psychophysical self as its object or just straightforwardly does so. Thus, we are universally disposed to feel shame when we are seen naked. I doubt it.

Almost every culture thinks that modesty and decorum require at least covering adult genitals. Bernard Williams makes a great deal out of the following observation: “The basic experience connected with shame is that of being seen, inappropriately by the wrong people, in the wrong condition. It is straightforwardly connected with nakedness, particularly in sexual connections. The word *aidoia*, a derivative of *aidos*,

‘shame,’ is a standard Greek word for the genitals, and similar terms are found in other languages. The reaction is to cover oneself or hide, and people naturally take steps to avoid situations that call for it” (1993, 78).

There are four considerations that weigh against thinking that the Greeks named a universal preexisting phenomenon—naked shame—as opposed to that they were one of many cultures to socially create a normative framework for experiencing naked shame. First, the dominant view in anthropology is that clothing was invented about 170,000 years ago, approximately 80,000 years after the birth of *Homo sapiens*. We went naked for a very long time. This suggests cultural learning since large leaves—not just fig leaves—were readily available for covering but were not used to cover exposed genitals.

Second, we need to beware of making any inferences about core human nature in general, and core shame in particular, from our lineage, the “footnotes” to the Greeks’ lineage (see Konstan 2007 for some concerns about Williams’s interpretation of the Greek usages). The Greeks were covering their genitals for about 160,000 years, give or take, before they thought and spoke the way Williams reprises. Meanwhile, classical Confucian texts, also Axial Age texts, show no linguistic connection between words in the shame family (*xiu*, *wu*, *chi*, and *ru*) and nakedness, and there are no examples in any classical Confucian text that connect shame to nudity or exposed genitals, although there are many that connect shame to violations of conventional and moral norms (Geaney 2004). This is not decisive as regards the non-innateness of bodily shame, since naked humans of the first 80,000 years of species history might have felt shame or protoshame, the ancestor of shame, when naked (which they always were), and thus have had a wish not to be seen naked, and an associated disposition to hide themselves when doing certain private, naked things.

But, third, it seems fairly straightforward to think that the necessity of clothing for protection, the eventual ubiquity of clothing, the need to regulate sexual behavior as societies grew larger and larger, and cultural learning regarding human waste practices can explain the development of modesty norms for covering genitals, and propriety norms for urinating or defecating, which in turn can account for modern shame at being seen exposed, or being seen urinating or defecating. Disgust at defecating near the homestead is common in nonhuman primates. And dogs can be easily housetrained in kennels, because they do not favor peeing and pooping where they sleep.

Nussbaum (2004) explores the connections between shame and disgust, and although she thinks that shame might have some minimal social usefulness, she thinks disgust is pretty much entirely countermoral—a motivational source for racism, sexism, ethnic hatred, queerphobia, and ableism. But this is one step too far. One can see how disgust could be utilized sensibly to engender a sense of social shame about urinating or defecating in public. The relevant norm is not to do such smelly and/or dirty things in public, near where people are engaged in activities of friendship, commerce, or home life. In itself, there is nothing wrong with the norm. The problems Nussbaum correctly calls to our attention are those cases where disgust responses that support cleanliness and hygiene norms are weaponized so that certain people, workers, immigrants, or the poor are associated with violations, and this is encouraged and internalized.

Fourth, there are social ideals of bodies that no doubt play some role in this kind of shame. Plato thought it was obvious that the bodies of young men/boys were the epitome of beauty. Other times and places have prized the female body as the epitome of beauty and sexual power. Familiar ideal female

bodies range from Rubens's bodies of the seventeenth century to Nabokov's *Lolita* bodies to late twentieth-century Twiggy bodies to twenty-first-century Rihanna bodies.

In modern worlds, the entertainment and fashion industries project ideals that, once internalized, will make most people dissatisfied with their bodies. Some evolutionary thinkers say that hip-to-waist ratio ideals for males of .9 and for females of .7 are proxies for health in males and females of reproductive age, and load the dice in favor of certain bodily ideals. But knowledge is power, and there is no necessity here. Good societies push back against unrealistic and dehumanizing ideals of the body. Elizabeth Barnes (2016) writes beautifully about nonshameful attitudes toward one's own and others' minority bodies. Remember, generic shame awaits social determination of what one ought to be ashamed of. If a culture or a subculture projects an impossible ideal of the female or male body, and especially if it engenders shame for neither achieving nor aspiring to meet the ideal, the problem is with the ideals and the bad values it represents.

Minority Shame

Regarding shame at being a member of a minority, I have in mind specifically shame with regard to a minority's customs or habits, such things as language, accents, religious rituals, diet, and forms of dress. Consider the case of speaking a minority language or having a distinctive accent. It seems inevitable that anyone who immigrates to, or even visits, a place where their ability to communicate is compromised can feel any of a variety of emotions—frustration, inadequacy, embarrassment (which many think is a variety of shame or close kin), and shame. Regarding accents: I almost never ask an American student to repeat what they say in class; at most, I request that

they speak up, but sometimes I ask my East Asian students to do so. I try to indicate that the problem—perhaps protesting too much and adding insult to injury—lies with me. But they are receiving feedback, nonetheless, that things would go more smoothly with me communication-wise if they spoke in a way that was more intelligible to me (McWhorter 2020).

The point is that cultures make available a wide array of statuses and ideals. Some statuses—such as native or non-native speaker, native or foreign accent, posh or nonposh accent—can, in principle, be noticed without being judged. Simply because of the relative frequency of miscommunication and stressful communication, a nonnative speaker, or a native speaker with an unusual accent, might feel bad about the way (the language, the accent) they speak. And one way of feeling bad is feeling embarrassed or ashamed. We are gregarious social animals who seek uptake for our actions and projects. But the kinds of situations I’m describing are ones where there are glitches in the uptake, or in the worse cases, deliberate downtakes.

These cases are especially worrisome because the generalizations that support majority judgments of the minority being “less than” and out of normative conformity, and that lead the minority to feel embarrassed or ashamed, are not normally expressed explicitly, nor are they normally publicly and/or rationally defended by either the majority or the minority. Nonetheless, these feelings can easily be causally produced. How so?

Let’s draw a distinction between a shame script that is socially certified and that protects a good value, and that can, in addition, be rationally defended versus shame that is engendered by bad values, bad norms, or—what is different—by unnoticed and unendorsed causal processes that have bad effects. An example of the first is teaching the youth that one

ought to tell the truth and ought to feel ashamed if one lies. An example of the second is the case where an individual with a foreign accent feels ashamed, not because the dominant group believes or defends the norm that one ought not to have a foreign accent, but because the frequency of failures to be understood when one has a foreign accent leads to feeling bad, unwelcome, alien, and possibly ashamed. Again, in the cases I am considering, the expectation that people ought to speak the dominant language without an accent is not publicly endorsed or defended. But genuine difficulties in communication across languages—or between people who speak the statistically dominant language with a normal accent and those who don't—create an atmosphere relevantly similar to cases where considered norms governing proper behavior are inculcated and endorsed and shame is introduced as an appropriate thing to feel, such as in the “one ought never to lie” type cases. The causal mechanisms that operate in such cases, as I am imagining them, and that might make the person feel ashamed of their accent, do not involve the intention to shame them because of their accent. The shame is produced nonetheless by association with relevantly similar kinds of situations in which shame is in play. That is, the associative mechanisms that operate in the inadvertent, unintentional case are general learning principles, operate across the emotions, and are not distinctive to shame. A child raised on a prideful regimen, designed to constantly boost self-esteem, might become entitled, aglow with confidence and pride, eventually thinking that when any situation goes well, they are the main cause and deserve maximum credit. The problem in this case is due to some bad thinking about when pride is deserved, possibly on both the child's side and the side of the adults who are teaching the pride norms and scripts, plus overgeneralization. It is not that rightful pride is a problem.

In the inadvertent cases of shame, the situation is one in which the minority reads correctly that their practices are not being easily or smoothly endorsed, not taken for granted, or not judged as fine, legitimate, and perfectly acceptable. The person or group then takes this, mistakenly, as an indication that they are being called upon to feel shame, and they do. Shame is born out of sensitivity to social disapproval, disrespect, and failures to be taken up by others. Those of us who are positioned to produce inadvertent shame in the minority language cases—as well as in cases of religious rites and rituals, dress, diet, and so on—have a special responsibility not to let it happen.

Racist, Sexist, Queerphobic, and Ableist Shame

The picture that makes the experience of minority shame inadvertent is too kind to numerical and power majorities, since typically some segment of the population will, in fact, intend for the member of the minority with the accent or the disability, or who is neuro-atypical or a member of a sexual, religious, or racial minority to read that they are judged negatively and are invited to feel badly about themselves. This brings us to a third kind of shame, which can be distinguished from naked shame and minority shame.

This third kind of shame is deliberate and ubiquitous in many places, and it has the following features: First, the person (as a member of some group) who is being shamed does not share the value with the shamer (who is often enacting an anger or fear script) that would make it appropriate for them (the person being shamed) to feel shame. In fact, they often entirely reject it. But they feel shame anyway (often anger and fear as well). Second, they are disapproved of and downgraded because they possess a certain unalterable trait:

the color of their skin, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. The demand to change an unalterable trait is straightforwardly cruel.

Shame asks an individual to modify, extinguish, or reschedule some desire, trait, act, or disposition. Sometimes shame calls on a person, even a group, to change ingrained habits. One example is calling on a racist or sexist culture to be ashamed of their racism and sexism, and to work to overcome it. "Ought" implies "can," and this, hard as it is, can be done. Sometimes, speaking realistically, it requires generational change. But current generations can aid and assist the process of turning the tables by self-cleansing and working to exorcise the bad values, views, and practices from themselves. Consciousnesses can be raised, and even souls poisoned by racist and sexist values, beliefs, and practices can teach their children, often and well, that it is always shameful to disrespect another for an unalterable trait, even if some particular group or generation cannot entirely stop doing so in their own hearts. My father was raised in racist and anti-Semitic quarters. He knew both were baseless prejudices. He told me this. And he admitted that he was not entirely able to cleanse his own heart of these prejudices. But he was entirely dedicated to teaching his children that both were based on false beliefs and shameful. This is, in fact, one culturally available script in our culture: teach the children well, better than you (your generation) were taught.

One point is that both the racist and the sexist and the anti-racist and the antisexist enact shame. The racists and sexists utilize certain culturally available scripts to make people of color and women feel ashamed for possessing certain unalterable traits. Remember, generic shame has this initial structure: The novice is invited to feel bad in a shamelike way about being judged for possessing a trait or characteristic that is disvalued or

disapproved of. Shame marks the possibility of social exclusion if the novice does Φ in situation S , where Φ names a violation of a social or moral norm and protects some value v . Feeling bad in the shamelike way is designed to inhibit future acts of Φ type, as well as beliefs, value commitments, traits, habits, or dispositions that might dispose the novice to Φ .

Generic shame permits racists and sexists to express disdain, disapproval, and disrespect for Φ that takes—it is a variable—an unalterable characteristic such as the color of one's skin or one's sex or gender or one's sexual orientation or one's disability status as the object of disapproval and disdain, and to use shame to protect the values of v_1 = white supremacy or v_2 = patriarchy or v_3 = heterosexuality or $v_1 + v_2 + v_3$ inside some value system V . In what situations S is Φ disapproved of? In life, in living—in being a person of color or being a woman or queer or differently abled—neither the trait disdained nor the situation is alterable.

Turning the tables involves saying that this is wrong, cruel, and misguided, and insisting on different norms and scripts. The shameful dispositions (Φ) become racism, sexism, and queerphobia, and the values (v_1 , v_2 , v_3) being protected are equal respect, dignity, and freedom inside a system of value V , which makes sense of these values.

In these cases, and many others, the situation is one where rival norms and scripts for shame—what is shameful, when to induce it, what to do when one feels it, what action to take—are mutually inconsistent and in competition. The racist wants people of color—or in the case of antiwhite racism, wants whites—to feel less than and socially excluded, to quiet down, know their place, and slink away. The antiracist wants the racist to feel shame, come to see that racism is shameful, and change themselves, their racist behavior and practices, and the values and norms they model for the young.

Is the racist, sexist, queerphobic, or ableist person globally bad? Almost certainly not. If the antiracist or antisexist acts as if they are, they simply copy the cruel mistake of substituting a deep-seated characteristic or an unalterable trait for Φ . It is a variable matter how much being a racist or sexist interpenetrates the being of the racist or sexist. But the humane, and also most psychologically plausible, view is that we contain multitudes, and, as hard as it is, we can work to improve aspects of ourselves, even many aspects at once, without needing to entirely undermine our identity, without needing to dissolve our previous self and create an entirely new person.

The best answer to the question of why people are so vulnerable to the shaming judgments of others is Beauvoirian. We are gregarious, social animals, cocreating a world with one another, and vulnerable to uptakes and downtakes, to assessments of our status and worth, to recognition respect and disrespect, and to affronts to our dignity. We are cocreated by and with others, and our weal and our woe are dependent on the goodwill of others. Cheshire Calhoun puts the matter this way: "Feeling ashamed . . . does not entail that they [objects of racist, sexist disrespect] agree with the shamers' contempt. That people who wholeheartedly condemn sexist or racist insults are still vulnerable to feeling shamed by those insults . . . is a perfectly natural response for a mature, well-formed agent to have. . . . Shame, not just social discomfort, seems the reasonable response to being treated with contempt by people whose evaluations partially define [who one is]" (2004, 137–38).

The Mature Sense of Shame

Now it is time to sketch the positive view of the mature sense of shame and explain why it is good, better even than having a reliable conscience. Recall the two dogmas of shame discussed

earlier (Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni 2011). The first is that shame is essentially a response to the disapproving gaze of others. The second is that shame leads to antisocial behavior, either withdrawal or “humiliated fury.”

The first dogma is false, because it is common for a person to come to avow and accept social values as their own, and to feel shame if they violate or think of violating these values even if they are not seen and never will be seen by any other. The second dogma is also false, because it is primarily humiliation, shaming, and global self-loathing that lead to antisocial behavior in WEIRD populations. A mature sense of shame has no such effects. In fact, a mature sense of shame is more plausibly thought of as “the proper guardian of every type of virtue” (Hume 1751, 140–41). Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni describe the requisite sense of shame this way:

To have a sense of shame is, when the circumstances call for it, to experience shame episodes. These involve the subject’s painful experience of being incapable of meeting, even to a minimal degree, the demands of a value to which she is attached. Being disposed to shame episodes, however, is only one dimension of the manifestation of an individual’s sense of shame. The latter should more generally be associated with all the elements constituting a sensitivity to the lower limit of what is acceptable in our traits and behavior. . . . Now beyond individual shame episodes and their immediate behavioral tendencies, we should also count as manifestations of our sense of shame—and this is crucial—first, the long-term action tendencies they might encourage, as well as, second, the thoughts—retrospective but especially prospective—regarding circumstances that might be occasions for shame. (2011, 174)

I want to emphasize several important elements in this picture of the sense of shame, add a few elements, and explain how shame, which is initially negative (negatively valenced, as the psychologists say), could become a sense of shame that is positive, incorporating aspects of pride, and making up an aspect of the self that is worthy of self-respect and self-esteem. This needs to be explained, because otherwise the fact that we use the word “shame” to describe both feeling ashamed (which is negative) and the sense of shame (which is not only judged positively by others but is experienced positively by the person whose sense of shame it is) might be a linguistic accident, and indicate nothing about the positive prospects or uses of shame, as I’ve been discussing it so far. The case could, after all, be like the use of the word “right” in the expressions “it was the right thing to do” and “she got lost when she turned right.” But it isn’t like that. “Shame” in the “experience of shame” and “shame” in the “sense of shame” are not homonyms with different meanings. A mature sense of shame is built around, and inspired by, an assembly of value commitments. Ideally, these value commitments are reflectively endorsed, not the result of brainwashing. The violation of these commitments would bring shame; thus, the person with a mature sense of shame is one who knows where shame lies, and doesn’t go there.¹

A mature sense of shame has the following features:

- It is largely internal and does not require being seen by others or imagining being seen or judged by others for its activation.
- It is autonomous. The person with a mature sense of shame avows the values that make the action they would feel shame for wrong, bad, beneath them, not what a good person would do, not a disposition that a good

person should regularly have (Rawls 1973; Taylor 1985; Kekes 1988).

- The sense of shame applies retrospectively, as when one remembers past shameful actions, regrets them, and vows or recommits not to do them again, or not to be like that again.
- The sense of shame inclines one to make amends for shameful actions. It isn't solely that the bad, inner phenomenal feeling of shame inclines one to make amends. It is that the child is taught, and then adults know, that the full script for shame involves making amends. Amends might involve acts of reparation and repair, or, in cases where the damage is irreparable (imagine shameful actions that led to a divorce), living amends where one shows that one is now reliable, better, not that kind of person anymore.²
- The sense of shame applies prospectively—proleptically—as when one sees that some possible action would violate one's sense of shame and decides not to do it, or does not even feel inclined to do it because it is wrong.
- The sense of shame inclines one to self-modify and self-cultivate. People with a sense of shame are attuned to aspects of themselves, to dispositions they have that make them tempted by, or prone to, a certain class of shameful actions, and they work on themselves to improve—possibly by trying to change themselves directly, possibly by working to change themselves indirectly by changing the people they associate with, the places they go, and the social and economic structures that support bad values in themselves and their community (Christakis 2019).

There are a few additional things we can say about a mature sense of shame:

- A mature sense of shame sets boundaries that one should not cross lest one do something wrong; it also serves to make one want to do what produces positive good. The epigraph for this chapter is from a wonderful paper, titled “An Ethics of Shame,” by Virgil Aldrich, that eloquently expresses the relevant idea. Aldrich writes, “Never do anything which you would feel ashamed to do and always do what you would feel ashamed not to do.” He adds: “I adopt this as my Golden Rule” (1939, 65).
- A person with a mature sense of shame is sensitive to social criticism. A mature sense of shame is autonomous in the philosopher’s Kantian-inspired sense of “autonomous,” according to which the person has, to some degree, inspected and accepted the values that their sense of shame protects. But the person with a mature sense of shame is not overconfident that they have everything right. Thus, they are open to challenges from others about their value assumptions, and, as necessary, about the worldview that supports their core value assumptions. In this sense, the person with the mature sense of shame is open to feedback about the quality of their character (based on judgments about its resiliency, reliability, strength, and consistency), as well as to criticism of the values that their sense of shame protects, and any background theories that make those values the right ones. This is to say that a mature sense of shame has several entirely positive heteronomous features born of humility, acceptance of fallibility, and an awareness that one might be self-deceived or be an

unwitting heir to bad values. Cheshire Calhoun says that openness to the judgment of others is a “mark of moral maturity” (2004, 129), and she adds: “Shame is the emotion of the *practitioner* of morality. To attempt to make oneself invulnerable to all shaming criticisms except those that mirror one’s own autonomous judgments or that invoke ethical standards one respects is to refuse to take seriously the social practice of morality” (ibid., 145). Bryan Van Norden puts a similar point this way: “Ethical shame and conventional shame are closely related because caring about how one appears to others is required by the virtue of humility” (2007, 267). “One who is completely indifferent to the ethical opinions of others is a dangerous fanatic” (ibid., 266).

The Sense of Shame Is Not Conscience

A sense of shame is better than conscience, which is not a bad thing to have, because it is less cognitive and behavioristic, and more attuned to making use of our universal species’ natures as embodied and affective creatures. No doubt some people have an innate or acquired taste and ability for tracking logical implications. In fact, there is evidence that philosophers are better than most at tracking where the logic of moral beliefs and principles lead and what action they enjoin. But philosophers are no better than anyone else at actually being motivated to do and then doing what moral logic demands (Schwitzgebel and Rust 2014). Logic by itself doesn’t motivate.

The sense of shame is not the same as conscience, at least as I understand the concepts. Conscience in WEIRD cultures has a genealogy that renders it primarily an epistemic-cognitive category. The word “conscience” comes from the Latin *con*

(with) and *scientia* (know). It involves knowledge (*scientia*) of right and wrong that one shares with (*con*) oneself (Hill 2002; Cottingham 2013; Van Creveld 2015). But the sense of shame I am describing and defending is not mostly an epistemic-cognitive concept. It is a cognitive-affective-conative one.³ Admittedly, the concept of conscience, once spelled out, incorporates the feeling of guilt. But guilt, recall, insofar as it can be pried apart from shame, focuses on the deed and its consequences. Shame is focused on the self, the potential doer of the deed and their dispositions. Richard Wollheim writes: “Shame arrives after guilt: A preoccupation of what a person should do gets overlaid with a concern about how he should be. . . . Once this stage has been reached, it suggests a further development in the moral sentiments. And that is that the sentiment of guilt is now supplemented by a new sentiment, which specifically relates not to actions and how far they fall short of the person’s internal prescriptions, but to the condition of the person himself” (1984, 220). The fact that shame is built to focus on the person rather than simply on the person’s doings and deeds is the great strength of shame over guilt, not a weakness.

Virgil Aldrich, describing his own sense of shame, writes:

My own moral experience tells me what I ought to do [something] despite practical consequences. . . . Often when my anticipatory “feel” for future consequences of any sort is hopelessly vague, my sense of what I ought to do is quite strong and clear. . . . Is it conscience? If “conscience” means the voice of God in human experience, expressing itself in axiomatic and absolutely authoritative dictates or if it is to be taken as a kind of proscriptive anticipation—based on past experience—of consequences, I have good empirical reason to say that, for all I know, it is *not* conscience. (1939, 59)

Aldrich goes on to say that there is a secondary or recessive concept of conscience that might work to describe his own moral experience wherein “the voice of conscience [in this sense] is the feeling of shame” (ibid.).

The concept of conscience has its roots in the Stoics, Saint Paul, and Saint Augustine, who mentions it nine hundred times in his *Confessions*. Immanuel Kant, a pietistic Lutheran, is the foremost theorist of conscience, who sums up its vertical structure and its juridical nature this way:

Every human being has a conscience and finds himself observed, threatened, and, in general, kept in awe by an internal judge; and this authority watching over the law in him is not something he himself makes, but something incorporated in his being. It follows him like his shadow when he plans to escape. He can indeed stun himself or put himself to sleep by pleasures and distractions; but he cannot help coming to himself or waking up from time to time; and when he does, he hears at once its fearful voice. He can at most, in extreme depravity, bring himself to heed it no longer, but he still cannot help hearing it. ([1797] 1996, 189)

Classical Confucian Shame

If conscience is well theorized in the Abrahamic traditions and the philosophy associated with them, something in the vicinity of the mature sense of shame, as I am conceiving it, has been theorized for more than 2,500 years by philosophers in the Confucian tradition, including contemporary ones. I do not want to make my argument for rehabilitating shame as a socializing emotion, and the desirability of achieving a mature sense of shame, rest on the appeal of any one particular tradition. However, Confucianism is long-lived, and both the war-rant and the social role of shame are clearly articulated.

There are philosophers who are Aristotelians and Stoics, but there are no countries that are Aristotelian or Stoic. There are, however, countries that are Confucian. South Korea may be the most Confucian country on the earth, but Singapore, Taiwan, Japan, and China also have strong Confucian elements (Sun 2013).

Unlike classical Western philosophies, Confucianism remains a live option in today's world. It has advocates in East Asia and in multicultural cities and regions with large East Asian populations. In classical Confucian texts—which consist of the *Analects*, the *Mencius*, and the *Xunzi*—the characters *xiu*, *wu*, *chi*, and *ru* all refer to shame. And a mature sense of shame is celebrated.

Two core values of Confucianism are harmony and order, so both moral propriety and conventional propriety are valued. But the distinction between the conventional and the moral is not as sharp as children of the religions of Abraham might expect. One reason is that one of the four major Confucian virtues is *li*, which is the virtue of abiding and enacting the rites, and many of the rites and rituals might be judged externally to be more matters of etiquette than morals. That said, the orthodox Confucian sense of shame is recruited to protect moral norms over conventional norms when they compete.

Where does the sense of shame come from? Mencius gives one of the first genealogies of shame in the fourth century BCE. Here is a famous text from Mencius where he states his famous “four-sprout” view:

Humans all have hearts that are not unfeeling toward others. Suppose someone suddenly saw a child about to fall into a well: everyone in such a situation would have a feeling of alarm and compassion—not because one sought to get in good with the child's parents, not because one wanted fame among their neighbors and friends, and not because

one would dislike the sounds of the child's cries. . . . From this we can see that if one is without the heart of compassion, one is not a human. If one is without the heart of deference, one is not a human. The heart of compassion is the sprout of benevolence. The heart of disdain (shame) is the sprout of righteousness. The heart of deference is the sprout of propriety. The heart of approval and disapproval is the sprout of wisdom. (2008, 2A6; see also 6A6)

Shame is the sprout or beginning of the virtue of righteousness (*yi*). *Yi*, the virtue, is the reliable disposition to do "what is appropriate" or "what is right" (Van Norden 2007, 256). We are not born righteous (*yi*), but we are born with dispositions to experience shame or protoshame, and this disposition can be cultivated, shaped, and extended to yield righteousness (Mencius 2008, 2A6, 7B31, 7A17). Mencius writes: "The shamefulness of being without a sense of shame is shameful indeed" (7A6).⁴

Confucianism is the possibility proof that shame can play a central role in the maintenance of the normative order in large contemporary cultures. Shame does not speak in the fearful voice of Yahweh, God, or Allah, nor in the internalized "fearful voice" of the Kantian conscience. Shame speaks straightforwardly for norms that govern a common project of respectful and orderly life. A mature Confucian sense of shame expresses ideals for excellence and recommends self-cultivation to achieve these ideals.

Shame: Social and Political, Not Metaphysical

I've argued that the mature sense of shame is better than conscience because it is psychologically realistic—better at capturing the cognitive-affective-conative aspects of moral personality than conscience. Shame answers to ideals for

excellent convivial social life. Conscience answers to the fearful voice. Shame is less behavioristic than conscience, calling on us to engage in self-work, not simply to refrain from doing certain prohibited deeds.

The contrast between conscience and a mature sense of shame as illustrated in the brief interlude on Confucianism suggests that the sense of shame is better than conscience in three other ways, for three other reasons. First, the idea of conscience is parochial. It is associated with one set of traditions, the lineages produced in the religions that take Abraham as their patriarch: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Conscience is associated with a metaphysics that grounds the warrant for morality in God's will, and conceives the reason to abide morality in terms of eschatologies, which, at least in their Christian and Islamic form, make compliance a matter of maximal existential prudence, where nothing less than the prospect of everlasting life in heaven rather than hell depends on normative compliance with the law of a judgmental and punitive God. In this way, conscience can be, and often is, superficial. When, as is common, guilt is its favored instrument, it demands primarily behavioral conformity. The focus is on the deed and its consequences. Guilt scores actions as a moral accountant would, as sins or not sins. It is telling that the medieval church sold indulgences that reduced divine punishments for sins. Sins become like traffic offenses. You speed, you pay. All is forgiven.

But, second, a sense of shame is not parochial. Every culture ever studied, including WEIRD ones, knows about and uses shame in teaching and maintaining social and moral norms. One reason is that we are gregarious social animals, highly dependent on others for love, affection, and care, and highly sensitive to being disapproved of or devalued. Independently of any theology, human sociality must be normatively organized, and shame is one natural feeling that is available

universally. Unlike guilt, which is dry and antiseptic—a largely vertical disciplinary emotion initially under the thumb of God—shame is embodied and grounded in horizontal social relations. When shame does have vertical structure, as it did and sometimes still does in Confucian cultures, it expresses hierarchies of wisdom—for example, the acquired wisdom of elders or the value discoveries of previous generations. The power of the elders or various kinds of majorities (power or numerical) to create and enforce norms is, of course, liable to misuse and exploitation by the power hungry, the overconfident, and by various kinds of self-serving oppressors. Thus, it is good that each generation gets to review and critique the wisdom of the ages.

Third, and this follows from the first two points, a sense of shame is especially important for denizens of cultures that were once genuinely Abrahamic but are now becoming secular. Let me explain. If conscience is metaphysically and theologically parochial, and commands in a dry, cognitive way (one can easily memorize what is sinful) that is focused primarily on not doing the deeds for which God punishes in the afterworld, then we can wonder what happens when the theological-metaphysical structure of that world starts to come undone. Friedrich Nietzsche (1887), Elizabeth Anscombe (1958), and Alasdair MacIntyre (1981) have thought deeply about this question. And although Nietzsche on one side, and Anscombe and MacIntyre on the other, have very different substantive ethical views, they agree that people who no longer believe in the metaphysics and theology that formerly justified their values, and thus their normative compliance with those values, will have lost their reasons to abide that morality.

I think they are right. But I want to put the diagnosis and prognosis in my own terms, which Anscombe and MacIntyre would likely not entirely agree with. The sort of normative

compliance engendered by the Abrahamic traditions was always cognitive (the moral law can be memorized and executed from rules) and behavioristic. Conscience asks for strict compliance. Its rationale, or at least, a large part of its rationale, has to do with God's views, God's will, and so on. It is, as I said, vertical. Because it is vertical and focused on doing and deeds, and less on the self or person who is the doer of deeds, less on the person's character, as ancient pre-Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic traditions were, it is thin, a veneer. And when it comes off, especially in cultures such as those in the North Atlantic, which are antecedently individualistic and expressivist (liberty and the pursuit of happiness are basic values), one is vulnerable to shamelessness.

Now one might wonder how losing theological or metaphysical foundations could produce shamelessness in a culture like ours that wasn't depending on the sense of shame in the first place. Well, we both were and weren't depending on it. Shame and guilt are both in the conceptual vernacular of WEIRD people, who interpose these concepts and terms. Thus, we do know about shame, perhaps as a recessive vocabulary, as a lost language. And we often use the language of shame to describe conventional violations, like people with appalling or shocking manners, despite the bad rap that shame has. But, in any case, shamelessness makes sense as a description of a culture that lacks strong inner conviction about values. A sense of shame is inner. Despite what Kant says about conscience also being inner, his language of being "watched," "shadowed," "threatened," "kept in awe," and "hearing its fearful voice" still infuses it with its theological roots.

When conscience loses its warrant, and a mature inner sense of shame is not in place, we get shamelessness. When there isn't, in the first place, strong inner commitment to certain values—for example, that only the truth should be spoken—we easily

get ideas about “alternative truths,” “my truths,” truth is what I feel, or truth is what contributes to my status or reputation or power.

A mature sense of shame is horizontal in that, unlike conscience, it is grounded in social relations. A person might be more or less indifferent to the quality of social relations, and confused or mistaken about how social relations contribute to their own happiness and flourishing. And they might be confused about whether the norms they were raised to believe in and abide by are the right ones. What cannot happen with a sense of shame, whether mature or immature, is that it loses its metaphysical foundations. A people can stop believing in God or the gods and thus lose the base-level commitments that made their moral beliefs justified. But a people cannot lose their belief that there are social relations (gratuitous skepticism of the “we might be in the Matrix” sort aside), and that their good depends on how things go in their relations with other peoples.

Conclusion

I’ve now sketched a picture of a mature sense of shame that is the antidote to shamelessness. It is not superficial, concerned only with etiquette and manners. It is not external, awaiting the gaze or “the fearful voice.” It is internal and emotionally attuned. It protects and avows values and ideals, rather than just being a register of dos and don’ts. It is subject to self-monitoring and other-monitoring, and thus to self- and other-critique. It is not uncritical and heteronomous. It functions prospectively to protect individual and social values and ideals. Finally, unlike conscience, it is not vulnerable to losing its metaphysical or theological foundations. Whether such a sense of shame actually protects the right and the good

depends on what values and ideals it serves. So long as the values and ideals it protects are right and good, then it is a good sense to have.

It is now time for me to sum up how I think I've made my case that anger of the payback and pain-passing sorts are bad, and that we ought not to enact them, and for rehabilitating a mature sense of shame as a valuable guide to a good life. I'll also make some comments about how cross-cultural methods have played a role in my argument, and how my view—that we should turn down the temperature on anger and reconsider the bad rap on shame—could work in multicultures where there are plural views on pretty much everything, including, no doubt, my recommendations on anger and shame. This is the task in chapter 8, to which I now turn.

PART III

Conclusion



Emotions for Multicultures

The Predicament

Let's review. We, my fellow Americans, some or many fellow Americans, maybe other WEIRD people, are both much too angry and too prone to use anger as a tool for ego—to punish those who get in one's way and to pass pain to others, including others who have no causal relation to the pain one is in. I've never before seen so much of this kind of anger, anger without hope and ideals, snarly anger, infantile anger, crush-you-like-a-bug anger, reactive anger, anger that conveys disrespect, cruel anger, sometimes sadistic anger.

If emotivism in ethics—the view that holding a value is pretty much only a matter of asserting it, stomping one's feet, and then spewing disrespect, sometimes hatred, toward those we disagree with—wasn't already true, then widespread modeling of moral and political speech that takes the form of inciting tribal animosities and alliances on social media, in meetings and rallies of antecedently polarized people, and in disdainful, “Can you believe it?,” moralistic grandstanding, might make it so. Moral and political agreement has the cognitive

depth of rooting for the home team, while disagreement is a matter of booing, dismissing, and disvaluing some scumbag or douche bag other. Both are shallow, matters of asserting, not reflecting or engaging. Such skills—reflection, inspection, and discussion—can be lost, and they are in danger of becoming so.

A PEW report from 2019 indicates that 48 percent of Democrats and 35 percent of Republicans say they share “any values and goals” with members of the other party. Taken at their word, this means that a majority of both parties think they share no values and ideals with members of the other party. Think about that. Obviously, this is a false belief, because we know for sure that there are many shared values and goals—for justice and equality, for well-educated children, for a good economy, and so on. What could lead people on both sides of the political spectrum to have such a false belief? Tribal animosities, encouragement of payback and pain-passing anger, lack of critical thought, loss of skills of loving attention to the other, and patient civil discourse about matters of value.

Facebook, Twitter, sound bites, and short-form journalism invite assertions of value, not discussions of value. Sixty percent of news articles shared online have not been read by the person who posts them (Lynch 2019). This means that the coinage of emoticons, thumbs-ups, and happy, sad, or angry faces is paid as the informational equivalent of a headline or a haiku that contains a secret hint indicating which side it represents. Meanwhile, mocking, spewing profanities, and frenzied rallies have become an accepted style of speech, a way of expressing one’s values. The bully in chief, the former president of the United States, hurled almost daily insults in incoherent tirades on Twitter (until his account was closed), while the First Lady asked children not to bully each other. This

inconsistency would be unsettling, except that, well, commitment to logical consistency and the truth are no longer exemplified as important values. This is shamelessness.

Shamelessness is modeled fairly reliably in national politics. There are hypocrites, liars, paid functionaries for K Street lobbyists, and sycophants. Shamelessness is also modeled in how the rich and the famous live. I'm sure that many artists and actors are actually upstanding people, but what magazine sold at the checkout counter at your local grocery store tells of anyone's noble character traits, values, or deeds? Voyeurism, exhibitionism, addiction, rehab, cheating hearts, and Photo-shopped lies are the currency of that realm.

There is no single cause of shamelessness. One factor that makes shamelessness less shameful than it ought to be is the view that all or most relationships are transactional, and thus not really to be governed by deeply held values. Promises and contracts are more akin to truces than to vows. When caught lying, one dissembles a bit, possibly apologizes a little, and suggests that we now return to our own little world of resource extraction from each other and play nice until the next time we walk over each other. A few years ago, an administrator at my university who broke a promise to my department explained to us that we had an old-fashioned conception of promise. We were Kantians, as far as promises go; he was a Derridean, postmodern ironist but certainly not a joker or a huckster, or what they called a "liar" in the olden days. On the transactional view of human relations, the default assumption is that we are all mean spirits, artful dodgers, and sensible knaves and knavesses beneath our hail-fellow-well-met facades.

The end of March 2020, like every other day, there was a front-page story in the news about one Bill Ackman, a major hedge fund operator, who bragged to his investors and on TV

this week that he made a 9,500 percent return (\$2.6 billion) on a \$27 million investment that the coronavirus would tank the economy. The week before, we North Carolinians learned that one of our senators, Richard Burr, sold somewhere between \$628,000 and \$1.72 million in hospitality industry stock after receiving secret advance warning of the seriousness of the coronavirus (he was head of the Senate Intelligence Committee), all while reassuring his constituents that the virus was no big deal.

This is shameful. It is something that, in a culture that encouraged a mature sense of shame, Burr would not have done, and we would all be shocked by—not inured to—its everydayness, its utter predictability. In a world in which we had, as Confucians recommend, “rectified the names,” so that being a public servant meant that one serves the common good, Burr would not have done what Burr did. But we don’t, and he did.

The Intervention: Do the Emotions of Anger and Shame Differently

Anger: So here is the intervention I recommend. Turn the temperature down on anger and cease and desist with two kinds of anger. Just stop doing vengeful anger and pain-passing anger. Or better yet, reflect on what is wrong with these kinds of anger, and then stop doing them. Some on both the left and the right say that the amount and intensity of anger is natural and expectable, but this is not true. Expressions of emotions when posting on Facebook or Twitter increase by 20 percent the probability that the post will be shared. Specifically, news that is largely “just news,” and experienced that way when simply heard or read as reportage, can be weaponized to elicit outrage online by the simple indication that the person who

shares the news is outraged by it. Tribal contagion does the rest. Molly Crockett, a Yale psychologist, writes, "If moral outrage is like fire, then social media is like gasoline" (2017, 771).

One source of evidence that anger practices are plastic comes from the ways other cultures do anger, both in everyday life and when the stakes are high and unusual. There is huge variation, and thus no necessity that anger needs to be done the way we are doing it now, especially if, as I claim, it is true that the ways we are doing anger are causing trouble.

Sometimes there is variation in our midst. In the case of anger, there are many individuals, communities, and subcultures inside multicultures that do not enact dominant scripts or, what is different, highly noticeable scripts, scripts that get the lion's share of attention. Alternative scripts, and the alternative norms that govern them, are hard to see or hear in the cacophony. Cultural psychology indicates that dominant modes of doing emotions eventually defeat nondominant ones in three generations (Mesquita, Boiger, and De Leersnyder 2016; De Leersnyder, Mesquita, and Kim 2011; Jasini, De Leersnyder, and Mesquita, 2018). How do we keep this from happening? How do we keep anger, as we are increasingly doing it, from further securing its status as a legitimate tool to enact revenge on those who get in our way, and to pass pain on to others when we are in pain?

I examined reasons internal to our own tradition for and against anger. Anger comes in varieties: there is revenge anger, pain-passing anger, feigned "as if" anger, instrumental anger, recognition respect anger, righteous anger at injustice, and impersonal anger at fate or the universe. I examined the theory and practice of these kinds of anger in other cultures. One internal reason for changing how we do anger comes from the widely accepted view that the aim of ethics is to do good. We should watch especially for anger that aims at revenge or

payback to others with whom we don't share moral or political values. And we should beware the kind of lazy anger where we pass pain, sometimes even to people we love, because we are in pain.

I need to emphasize that this doesn't leave the other varieties innocent. Recognition respect anger, instrumental anger, righteous anger for justice's sake, and impersonal anger are often entirely justified. But they undermine their moral force and spread toxic effects if desires to pay back or impulses to pass pain are part of what produces them, colors their content, and affects the way the anger is expressed. The method of examining the ways other cultures do anger—sometimes with representatives among us—is offered to assist moral imagination and unseat convictions that we might have about our own practices, to the effect that there is no other way to do anger, or that this is the way anger is, the way anger works.

What is actual is possible. What cultural psychology, anthropology, and cross-cultural philosophy teach is that how we do emotions is almost entirely a matter of cultural learning. This should not seem the slightest bit controversial. Even basic emotions theorists will need to admit that almost all the causes for emotions as we do them are new—they did not exist when the basic anger circuitry evolved; the same goes for how modern anger feels, what actions it disposes us to, what is authorized, and so on. Different cultures teach different norms and scripts for doing anger. And there exist practices for doing anger that are psychologically, morally, and politically better than some of the ways we currently do anger.

Indeed, there are five or six locations at which cultures have a say in constructing what an emotion is and what it does. An emotion is defined by a schema comprising typical

causes + inner phenomenal features/feelings + characteristic content + typical dispositions to act + typical action. There are culture-specific norms that govern which situations call for a particular emotion, at what intensity and valence the emotion ought to be felt given those causes, the content of the emotion, and what action is warranted.

If you think of emotions as happenings, as akin to reflexes, or as disturbances that are causally determined by external forces, then you hold not only a false theory of emotions but one that might seem to yield its own entirely unwarranted confirmation. If you think that emotions will be what they will be, that emotions are like pupil contractions to light or digestion—as encouraged by WEIRD ideas about being globally entitled to one's feelings—then one will take a pose of impotence with respect to the emotions. This will make it more likely that the emotional economy of one's world will, as it were, just happen. But this will be due to the fact that one takes a passive pose with respect to emotions, not because emotions are causally ballistic and just happen as they are supposed to happen by nature's design. I guarantee that, even if one takes the passive pose toward one's own emotions, they do not take this pose toward the emotions of others. It is almost universal that one thinks others ought to be more present, more loving, more appreciative, less frazzled, less anxious, less nervous and shy, and more empathetic and compassionate. But "ought" implies "can," so unless the judgments in such cases are idle fantasies, we think that other people can change in these ways.

Perhaps a person is in therapy to work, among other things, on their emotions. If such a person thinks that emotions are happenings and cannot be modified, moderated, tuned up or down, or cannot take different evaluative objects than they currently do, then the person is being performatively inconsistent.

And in this inconsistency they reveal a partial, perhaps it is a halfhearted, commitment to the truth that emotions are not happenings. It may be that scripts for doing emotions once learned are, like other habits, hard to unseat. But that is a different matter altogether.

And so it is with all the emotions. They are plastic. All social emotions—anger, shame, guilt, joy, pride—are assembled to feel as they feel, and to do what they do, inside a human community. Different emotions are designated as appropriate responses to specific situations and to enjoin a certain class of appropriate behaviors, which are themselves governed by cultural norms and permissions.

Anger is something we do. There are norms for anger and scripts for enacting it. One familiar norm says that if you get in my way and slow me down (in an economy, in traffic) or obstruct my desires (in a relationship), I can get angry with you. Associated scripts give me permission to enact or convey my disdain and disregard—I can scowl, huff and puff, I can give you the finger, tell you to “fuck off,” try to crush you like a bug, wish you were dead. These kinds of norms and scripts are not rare, but they are not ones that a decent moral community should want to inhabit the hearts, minds, and souls of its citizens. But we have low standards, and we allow them, expect them, think—perhaps in some resigned moments—that they are normal.

I have offered arguments and reminders that what I have just said is true. Assembling the reminders can help, as can reflecting on what we expect from anger, as well as how, why, and when we think it is justified, and what functions we think it serves in the short run and in the long run. There are acceptable kinds of anger, where acceptability is assessed in terms of both ends, what the anger aims to accomplish (revenge, compliance to my will, positive social change) and means (its

volume, whether it invites conversation and change, whether it is arrogant, overconfident, and cruel, and whether it is skillful and attuned to the needs of the other). Anger often does not hear. Sometimes, in the heat of the moment, it deliberately intends not to hear, only to be heard. This is a problem that may be, as it were, in its nature, and that norms to moderate and modify anger need to be alert to.

Shame: As for shame, the situation is different. Anger is overutilized. Shame is underutilized. There are many reasons why this is so. We are told that shame is not for us. It is an emotion that “oriental” others have or do. Shame is associated with hierarchies, patriarchies, and honor cultures, not with free, liberal, egalitarian, democratic peoples. Shame is superficial, a matter of the disapproving gaze of the hoi polloi. In philosophy-speak, shame is heteronomous, imposed from the outside, not self-chosen, not autonomous. I say none of this is true or, at least, none of it needs to be true of how we do shame.

In addition to its philosophical critics, shame has its own bad rap inside WEIRD psychology. According to a powerful strand of psychoanalytic dramaturgy, shame is dangerous because it is rooted in the primitive shame that we experience universally as infants, when upon exiting (what seemed to be) the self-sufficient bliss of wombic life, we discover that we have needs, that Mommy doesn’t come on demand to satisfy these needs, and that we are not the only (self-sufficient) thing, nor are we omnipotent. This recognition produces a deep and abiding narcissistic wound, one we can never forget. Primitive shame is shame that announces from the get-go, “I am a failure.” Reactivating primitive shame, the original underlying shame, is then as easy as pie.

Some sort of hara-kiri is its natural next move. In the West, the hara-kiri is of a slow-burn sort, not the noble, ritualistic

kind of medieval Japan. WEIRD people who experience shame, thinking that they are globally deficient, engage in unsafe sex, suffer low self-esteem, develop addictions or eating disorders, strike out in “humiliated rage,” are depressed, and contemplate (possibly commit) suicide.

The problem is that none of this about shame is true. The psychoanalytic theory of shame is unscientific, a production of overactive nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Central European imaginations. The shame measurement industry in Anglophone countries—exemplified by and almost entirely beholden to the test for self-conscious affect, TOSCA—was originally inspired by psychoanalytic theorizing. Furthermore, TOSCA does not sensitively look for the varieties of shame. The true varieties, which are visible in a simple look-see, vary across a minimum of three dimensions, in terms of (1) the evaluative objects of shame, which include acts, habits, dispositions, and lifestyle choices, typically not one’s entire being; (2) the character of the feelings associated with the shame, for example, the shame mostly experienced as fear of social disapproval, or as sadness that a valued relationship will suffer, or as disappointment in one’s ability to live up to one’s own standards; and (3) the actions the shame enjoins—shrinking away, making amends, changing up one’s game, or not doing the action that would make one experience shame.

Instead, TOSCA defines shame as a crude, totalizing emotion, whose intellectual content is “I am a failure.” People who think and feel this way no doubt suffer bad life outcomes. But this has nothing to do with shame as such, only with a certain obviously unhealthy form of shame. Whereas the psychoanalytic view of shame is unscientific, TOSCA findings about the deleterious effects of shame are based on bad science. The global nature of shame and its damaging consequences are baked into the way shame is defined by TOSCA. Shame

involves a “negative evaluation of the global self” (Tangney and Dearing, 2002).

What is the better view of shame? First, it is one that is attuned to the varieties of shame. When parents tell a child that they ought to feel ashamed because they lied, or hit their sibling, or behaved badly in school, they are not calling upon the child to think “I am a failure.” Context makes it entirely clear that the shame the child is being encouraged to feel is about the lying, or hitting, or bad school behavior. This simple point comports with findings that, when Anglophone speakers use the word “shame” in ordinary speech, it is rarely totalizing, as TOSCA insists it must be if it is to be shame.

In a perfect world, humans would be born as perfect angels; there would be no competition between personal and social goods, and the rewards of normative conformity and compliance would be immediately and universally evident. In such a world, there would be no need for the disciplinary emotions—neither the uplifting ones like pride, self-esteem, and self-confidence, nor the negative ones like fear, guilt, and shame. But we are not perfect angels; there is competition between what is good for the individual and the group, and sensible knavery can pay. Thus, every culture ever invented has deployed the disciplinary emotions to inculcate and then sustain its norms, ideals, and scripts for being a good human being. The background learning theory aims to have externally endorsed norms (both conventional and moral) that become internalized. When positive reinforcement—for example, building pride and self-esteem—is used, the aim is to have the child feel reinforced by what they were originally reinforced for. When there is even accidental good behavior—the child, we’ll suppose, experiments with sharing—the parents are all over him with positive reinforcement. When the tools are punitive, as shame and guilt are, the aim is the same

but is more circuitous. First, the child is taught directly that such and such is something that they ought not to do, want to do, be disposed to do, or develop a habit of doing. Second, they are positively reinforced for substituting the normatively correct act, habit, and disposition for the wrong one. Third, as in the positive case, they learn that complying with the norm is its own reward.

In Abrahamic traditions, morality is enforced ultimately by God. God, being good, could and presumably would prefer to love our unruly souls into normative compliance. But according to Scripture, God often turns to angry disapproval to produce compliance. The relationship between lawgiver and law-abider is vertical. Conscience internalizes and miniaturizes this metaphysically complex system, so that one's own inner voice speaks proximately through the emotion of guilt, anger turned inward, which then induces fear, which then induces compliance, or, if not, then produces confession and amends after one succumbs to temptation. At least this is one standard model.

Shame, as a socializing emotion, can also partake of hierarchy, and thus verticality to the extent that a culture that utilizes shame is hierarchical. But the connection is contingent. Shame is also well suited to function horizontally as a disciplinary emotion. If we conceive of convivial social life as comprising discoveries made over world-historical time of practices and prohibitions that typically work for the common good, shame for violations is a perfectly sensible tool to serve such a way of living and being. Shame's proper function is to mark values of importance and to communicate social disapproval for being careless with these values. In its ideal form, shame marks and prohibits violations of norms that a good community endorses, or would endorse if it were wise, reflective, and morally decent.

One objection to shame is that it is not metaphysically deep. It is grounded in natural features and consequences of human practices, thus the warrant of the norms endorsed is not transcendental, as is the Abrahamic anger-guilt-conscience system, but is merely social. But what has been thought to be a disadvantage of shame can be seen as an advantage for modern people who abide plural metaphysical foundations for their forms of life, including ones that are resolutely secular, and thus that judge social consensus about values, norms, and scripts as the best we can do. One hope is that there is an overlapping consensus about what values are the right ones, and worth protecting, and which ones are wrong and worth eliminating. Varied systems of value, various comprehensive philosophies and theologies, might each in their own way give reasons for deep commitment to certain shared values that describe how persons ought to be, and ideals that individuals and communities ought to embody, not simply for how persons ought or ought not to act.

I take it that worldwide commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1948; since 1948 all 193 members of the United Nations have ratified parts of it) has been expressed even among peoples who have no natural way to talk about “God-given,” “inalienable,” or “natural rights,” as do we Western children of the Enlightenment. The unanimous adoption of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 is another example of an overlapping and unforced consensus about substantive goods (United Nations General Assembly 2015).

Another thought—which might be judged to compete with what I have just said if one concludes (which I do not) that multicultures require only a *modus vivendi*, nothing deeper—is that shame is the right emotion to address people who are expected to have deep normative commitments rather than

superficial ones. It is widely said that shame faces the person, whereas guilt faces the deed. Shame, I've argued, asks a person to change or at least not to enact some habit, tendency, disposition, even a deeply held value commitment, if it is wrong or misguided. Shame calls on a person to do hard work. Guilt is, or can be, a one-off emotion, and thus a superficial safeguard on one's character, a thin veneer. I do something wrong. I am guilty. You know I did it. I say I'm sorry. (I might be mostly angry with myself for getting caught in this game of hide-and-seek we play, rather than angry because what I did was wrong.) We get on with things.

In some respects, and seen in this way, guilt is a superficial emotion suited for a world in which relations are mostly transactional and themselves largely superficial. It is no trivial matter, as I discussed in chapter 7, that the Reformation begins with concerns that the Roman church's divine anger-guilt-conscience-reparations system had become one in which money could get one indulgences, less time in purgatory, and no time in hell. Morality is monetized, and every sin has a price. The payment for a sin is a fine, nothing as existentially weighty and consequential as spiritual exercises (Hadot 1977), *techniques de soi* (Foucault 1988), the therapy of desire (Nussbaum 1994), or self-cultivation.

Shame runs deeper than guilt. It has higher expectations for the self. It calls attention to the self, not simply to doings and deeds. It asks that you *be* good, not just *act* good. It may, for this reason, be unattractive to us. We don't want to hold any values deeply. This response would not surprise me, but it is indicative of, and thus confirmation of, the very shamelessness that I claim is the order of the day. But it is a terrible reason not to give shame a new look.

The sort of shame I recommend is a mature sense of shame. A mature sense of shame has the following features, abbreviated somewhat from chapter 7:

- It is largely internal and does not require, for its activation, being seen by others or imagining being seen or judged by others.
- It is autonomous. The person with a mature sense of shame inspects, affirms, and takes as their own the values shame protects.
- The sense of shame applies retrospectively, as when one remembers past shameful actions, regrets them, and vows or recommits not to do them again, or not to be like that again.
- The sense of shame inclines one to make amends for shameful actions.
- The sense of shame applies prospectively—proleptically—as when one sees that some possible action would violate their sense of shame, and decides not to do it, or does not even feel inclined to do it, because it is wrong.
- The sense of shame inclines one to self-modify and self-cultivate. A person with a sense of shame is attuned to aspects of themselves, to dispositions they have, that make them tempted by, or prone to, a certain class of shameful actions, and they work on themselves to improve—possibly by trying to change themselves directly, possibly by working to change themselves indirectly by changing the people they associate with and the places they go, or by doing political work to change social and economic structures that support bad values in themselves and their community.
- A mature sense of shame sets boundaries that one should not cross lest one do something wrong; it also serves to make one want to do what produces positive good. A person with a mature sense of shame is sensitive to social criticism.

- A mature sense of shame is autonomous in the philosopher's, Kantian-inspired sense of "autonomous," according to which the person has, to some degree, inspected and accepted (in that order) the values that their sense of shame protects.
- The person with a mature sense of shame is not overconfident that they have everything right. Thus, they are open to challenges from others about their value assumptions, and, as necessary, about the worldview that supports their core value assumptions.
- In this sense, the person with the mature sense of shame is open to feedback about the quality of their character (based on judgments about its resiliency, reliability, strength, consistency), as well as to criticism of the values that their sense of shame protects, and any background theories that support and make sense of those values. This is to say that a mature sense of shame has several entirely positive, heteronomous features born of humility, acceptance of fallibility, and an awareness that one might be self-deceived or be an unwitting heir to bad values.

Critique and Philosophical Method in the Global Village and in Multicultures

Finally, a word about the method I've used to make my arguments, the method of using sources from cultural psychology, anthropology, and cross-cultural philosophy, as well as standard sources from the Anglophone analytic philosophical lineage. The earth, some say, is a global village. That is something of an exaggeration. What is true is that we depend for goods, relationships, and well-being on relations with faraway others. Others in China and Mexico make parts that we need

to assemble cars in Detroit. Radioactivity from the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster (caused by an earthquake and a tsunami) was detected almost immediately in Colorado. We suffer, and not just economically, when people in sub-Saharan Africa or Syria or Yemen suffer. I mentioned earlier that, in 2015, all 193 nations that make up the United Nations passed the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are a “blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.” Among those same 193 nations, 188 have coronavirus as I write. We are connected, even if not all of us or even most of us are living among people who are very different from ourselves.

These global dependencies, as well as instantly shared information about how others live, mean that there are more, and more varied, resources than ever to compare, contrast, critique, and learn from others about how to live well and how not to live well. As a boy reading *National Geographic*, I thought I would be an anthropologist. By the time I was old enough to choose to prepare to become an anthropologist, I thought it could be hard to get home quickly in an emergency—if Mom or Dad or a sibling fell ill—if I really went off to the kinds of locations I fantasized going to. So I wrote my graduate school essay application to philosophy departments, explaining my intention to study the nature of persons naturalistically by becoming what we called then a “philosopher of psychology.” It seems that the young man who wanted to be an anthropologist is still inside me. I have been lucky to have lived during a golden age of information about alien others where, thanks to the work of great anthropologists, primatologists, cultural psychologists, filmmakers, and novelists, there is more and more information about how others, sometimes very different kinds of persons, live. Recently, cross-cultural philosophy has become a thing and provides helpful resources for understanding non-WEIRD people. We are historical beings,

heirs of philosophical and theological lineages that, even when no longer visible as such, are in the blood and bones of different people. Different people are oriented toward different values, prize different virtues, and conceive of ideal social relations in somewhat different ways. My simple idea is to use all this information about diverse ways of being human to facilitate moral imagination, as a tool for thinking about whether we are doing well at living well, and if not, why not, and for discovering resources to do better, to improve ourselves or, if not ourselves, future generations. Some of the many things that can be improved are the way we do emotions.

Even if we do not all live in a global village, many modern people do live in multicultures, places where people from many different worlds come together to live together. We do not know how this is going to turn out. But there are some hints about how multiculturalism might go. In 1966, when I began college in New York City, we all read Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1963). The subtitle was *The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City*. The book was a report of what I took to be glorious news, namely, that America's then greatest immigrant city had not become, as many expected, a thin gruel of bland and homogeneous customs and habits. The thought that this might happen was based for some on the expectation that the dominant WASP culture would demand conformity to its normative regime, and differences would be thinned out, possibly remaining mostly in the form of ethnic restaurants, and such memorial events as Saint Patrick's Day, Saint Anthony's Day, and Chinese New Year for nostalgic Irish, Italian, and Chinese folk. Others did not expect so much that the WASP normative order would dominate and drown out all the other distinct and flavorful ingredients of several great migrations,

as that all the ingredients would produce some entirely new, but nonetheless homogeneous normative order, a broth of one flavor. Why? Because that is just what happens in melting pots or blenders. But it didn't happen, and I continue to hope it won't happen. One reason I hope this is for the same reason that John Stuart Mill wrote in his 1848 *Principles of Political Economy*:

But the economical advantages of commerce are surpassed in importance by its effects which are intellectual and moral. It is hardly possible to overrate the value, in the present low state of human improvement, of placing human beings in contact with persons dissimilar to themselves, and with modes of thought and action unlike those with which they are familiar. . . . It is indispensable to be perpetually comparing their own notions and customs with the experience and example of persons in different circumstances from themselves; and there is no nation which does not need to borrow from others, not merely particular arts or practices, but essential points of character in which its own type is inferior. ([1848] 1963, vol. 3, 17, 594).

Mill was speaking here mostly about business commerce as a resource for moral progress. Those of us who live in multicultural cities have opportunities in our midst to direct change in ourselves, to carefully consider and adopt ways of living, modes of being human, that exist in our midst but that are not "ours" in order to improve ourselves, "to borrow from others . . . essential points of character . . . in which [our own type] is inferior." There is no guarantee that we will do this, since there is some evidence from cultural psychology that good ideas about value, or enacting the emotions, brought to us by immigrant groups—more communally attuned Nigerians and

Mexicans, more respectful Chinese, more gentle and compassionate Thais—can be swallowed up by the dominant culture (if it is large enough) before any respectful consideration is given to these alternative ways of being human.

Many modern people, especially in progressive communities, recommend that we appreciate diversity. One reason is motivated by justice: many groups are not represented equitably in certain social institutions—government, clergy, higher education—because of histories of oppression. As Cornell West often says, “Justice is what love looks like in public.”

A different reason is that mixing diverse people will help us “get each other,” understand where the other is coming from, get why others value what they value, and learn about special challenges these others have as members of the groups to which they belong (by consent or attribution). This much will improve social relations and create conditions for a smooth *modus vivendi* in places where people of different kinds intersect. Both are good reasons.

An additional reason for appreciating diversity is so that we can all better understand who we are and what we ourselves are doing. It can be easier to see what we value, what emotions we enact to protect these values and how we enact them, when they are viewed in contrastive spaces. The ultimate goal is to gain social and self-knowledge, to learn from one another in order to make ourselves better, and to advance the common good.

If philosophical ethics is to remain relevant in multiculturalures, it will need to be increasingly more anthropologically attuned and cross-cultural. The days when ethics could be conceived as a conversation about human excellence inside a single tradition that is a series of footnotes to Plato is long gone. There is no longer any single tradition inside which that project is being carried out. We contain multiplicities.

The good news is that the youth of today are being exposed to some of the varieties of moral possibility and stand a chance of not being trapped in their own upbringing. This is a good and hopeful thing. If we elders equip them with tools for honest, patient, critical imagination and tools for rational, patient self-cultivation, it could be a great thing. Time will tell.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TWO RESIDENTIAL FELLOWSHIPS, some research funding, and many graduate students and friends helped with this book. In 2015–16, I was a Rockefeller Fellow at the National Humanities Center (NHC) in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, finishing up *The Geography of Morals* and starting this book, *How to Do Things with Emotions*. Then in 2016–17, I was a Berggruen Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Science (CASBS), Stanford, California, where I studied the cultural psychology and anthropology of anger and shame. Both centers are heavenly places at which to think, work, and converse with wonderful colleagues. I am grateful to Robert Newman, director of NHC, and to Margaret Levi, director of CASBS, for hosting me. I thank Dan Haybron and the St. Louis University/Templeton Project on “Happiness and Well-Being,” for some course relief support in 2017 and 2018. I am grateful to Duke University for giving me time off and for fully supporting my interdisciplinary research. I have been at Duke for almost three decades, and I feel blessed to work at an institution and in a department that has always prized teaching and research across disciplinary divides.

I have known Rob Tempio, the philosophy editor at Princeton University Press, for more than a decade. Rob, always probing for good ideas, helped me develop the thesis of this book. Rob and Matt Rohal, the other philosophy editor, did old-fashioned editorial work to help me find the right voice to write in for a wide audience across disciplines. I am grateful to Rob and Matt, and to Kathleen Cioffi, Cathy Slovensky, and

Karen Carroll for the professional work they did for the Press to edit and produce the book.

Over the past three years, I have had the good fortune to be involved in two projects with Jeffrey Sachs, director of Columbia University's Center for Sustainable Development, and Monsignor Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences at the Vatican, on "Ethics in Action" and "Science, Ethics, and Happiness." Both projects involved bringing together people from different countries and different religions, including no religion at all, to think about the connection between ethics, norms for emotional expression, emotional balance, and well-being. My friendships with Jeff and Sonia Sachs, Tony Annett, Sharon Paculor, Jesse Thorson, Monsignor Sorondo, Vittorio Hoösle, Scott Appleby, Bill Vendley, and Gabriella Marino are special gifts of these initiatives, as is their wisdom.

In addition to these colleagues, I could not have done this work without many other family members, friends, colleagues, and students: Lynn Ainsworth, Kent Berridge, Robert Bingle, Tal Brewer, Gregg Caruso, Myisha Cherry, Ruth Chang, Felipe de Brigard, Richie Davidson, Helen De Cruz, Dan Dennett, Ronald de Sousa, Donald Dryden, Paul Ekman, Michael Ferejohn, Jennifer Frey, Alison Gopnik, Tayfun Gur, Jennifer Hawkins, P. J. Ivanhoe, Chaihark Hahm, Dan Haybron, Lisa Heldke, Jianping Hu, John Kekes, Richard Kim, Brian Knutson, Kristján Kristjánsson, Daniel Jacobson, Hanqi Jiang, Joshua Landy, Dan Lapsley, Joe LeDoux, Béatrice Longuenesse, Botian Liu, Tanya Luhrmann, Terry Maroney, Alan Moore, Cecilea Mun, Darcia Narvaez, Karen Neander, Batja Mesquita, Hazel Markus, Shaun Nichols, Peg O'Connor, Hanna Pickard, John Protevi, Songyao Ren, Kelly Shi, Mark Risjord, Andrea Scarantino, Bongrae Seok, David Shoemaker, Nancy Snow, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, Gopal Sreenivasan, Eleonore

Stump, Nina Strominger, Larisa Svirsky, Will Tiemeijer, Justin Tiwald, Jeanne Tsai, Candace Vogler, Robin Wang, Danny Walkowitz, David Wong, and Wenqing Zhao.

Three of these friends require special commendation. This book is dedicated to Lynn Ainsworth. Lynn's favorite saying to me when I say insightful things, which she calls "going-on," is "Wrap it up, Socrates. Wrap it up." This book would have been longer were it not for Lynn. Thank you, Lynn.

Peg O'Connor is a fellow philosopher and a dear friend. We joke that we are from the same litter, and we talk almost every day in the summer and fall when we both find ourselves on the coast of Maine. We agree about a lot of things philosophical and otherwise. But not shame. Although I have not tried out all my arguments in favor of a mature sense of shame on Peg, I wondered after every paragraph in this book where I defend shame: *What would Peg say?* Thank you, Peg. You kept me honest.

Batja Mesquita is a cultural psychologist and a leading expert on emotions. I met Batja at CASBS in 2016–17. I thank my lucky stars that I have been able to talk regularly to Batja about her work and mine on emotions across cultures, and to think together about whether and how cross-cultural psychology and anthropology might matter to cross-cultural philosophy and vice versa. It was Batja who gave me the courage to insist that emotions are things we do, and whose work confirmed my conviction that if and when emotions cause trouble, we can do them differently. Thank you, Batja.

NOTES

Introduction: How to Do Things with Emotions

1. According to the June 2020 Pew Research Center Report, 71 percent of Americans felt angry when asked to think about the state of the nation. Two-thirds felt fearful. Anger and fear seed each other, creating a potentially self-sustaining loop.

2. What about hope? The year 2020 gave us the COVID-19 pandemic and renewed, widespread #BlackLivesMatter activism across America in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder by the Minneapolis police. #BlackLivesMatter anger is principled, entirely justified, and, finally, a multiracial movement. It is as if the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918, the Great Depression of 1929, and the social and cultural upheaval of 1967–70 occurred at the same time. The June 2020 Pew Research Center Report revealed that 46 percent of Americans were hopeful about the state of the country, with slightly more hope among blacks and Hispanics than among whites. That said, during 2020, there were disturbing developments alongside positive ones, as former president Trump fired up tribal political anger in citizen militias who love freedom, Second Amendment rights to bear arms, and law and order. Political leaders commonly model, express, and state norms for justified political anger and, what is different, for violence.

3. The June 2020 Pew Research Center Report, which tracked anger and fear about the state of the United States, also measured pride. These data are from June 16–22, 2020, thus well into the COVID-19 crisis and after the murder of George Floyd. Eighty-four percent of Americans were not proud. Although “not proud” does not equal “ashamed,” there is a significant relation. There are good reasons to be ashamed about the state of the nation: there is the shame of being led by a president who embodied and advanced white supremacy, the sycophancy of political representatives at every level, and the shame of the legacies of racism, sexism, and queerphobia and their current poisonous, sometimes intentional, forms.

4. R. M. Seyfarth and D. L. Cheney (2003) argue that vocal expressions in animals as various as frogs, birds, mongooses, and vervet monkeys are strategic and entirely under voluntary control. Like the human smile, which normally occurs only with an audience, so, too, horny frogs only make mating calls when a potential mate is nearby, and they strategically vocalize in ways designed to throw predatory bats off accurately locating them.

5. There are also sources in the phenomenological tradition that emphasize both the active side of emotions and their bodily components. It is this phenomenological lineage that yields the “4-e” view of mind: mental activity is “enactive,”

“embodied,” “extended,” and “emotional/affective.” My confidence that emotions are doings, or should be conceived as having a significant actional aspect, is inspired by these pragmatist and phenomenological sources, as well as by the work of my dear friend and intellectual mate, Batja Mesquita, whose work in cultural psychology shows the power of this idea.

6. The schema models emotions as wide states. One could (many do) hypothesize that emotions have narrow profiles that can be characterized in terms of shared qualitative feeling or the qualitative feeling of an emotion + its typical somatic profile across instances. There are smart affective scientists on both sides of this debate. Lisa Feldman Barrett (2017) and Joseph LeDoux (2019) think that this narrow project is not progressive, because one doesn’t find facial or neural regularities across cases, whereas Paul Ekman (2007), Jaak Panksepp and Lucy Biven (2012), Kent Berridge (2018, 2019a, 2019b), and Stephen Asma and Rami Gabriel (2019) think there are such regularities that can be used to characterize emotions narrowly. There are philosophical views on the emotions that divide in terms of which aspect of my wide schema they privilege. There are perceptual theories, feeling theories, judgment theories, conative or motivation theories, and action theories. My view is that perception, feeling, cognition, and action each play a role in making emotional episodes what they are. Emotions are things we do or are for-the-sake-of doing-things, and doings are complex things that, in the case of emotions, require perceptions, feelings, judgments, dispositions to act, and actions. The emphasis on the whole episode might make it look as if my view is a conative, motivational, or action theory. It isn’t. My view starts with the idea that the psychobiological function of emotions is to have me do something—something to release the emotion in the case of negative emotions or something to sustain, enhance, or build the emotion in the case of positive emotions. When an element is missing, e.g., there is no robust somatic/phenomenal feeling or no carry-through, we do not need to say it is not an emotional episode, although we could; instead, we say it is not a paradigm case, atypical to some degree.

7. Moods—such as feeling bored or experiencing free-floating anxiety—often have no content; they are not about anything. Emotions always have an intentional object or content.

8. The motto “emotions are things we do” awaits refinement. There are many things we do that are not emotions or standard examples of emotions. We do means-end reasoning, we spell words, climb mountains, ride bikes, order merchandise on the internet, do long division, empty the trash, dig ditches, write speeches, and garden. One might think that in real life most of these doings are suffused with feelings—emotions, moods, various admixtures of pleasant and unpleasant experiences—and thus that specifying these acts as physical or cognitive doings absent emotions is an analytic abstraction, not the way the doing actually is or unfolds. I think this. But this raises the question of whether, say, writing a short speech consists of multiple acts: various compositional acts, hemmings and hawings, visions and revisions, positive and negative reactions

to these acts from both the poses of self-as-author, self-as-audience, and self-as-critic, which then serve as evidence (by serving up cognitive-emotional affordances) on next steps in the editing process, culminating perhaps—after metaphorical blood, sweat, and tears—in the act of acceptance, a sense of satisfaction that the speech is good. I think so. Last point: I recommend a certain nominalism about the general kind of emotion. Let each linguistic community—including the community of expert emotions scientists—have authority to say what emotions there are, what features of emotions (from my wide schema) they use to individuate emotions, and let them explain, first pass, what psychological generalizations hold among emotions.

9. In addition to the sheer size of an immigrant group as a causal agent that could engender emotional adjustments in the dominant culture, an indigenous or exogenous power majority can also have similar effects. So elite, upper-class folks with wealth, or occupying armies and colonists who control markets, can demand for reasons of power—not for reasons of their normative quality—practices that accommodate, or even that are, their emotional norms and practices.

10. Perceptual theories of emotions (Tappolet 2016) make too much of the perceptual aspects of emotions and underestimate the other aspects, as do other kinds of theories (feeling theories, or judgment theories, conative or motivation theories), which also have the downside of overemphasizing one aspect of emotions.

11. Gallup (2019).

12. In fact, even “anger” in English isn’t a good translation of “anger.” This sounds paradoxical, but think about it. There are a million words for anger: “irritation,” “wrath,” “fury,” and “pissed off.” And then there is all the work that adjectives do: “intense anger,” “mild anger,” and so on.

13. In *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* (1990), George Lakoff points out that we can track common meanings inside languages, but we should not underestimate the importance of idiolects, or individual cognitive models that contain the idiosyncratic meaning rules that individuals can have for terms in a shared language.

14. There is an appreciative critique of Jackson et al. (2019) by Asifa Majid (*Science* 366 [6472]: 1444–45) that expresses the concern that the original study worked by holding the underlying emotion concepts as stable and universal (“as Platonic ideals”) when they might actually be highly variable. This is a legitimate concern, but if it is true that this study holds fixed some conceptual essences that mark different emotions, and there really are not any such conceptual essences, this would suggest that variation is even more robust, deeper, and widespread than the study shows, not less so. It would mean that there is cultural variability in the causes, effects, and feelings used to define even basic emotions.

15. Do speakers of Nakh-Daghestanian languages not experience grief and anxiety? We don’t know from the linguistic evidence, which indicates that they lack words for these emotions. There are many cultures with a limited color

vocabulary who can nonetheless easily distinguish colors and shades as well as we do (Lakoff 1990).

16. These points about learning terms for private mental states are familiar from Ludwig Wittgenstein, Gilbert Ryle, W.V.O. Quine, and B. F. Skinner. In *Verbal Behavior*, Skinner explains: “There are at least four ways in which a reinforcing community with no access to a private stimulus may generate verbal behavior with respect to it: (1) A common public accompaniment of the private stimulus which eventually controls the response may be used. . . . One teaches a child to say *That hurts* . . . by making reinforcement contingent upon certain public accompaniments of painful stimuli (a smart blow, damage to tissue, and so on). . . . (2) A commoner practice is to use some *collateral response* to the private stimulus. . . . The community reinforces the response *My tooth aches* when it observes such collateral behavior as holding the hand to the jaw, executing certain facial expressions, or groaning in certain temporal patterns. . . . (3) A third possibility is that the community may not appeal to private stimuli at all; it may reinforce a response in connection with a public stimulus only to have the response transferred to a private event by virtue of common properties, as in metaphorical or metonymic extension. It has often been pointed out that most of the vocabulary of emotions is metaphorical in nature. When we describe internal states as ‘agitated,’ ‘depressed,’ or ‘ebullient,’ certain geometrical, temporal, and intensive properties have produced a metaphorical extension of the responses. . . . (4) When a response is descriptive of the speaker’s own behavior, there is a fourth possible way in which private stimuli may acquire control. The original contingency may be based on externally observable behavior of the organism, even though this stimulates the speaker and the community in different ways. If the behavior is now reduced in magnitude or scale, a point will be reached at which the private stimuli survive [imagine one suppresses the temptation to express anger (my example)] although the public stimuli vanish. In other words, behavior may be executed so weakly or so incompletely that it fails to be seen by another person, although it is still strong enough to stimulate the behaver himself” (1957, 131–33).

17. Batja Mesquita (2022) distinguishes between *MINE* and *OURS* conceptions of emotions. *MINE* emotions are conceived narrowly and as inside persons; whereas *OURS* emotions are conceived widely as functional syndromes involving typical causes + feelings + dispositions to act + act. She says *OURS* emotions are understood as occurring between people. *WEIRD* people conceive emotions in the *MINE* way. Mesquita thinks, as I do, that *OURS* better describes the metaphysics of emotions across *WEIRD* and non-*WEIRD* societies. It is just that *WEIRD* folk like to talk more about the personal inner aspects or properties of emotions than non-*WEIRD* folk.

18. Cause and content (what the emotion is about) can come apart. I might be annoyed or angry at Mary for asking me where the keys are while I am working. Mary asking me where the keys are is the content, that is, what I am angry about. But the cause or part of the cause might be that I didn’t eat breakfast.

19. In my experience, many people insist that there must be something very specific that makes an emotion the emotion it is, and that because the causes and effects differ so much, it must be the invariant features of the emotion itself that make getting angry at the cars in front of me and angry at my internet server, both cases of anger. The only candidate for sameness of anger, given that causes and content differ, is identity of inner phenomenal feeling. But this requirement, that some narrow invariant feature is required to specify a kind, is unwarranted. Compare to the kind "tennis stroke." What is a tennis stroke? Where is the tennis stroke? A tennis stroke is a swing with a racket that hits (or aims) to hit a tennis ball within certain boundaries and over a net of a certain height (three feet at center; three feet six inches at posts). The trajectory, speed, and spin of the ball vary a lot coming and going. There are different kinds of strokes: serves, volleys, drop shots, lobs, etc. A good stroke involves certain positions of the entire body, which are responsive to the trajectory, speed, and spin of the ball. Body position, arm position, and core position vary across every stroke. The point is, we have a perfectly good idea of what a tennis stroke is, and where it is, without there being any aspect or dimension of a tennis stroke that is the same across strokes.

20. The contestations in the last kind of case involve complex matters of both ethics and social ontology: Is a person partly constituted by contingent facts about their lineage and thus responsible for actions of the people to whom she is connected or not?

21. Seneca, no pacifist, favored nonangry, efficient armies. Angry armies torture, rape, and pillage. Nonangry armies don't. They just win necessary battles.

22. In a brilliant paper from 1956 simply titled "Emotions," Errol Bedford insists both that emotion words are theoretical terms that do not name inner feelings, and that the principal functions of emotional expressions are "judicial not informative" (298). This might be an overstatement since often one says how one feels precisely to inform others how one feels. But Bedford is onto something. He notes that there is "overlap between the lists of emotions, and the lists of virtues and vices that are given by philosophers" (*ibid.*, 294). The "judicial function" is thus one of "moral criticism," whereby one admits or denies responsibility, assigns blame, makes excuses, or invites an audience to share in a positive or negative evaluation of another. Forty years after Bedford's essay, William Reddy recommended that we think of statements about emotions as a special kind of speech act that he dubs "emotives" (1997). We might think that saying "I am so pissed off" is just a report of what emotional state we are in. But it is rarely such a simple descriptive report of my psychology (what speech act theorists call a "constative"). It has performative aspects akin to statements like "I baptize you" and "I accept that," but it displays additional features that prototypical performatives do not have. In saying "I am so pissed off," I invite my audience to sympathize with me and the object of my anger to fear me. Reddy writes, "Emotives are influenced by and alter what they 'refer' to. Thus, emotives are similar to performatives (and differ from constatives) in that emotions do things in the

world. Emotives are themselves instruments for directly changing, building, hiding, intensifying emotions” (ibid., 331).

23. My view is not that the language of emotions, and norms and scripts for doing emotions, are required for feelings. A few emotion researchers seem to take that view (Barrett 2017; LeDoux 2019). My view is that we regulate emotional feelings and emotional expression by way of norms that, in the human case, are typically conveyed in the language of caretakers and are commonly enacted and reinforced in public symbolic forms in schools, religious instruction, and ritual performance.

Chapter One: Anger and Morals

1. Another disposition that I think has moved, or shows signs of moving, from one column to the other is something in the vicinity of greed and acquisitiveness. Greed and acquisitiveness are moving from the vice column to the virtue column. Greed is a deadly sin, but it can be rebranded in terms of entrepreneurial energy and a quest for achievement and creative innovation that can seem to be the epitome of virtue in individualistic, neoliberal quarters. Aristotle’s virtues of “great-souledness” and magnanimity created this particular opening for conceiving of wealth acquisition as a virtue, or as enabled by virtue.

2. The Dalai Lama writes that the Tibetan words *zhe sdang* can be translated as “anger” or “hatred” in English. He then says: “I feel that it should be translated as ‘hatred’ because ‘anger,’ as it is understood in English, can be positive in very special circumstances. These occur when anger is motivated by compassion or when it acts as an impetus or a catalyst for a positive action. In such rare circumstances anger can be positive whereas hatred can never be positive” (1999, 7).

3. Callard’s *On Anger* (2020) is quite brilliant. And I am one of her targets. She distinguishes between the realistic project of inhibiting and moderating anger and a fantastical project that claims that anger can be purified and has completely innocent forms. Callard defends grudges and revenge not because they are sometimes satisfying—they are—but for a much deeper reason. She thinks that morality is an accommodation to certain dark facts about human nature, including that anger norms are in fact a solution to our natural tendency to meet violence (which is guaranteed to occur) with vengeance, setting off never-ending vengeance. Anger is vengeance domesticated, still a bit blood-thirsty but contained enough so that it invites less vengeance than its undomesticated parent. Anger is thus less corrupt than vengeance but still corrupt, still mean and hurtful, and necessarily so because we are not good enough to do without it.

4. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II.46.6 ad 2; 47.1–2, follows Aristotle, defining virtuous *ira* as involving the desire to make another suffer. But he explains this in terms of a just retribution. Furthermore, the aim is not simple revenge or pain-passing. There is hope for the future, including hope for the good of the other.

5. Pankaj Mishra calls ours the Age of Anger (2017), and he sees extreme and constant anger across the developed world, and across the political spectrum, on the left and the right. Bageant (2007), Rasmussen and Schoen (2010), Cramer (2016), and Hochschild (2016) are fine ethnographies about twenty-first-century anger and resentment in America. Traister (2018) and Chemaly (2018) are defenses of anger for the sake of social justice.

6. Calling someone “a scumbag” or saying “fuck you” are angry speech acts designed to insult and injure. Such cruel speech is a visible part of the situation that I think is problematic. Some profanity-studded speech might be judged not to be the Queen’s English and thus to be crude—“That was a fucking great cricket match”—but it is not remotely cruel or intended to hurt another.

7. Anger is often met with anger. But anger is not always triggered by anger. Fear is a common cause of anger, as are disloyalty, the experience of being disrespected, and being overburdened.

8. Amia Srinivasan (2016) defends political anger against Nussbaum’s critique. See Cherry and Flanagan (2019) for an edited collection of papers that defend several kinds of moral anger. Macalester Bell (2013) is a study of contempt, a relative of anger. Philip Fisher (2003) is a deep literary, philosophical, and psychological analysis and defense of anger and other vehement passions. See also Agnes Callard (2020), where anger, including grudging and revenge anger, are defended against Martha Nussbaum and me.

9. Thanks especially to Tal Brewer for helping me on this point.

10. Pettigrove (2012) is good on antianger sources in Hume and Butler; Nussbaum (1994) is good on Stoic sources. Judith Shklar (1982) thinks that post-Enlightenment, we put cruelty first as the worst political vice. If Shklar is right, then cruel anger should be something that, at a minimum, we ought to feel ambivalent about.

11. There is excellent work on consciousness (Godfrey-Smith 2016; Tye 2017) that argues for robust phenomenal consciousness among honeybees, crabs, fish, birds, and octopuses. As for the emotions, fear seems common among fish; pleasure, anger, and grief seem common among birds.

12. There is the “epiphenomenalist suspicion” about anger and other basic emotions (Flanagan 1992). The epiphenomenalist says that the complex emotion we call “anger” is some sort of evolutionary side effect, epiphenomenon, spandrel, or exaptation of some core behavioral circuit. According to the epiphenomenalist, the emotion evolved secondarily, as a freebie, on top of the behavioral circuit that does the lion’s share of fitness-enhancing work, and it serves no function. The feeling of anger at most registers to the organism that it has detected a threat or an obstacle, and that a survival circuit has been activated. The feeling might seem to motivate the angry response. It doesn’t. The psychological version of the epiphenomenalist suspicion has been tested empirically for anger and other basic emotions (Panksepp and Biven 2012), and it is false. Eliminate the phenomenal feeling of anger in an organism and you don’t see the angry, fitness-protecting response.

13. My friend and PhD student Robert Bingle has convinced me that in fact Seneca is only interested in extirpating *ira*, which is a unique type of out-of-control anger. See Bingle (forthcoming). If this is right, then “extirpating anger root and branch” is not intended even by the Stoics to mean extirpating all varieties of anger.

14. David P. Barash and Judith Eve Lipton (2011) are good on the evolution, biology, and psychology of both payback and pain-passing anger. Like Carol Tavris (1989), who roundly criticizes the ventilationist view of anger, Barash and Lipton caution against the idea that it is good to release anger cathartically, as in anger management training where one takes out anger on a punching bag or a pillow. The evidence is that this increases rather than decreases the amount of anger that allegedly needs venting.

15. In *The Therapy of Desire*, Martha Nussbaum tells a story she heard secondhand about Elie Wiesel that can be read as an example of impersonal rage at the heavens. There is no particular person or group of persons that the rage aims to hurt or pay back: “Wiesel was a child in one of the Nazi death camps. On the day the Allied forces arrived, the first member of the liberating army he saw was a very large black officer. Walking into the camp and seeing what there was to be seen, this man began to curse, shouting at the top of his voice. As Wiesel watched, he went on shouting and cursing for a very long time. And the child Wiesel thought, watching him, now humanity has come back. Now, with that anger, humanity has come back” (1994, 403). This case is sometimes used in arguments to the effect that anger is necessary to accomplish certain moral effects or that it is the best way to accomplish such effects. See Becker (1998), Sherman (2005), and McRae (2015). I think that we can easily imagine the officer in the Wiesel case becoming overwhelmed by sorrow rather than anger, and a contagion of tears spreading among his fellow soldiers. This might have had the same humanizing effect on young Wiesel as the angry episode, as well as the further advantage of not scaring the other kids, who might have been less able than Wiesel to read the shouting and cursing rage as perhaps it was intended (Flanagan 2017).

16. Besides blue anger, anger mixed with or born of sadness, there are also red anger and yellow anger. Red anger is bloodthirsty, vengeful. Yellow anger is the reactive anger of a frightened soul, someone who is cornered, possibly a coward, possibly someone with no other recourse than to return terror for terror.

17. P. Russell (2020) is a smart, popular essay on ways in which some varieties of righteous anger for moral ends embed cruelty and sadism. Moral grandstanding (Tosi and Warmke 2020) often enacts a passive-aggressive form of anger. The grandstander prides themselves on being seen as a hyper-vigilant, moral connoisseur who shines a bright and humiliating light on the transgressor.

18. Anger plays a significant role in morality for children of Abraham and Aristotle. Anger is used to teach a normative order that contains norms that

regulate anger itself, and that keep it from becoming ruthless, sadistic, or frenzied. Stratton (1923) is an important psychological treatise on this topic. He divides religions into three types: (1) “The Irate and Martial Religions,” Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Islam; (2) “The Unangry Religions,” Taoism, Vishnuism, Buddhism, and Jainism; and (3) “The Religions of Anger-Supported Love,” Confucianism and Christianity.

19. Gibbard (1990) intends that the anger-guilt schema capture a recognizable and powerful vein in our moral psychology and ethical thinking—the same vein that Bernard Williams calls “the morality system” (1985, 51)—which trades in the language of duty and obligation.

20. One could have this view that moralities differ in terms of what moral emotions they primarily engage, but still think that the anger-guilt schema is a good heuristic for us to identify moralities that are not built on anger and guilt. We look for the ways in which the members of another culture deal with behaviors and areas of life, family, sex, resource distribution, and interpersonal conflict that we would govern with anger and guilt norms, and see first, whether they have norms governing these areas, and then next see what emotions do the work of normative governance, which we would do by way of anger and guilt. We inquire what those norms are and which emotions play the role for them in normative governance that anger and guilt play for us.

Chapter Two: Anger across Cultures

1. This thirty-item inventory does not reveal exactly where the cleavage lies between statistical norms, conventional norms, and ideal norms for anger. It also doesn’t mark very clearly what is included in the local concept of anger as understood by cultural psychologists and anthropologists, whether, for example, the concept translated by the word “anger” includes “as if” anger, instrumental anger, primarily felt anger, or primarily angry behavior, impersonal anger, payback, pain-passing anger, or all or only some of these. To say anything very precise or helpful about such matters would require a kind of fine-grained, multidisciplinary, thick description that isn’t yet available. Michele M. Moody-Adams (1997) is wise on the need to exercise care in the use of anthropology to make philosophical points. Andrew Beatty (2019) is also terrific on the complexities of translating emotion terms, emphasizing the complex ways emotions are embedded in an entire form of life, with an idiosyncratic history, religion, and so on.

2. It is not clear from the ethnographies whether the Minangkabau view all anger as vicious, or whether distinctions are made among spheres, whether, for example, personal anger is always wrong because it violates the aims of love and respect, but that anger is allowed in commercial relations when there is cheating, or at the political level when there is grave injustice.

3. The contents of the two moralities cannot be entirely identical even on this assumption, which tries to keep the focus on the socializing emotions. The

reason is that there will be different substantive norms about the socializing norms themselves. Furthermore, the dominant socializing emotions will create the moral equivalent of a dominant type of weather—stormy, cloudy, windy, calm, sunny—that will color all aspects of life.

4. David Wong has many wise things to say about the plurality of forms of life that are above a certain threshold of decency, and what is possible by way of critique when this is so (1984, 2006).

5. S Buddhism is also, for similar reasons, compatible with punishment, war, and violence.

6. Shaming and humiliating are associated with shame. But there is no necessary connection. Shaming and humiliating are excellent vehicles for both revenge and pain-passing varieties of anger.

7. On game theoretic grounds one could imagine that the Bara are vulnerable to rapid moral change, if we assume that they have even a small preference for doling out less pain, all else being equal. If the Bara have this preference and then receive word, and accept it, that some other methods of moral socialization exist that are less painful physically and/or psychologically than their angry methods—e.g., shaming, recite after me, gold stars for good behavior, etc.—are also equally effective in securing their normative order, and are no more expensive timewise, and so on, then they should want to change. The discovery of other methods that inflict less pain might lead to changes in their practices. Similarly, imagine that the Minangkabau have misgivings for some reason or other about shaming and then learn that Jews and Catholics have used guilt rather than shame effectively to maintain the moral order. Moral epidemiology might predict swift migration to guilt-inducing norms if such a thought took hold. See Skyrms (2003) and Bicchieri (2016).

8. A major reason Buddhists give for why anger is the most destructive emotion is that it is incompatible with—perhaps psychologically and performatively inconsistent with—*bodhicitta*, the awakening of compassion, the virtue that desires to alleviate the suffering of all sentient beings. Anger, at least one familiar kind, aims to produce suffering.

9. The degree to which the disagreement between individualists and non-individualists is metaphysical, or whether it is mostly normative, pragmatic, and forensic, is very complicated. All parties could agree that there are individuals but believe that well-being and responsibility are not individualistic. Henrich (2020) argues that WEIRD and non-WEIRD peoples differ concerning a host of dimensions associated with individualism, and disagree about whether the locus of blame and responsibility for bad character is an individual or a social unit (a family, village, nation-state).

10. Burdened virtues can burden in different ways. If an oppressed group is required, e.g., to not get angry even though they have reason to get angry, they are burdened. Srinivasan (2018) calls this “affective injustice.” If an oppressed group is asked, e.g., to be angry in a way that would be considered wrong for

others—like breaking the law in order to accomplish the goal of liberation—they are burdened in a different way. In the Bara case, I am imagining that they all feel burdened because they have to treat the youth so harshly. But they conceive it as necessary for a good life. Humans are, as Xunzi and Kant both said, “crooked wood,” so one does what needs to be done to straighten us out.

Chapter Three: Anger and Flourishing

1. Annas et al. (2016) is a collection of papers that defends the alternative view that there are, as it were, objective harms caused by certain child-rearing practices.

2. Seneca, in *De Ira* (1928), also gives some psychobiological reasons why anger is a bad socializing emotion, as well as bad for mature adults. It is naturally unruly. It fusses on the outskirts of things. You hurt me just now by mild inconsiderateness and suddenly your failure to rake the leaves last weekend or failure to promptly empty the dishwasher last Thanksgiving is in play. Angry soldiers rape and pillage; good soldiers simply win battles.

3. Dear reader, do not let “no-self” tie you up in knots. Most Buddhists accept that there are persons with personalities. The doctrine of no-self (*anatta*; *anatman*) is a denial of *atman*, an idea distinctive of and internal to orthodox 500 BCE Brahmanism, where high-caste priests claimed to have a divine part, *atman*, that linked them to, or made them part of, Brahman, the ultimate divine source of everything. No-self was intended initially to say “no” (*an*) to the self-puffery and ego of the high priests of what we now call Hinduism. It was never intended as a response to any familiar Western belief about the self, persons, or souls.

4. The majority script could refer to a numerical majority script, or, as likely, to a power majority script, to the script of the most powerful who authorize themselves to speak about what “we” think and how “we” do things.

5. Glen Pettigrove (2012) explores threads in our own Western tradition—e.g., in Hume—that give arguments for meekness and against payback anger, and Nussbaum (2015, 2016) works to retrieve sources in Aristotle, the Stoics, and the practical work of Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi for the same idea. Arguments against payback and pain-passing anger seem to be increasing at a time when arguments against retributivism in the law are also increasing, and for many of the same reasons. If both arguments win at the same time, I’d like to think it has a lot to do with better psychological theorizing and better metaphysical thinking about causation and agency. This would then be a case where wide reflective equilibrium procedures—but not superwide ones—were successful.

6. What Charles Taylor calls an “unforced consensus” is similar to what Rawls calls an “overlapping consensus.” The atheists, hedonists, Lutherans, and Catholics disagree about many metaphysical and moral truths, but they overlap

on the belief that the state should allow freedom of religion. Seeking an unforced or overlapping consensus is not the same as seeking reflective equilibrium, narrow or wide. This is because one might get everyone to agree that we shouldn't eat pork. For A, this is agreed because it is prohibited by Yahweh in Hebrew Scripture; for B, it is agreed because it is prohibited by Allah in the Quran; for C, it is agreed because they are a vegetarian. This is a case of both unforced and overlapping consensus, but the reasons are not mutually consistent (as required by narrow reflective equilibrium), and, in addition, they disagree about the facts (as required by wide reflective equilibrium).

7. I am assuming that almost all such comparisons will be piecemeal or segmental, about particular moral beliefs, ideals, or practices, or small sets of these. See Ruth Chang's (2002, 2016) work on choices that involve options that are "on a par," and the sort of enacted commitment for one's life and the world to be different involved making "hard choices."

Chapter Four: Generic Shame

1. The language of autonomy (good) and heteronomy (bad) is from Kant. It expresses an anxiety common among individualists. Markus and Kitayama (1991) is the classic paper in psychology on cultural differences in self-conception as they relate to conceiving the self as an autonomous, self-creating being or a communally created and sustained being.

2. I repeat that I do not take a position on one debate inside shame research. On one side, there are those who think shame is a basic emotion; on the other side, there are those who think it is nonbasic and assembled from some other basic emotions, possibly fear, anxiety, and sadness. It doesn't make a difference to my normative arguments in favor of shame whether it is a *sui generis* basic emotion or quickly assembled from other basic emotions.

3. Psychoanalytically oriented object relations theories, which I discuss in chapter 5, also posit a kind of primitive shame or protoshame. But they conceive protoshame as the response of the universal narcissistic child inside us all who discovers its lack of omnipotence in early childhood and carries the shame of this discovery for the rest of its life. This view is not normally expressed in a way that is inconsistent with the theory of evolution. But it doesn't incorporate evolutionary thinking either, and is not likely to be endorsed by its proponents.

4. The Sznycer et al. study (2018) is especially interesting for two reasons: it claims to find evidence across fifteen cultures for invariance in the neurocognitive shame system, and it explains this invariance in terms of strong selection pressures in favor of a system that assists in quickly acquiring local normative knowledge as protection against ostracism. Humans are made for doing, and doers need to be good predictors of two kinds of outcomes: whether the doing achieves its aims and whether there will be uptake by compatriots. A proleptic system anticipates and raises objections to itself about action plans—ideally at lightning speed—before they are raised by external forces. Shame is unpleasant,

so one wants to be good at avoiding it, which requires being a quick study of social norms, both conventional and moral.

5. Corey Maley and Gilbert Harman (2019) developed the interesting idea that feeling guilty comes in varieties that can incorporate different emotions. In their view, feelings are a higher-level category that includes or incorporates emotions. So if I feel guilty that I didn't exercise today, it might incorporate the emotion of anger at myself. If I feel guilty that I left the dishes in the sink, the underlying emotion might be fear that my partner will be angry. These two cases involve doing something wrong, possibly a resolution not to do it again, and thus are well described as guilt for those reasons. But the underlying emotion is self-directed anger in the first case and fear in the second. This same point might apply to shame. If shame is, as one theory argues, assembled from sadness, fear, and anxiety, then there might be different kinds constituted by different ratios: shame that is 80 percent anxious shame; shame that is 75 percent fear shame. I am more interested in the content of shame than its inner psychological or phenomenological features, so I'll leave this interesting possibility to one side for others to think about.

6. Using examples from literature to splendid effect, John Kekes argues that there is no general answer to the question of whether shame is good. I agree. It depends on the "evaluative framework" the shame is designed to protect. Even if shame protects good values in an overall good evaluative framework, Kekes thinks that "fear of shame" is normally not the best option among those available for defending and sustaining the normative order. "There are better ways of protecting our self-respect than fearing shame" (2019).

7. Kekes recommends reading Aristotle's cryptic remark that "shamelessness—not to be ashamed of doing base actions—is bad, but [it does not follow] that it is good to be ashamed of doing such actions" as similar to saying that "having a heart attack is bad . . . but it doesn't follow that fearing a heart attack is a good way to heart health" (2019). According to Kekes, what works better than fear of shame to keep one's eyes on the prize is a settled sense of ideals, a reflectively endorsed evaluative framework, self-knowledge, a proper sense of duty and obligation, and skillfulness at diverting unworthy motives. This is what I call "the mature sense of shame."

8. *Mengzi: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, trans. Bryan W. Van Norden (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2008), 2A6.

9. The idea that shame is linked to the possibility that God might repudiate a person altogether seems very close to the view that shame involves a negative judgment about the global self. Catholic orthodoxy thinks hell exists, but there is no consensus view about whether it has any occupants. God is all-loving, God loves sinners, God is forgiving, God is full of grace, and no person is wholly irredeemable, wholly worth repudiating.

10. Krista Thomason (2018) provides a helpful conceptual analysis of shame as it might be understood from an entirely secular philosophical perspective. Like Thomason, but for mostly different reasons, I claim shame is, or can be, good.

11. The orthodox story unfolds this way: One desire the narcissistic child in all of us has is to possess the opposite sex parent sexually. Once the child suffers the universal narcissistic wound and experiences primitive shame upon discovering it is not omnipotent, it resolves its desire to sexually possess its opposite sex parent in a compromised way. The girl child sees that she can gain the father, or more likely, someone relevantly like the father, by modeling the mother's ego ideals. The boy child has a more complicated developmental task. He experiences both sexual desire for the mother, and at the same time fear that the father will castrate him if he acts on it (even in fantasy). He takes his sexual sights off the mother and sets them on eventually finding a partner who is relevantly like the mother by modeling the father (who once wooed the mother by his charms). But modeling the father, who the boy child fears will castrate him, results in internalizing his stern superego.

12. Caelainn Hogan's *Republic of Shame: Stories from Ireland's Institutions for "Fallen Women"* (2019) is the tragic tale of the twentieth-century Irish convent homes for unwed mothers. It is also a story that explains the whys and wherefores of what she calls "the shame-industrial complex" in terms of *normative holism*. These homes make sense only in the context of a perfect storm of the entirely sexist shame attached to female sexuality and the additional shame of unwed pregnancy, combined with the shame of poverty and religious superstition that required secret baptisms of newborns before they were, once more shamefully, adopted out in a country where such adoption was illegal. The evil here was due to the inhumane and sexist values shame served, not to shame itself. Remember: shame is a general purpose emotion that involves feeling bad about some action or aspect of oneself; it is used to promote normative conformity. Shame is indifferent to whether it serves good or bad values. In the Irish homes for unwed mothers, it served bad ones. The point is that what can seem as if it is a qualitative assessment of the value of shame is usually not. It is an assessment of the values shame serves in a particular sociomoral ecology.

Chapter Five: The Science of Shame

1. Psychoanalytic object-relations theory conceives the project of psychic development in early childhood as being primarily taken up with the child learning that it is not the only thing (object) there is. The task is to be able to differentiate between objects of various sorts—for example, self and other, caretakers with their own wishes and desires, pets, transitional objects like teddy bears, and inanimate objects—and to develop the kinds of relations with these different objects that we expect of mature persons. The theory starts with Sigmund Freud. Nussbaum's rendition comes from a synthetic reading of a range of thinkers from Freud to John Bowlby, W.R.D. Fairbairn, Otto Kernberg, Melanie Klein, Hans Kohut, Margaret Mahler, Andrew Morrison, Daniel Stern, Silvan Tomkins, and Donald Winnicott.

2. Richard Wollheim, author of *The Thread of Life*, is another philosopher impressed by psychoanalysis. Wollheim proposes that guilt serves the superego, whereas shame serves the ego ideal, where the distinction is roughly as follows: The superego is one's conscience, an internal figure (in classical Freudian theory, it is the internalized voice of a frightening and potentially punitive father) that "aims to control the inner and outer life of the person who houses it . . . [by] commanding, forbidding, cajoling, threatening, rewarding, [and] punishing" (1984, 200). The phenomenologies of shame and guilt then differ as follows: "The essence of shame, or what is reverberatory about it throughout the psychology, lies in the look, in the disparaging or reproving regard, whereas the essence of guilt lies in the voice, in the spoken command or rebuke" (ibid.). Like Bernard Williams's perspective, Wollheim's is helpful as far as giving shame a second look goes. Wollheim sees shame as the more mature emotion: it emerges after guilt and is less behavioristic, and it is more aligned with the philosophical projects of knowing the self and modifying the self.

3. Freud (1905) thought that there were some such species memories. For example, he explained penis envy in girls who had never seen an actual penis in terms of such a memory.

4. John Deigh, who has been working on and thinking about emotions generally and shame in particular for a long time, wrote an incredibly sensitive review essay (2006) of Nussbaum's *Hiding from Humanity* (2004). Deigh distinguishes between tutored and untutored emotions, and questions Nussbaum's views of the nature of shame in its untutored form. He concludes that Nussbaum's critiques of the use of shame in the law turn mostly on conservative content of certain legal practices that endorse shaming and humiliation, not on negative features of shame itself.

5. Sexist shaming—for example, slut shaming—is wrong because it abides a sexual double standard and shames women for being sexual beings. It isn't something women are prone to because of anything about the nature of shame itself, or because they are cursed (like men, according to the view on offer) with "I am a failure" thoughts/feelings. It is because there are social messages that convey to women that their sexuality is something to feel ashamed about. The problem, as always, is with the values shame is called upon to protect, not with shame as such.

6. James (1892, 334–35).

7. Lewis explains that all her patients had suffered "traumatic childhood events" (1971, 12). In most cases, they returned to therapy after successful analysis, blaming "the tenacity of childhood hang-ups for permanently malforming their character" (ibid., 13). Lewis sees shame implicated in three ways for these patients: shame for the childhood trauma, shame for their inability to get over the childhood trauma, and, finally, for transference shame they projected onto the analyst. Lewis explained this last type or variety of shame as due to the fact that the analysand shares with the analyst in dream interpretation and free

association all sorts of unseemly thoughts and desires, and is, upon reflection, ashamed of having done so. This creates a “feeling trap,” where shameful feelings are activated and intensified, with no easy way out from the heightened experience of the shame.

8. Maley and Harman (2019, 22–23). See also Giner-Sorolla, Piazza, and Espinosa (2011) for questions about TOSCA’s validity.

Chapter Six: Shame across Cultures

1. The situation is similar with happiness, sadness, fear, and anger. These emotions also abide normative rules in the sense that they are apt or fitting, just in case it makes sense to be in these states, given what they are about. Happiness is apt if you have the winning lottery ticket, but not if you incorrectly think you do. Fear is apt if that really is a snake and not a belt or rope. Anger, like shame and guilt, is more subject to sociomoral discipline than happiness and fear. Thus, anger is apt if there is a justice violation and the anger does not aim to simply or only pass pain or gain revenge. My inclination is to say that, among these various emotions, anger may be the one that in itself, by its very nature, is a cause of trouble. In fact, I am inclined to say of anger, but not shame, what Nussbaum says of shame and disgust: anger is “especially likely to be normatively distorted and thus unreliable as a guide to public practice, because of features of its specific internal structure” (2004, 13). My thought is that anger, as a general response to not getting one’s way, is so undisciplined and rapacious that, as Seneca thought, domesticating it is super difficult.

2. If one imagines that the shameless artists are also amorality and libertines, one can start to see how neither shame nor guilt would play much of a role in their lives. Then again, edgy artists are usually shameless only in certain zones of life—sexual, artistic, lifestyle—but would not do many shameful things, like be disloyal to friends and loved ones, break laws, rape, pillage, kill, and so on. It is hard to imagine anyone who lacks a sense of shame altogether.

3. As I will say shortly, a mature sense of shame involves a regimen of “inspect then avow.” That is, the person with a mature sense of shame is not overly confident about either their worldview or particular beliefs and value commitments within it. They will be reflective enough to have thought about their values, and if challenged will engage in further reflection.

4. I grew up in a large family in a community of large families. Playing with siblings, and with large groups of kids from a bunch of families, was the stuff of everyday life. So, organizing softball and kick-ball games with fifteen kids from the neighborhood was a regular occurrence. Everyone knew the responsibilities of older kids to include the younger kids in such games, make them feel welcome and supported, and so on. We policed “bad sports” by way of something in the vicinity of shame/guilt, invoking norms about how the game “is supposed to be played,” positions to be allotted, disputes settled, and so on. It was all very elaborate. My hypothesis is that we had all learned at home some prototype rules

about how to play with, share with, and take turns with siblings of different ages. This was the basic schema. Then we exported and extended the prototype to games among all the kids, and we adopted and enacted the modes of enforcing norms by adopting and adapting the methods our parents used with us at home to teach us how to play with siblings.

5. Andrew Beatty (2019, 87–89) writes of the Javanese that their shame (*isin*) is tied mostly to social violations or accidents that look like bad manners (e.g., showing up at a party to which one was not invited), but not to moral violations.

6. Nietzsche (2006) is brilliant at developing the association of guilt with debt, as well as the image of an internalized creditor who is a sadistic part of the self that drools at the prospect of extracting payment in a painful way from other hated parts of itself.

7. The Catholic Church of my youth recommended feeling ashamed (or guilty) for being in certain situations or places that were referred to as “near occasions of sin.” My friend Jeanne Lorio grew up in Louisiana. The after-party for her prom was held at a milkshake shop, which happened to share the front of a building with the local house of prostitution, which was in the back. Jeanne’s girlfriend, on that particular double date, thought she ought to confess to being at the milkshake shop, given that its proximity to the house of prostitution made it a “near occasion of sin.”

8. Quinn (2005) observes that the emotion of pride is a major socializing emotion in middle-class America. This seems right. American children are encouraged to stand out, to have high self-esteem and self-confidence. Many have noticed that the currency of pride, especially when it suffers a steep inflation rate—trophies for showing up at life—cheapens the value of work on oneself, or for the common good, and instead rewards noticeability, which is enhanced by networking, standing out from the crowd on social media, and the like. The worry then is that the pride is detached from the types of activities that would make it pride-for-being-engaged in genuinely worthwhile activities (Lukianoff and Haidt 2018).

9. This failure on translatability is predicted from the discussion of the semantics of emotion terms in the introduction, and from the discussion of conceptual, normative, and network holism in chapters 4–6. In contrasting and comparing how emotions are done in different sociomoral ecologies, we look for family resemblances, never conceptual identity or linguistic synonymy.

10. Nussbaum (2004) provides wise arguments against using shaming in the law, which is entirely compatible with teaching people to be ashamed for law breaking.

11. Gibbard (1990) contrasts our anger-guilt morality with a disdain-shame morality. I’m skeptical that a shame morality would need to use disdain or contempt on the social enforcement side of things. Confucian ethics gives pride of place to shame, but doesn’t encourage disdain or contempt as the social enforcement mechanism.

12. This is not TOSCA shame-proneness, which involves the kind of shame that is associated with low self-esteem and judges the whole self to be the cause of all failures or missteps. Minangkabau shame-proneness is just a kind of natural shyness or modesty.

13. One other point: I am skeptical that the extreme painfulness of WEIRD shame needs explaining. The reason is that shame's alleged extreme painfulness is cooked up; it is a finding about the kind of shame (TOSCA shame) where the entire self is judged as shameful. This kind of shame has to be extremely painful; it is existentially undermining of an entire person's being, and it is always entirely undeserved. But it is also not normal shame, which takes actions or aspects of the self as its evaluative object, and needn't have any global self-undermining features.

Chapter Seven: The Mature Sense of Shame

1. Bryan Van Norden examines the possibility that conventional shame and moral shame are entirely different kinds of shame, wondering "is it just homonymy" that "shame" is used in both phrases? He concludes that shame expresses the same concept in both places. "We are social animals who are rightly sensitive to the opinions of others, in the first instance, caretakers. A humble person maintains this sensitivity" (2007, 266–67). I agree wholeheartedly.

2. In this book, I do not take up the important topic of collective shame. I am, however, very interested in the topic. Two observations: (1) There are lessons from genocide studies that might teach us about the way shame can protect a sense of solidarity and common humanity (Morgan 2008; Maibom 2010). Allied soldiers who liberated prisoners from Nazi concentration camps felt shame. Why? They were liberators not perpetrators. The concentration camp survivors who were liberated also felt shame. Why? They were 100 percent victims of evil. The best answer to both questions invokes multiple causes. In the first case, there is a sense of shared humanity and thus feelings of solidarity with the survivors, as well as the horrifying thought that fellow humans—and thus possibly oneself—were capable of this horror. In the case of the survivors, there was the shame at being seen in emaciated and degraded condition, shame about surviving when others, including loved ones they wanted desperately to protect, died; there was sorrow for their liberators being exposed to what the survivors knew but wished for no one else to know (the way a loving parent wishes that their child will never learn certain difficult truths), and possibly much more. (2) We live in a time when many people find it important to identify themselves with a people, with a lineage. If one does this as part of the process of constituting oneself as a person of a certain sort, and considers oneself to be made as one is, in certain favorable ways, based on ancestors, then one should also take responsibility for harms one's ancestors committed. European Americans like myself who identify as such and have pride in their ancestry share the shame of what

those ancestors did to the original people and to chattel slaves. We owe reparations to peoples in those lineages. The argument is conditional. If you conceive yourself as having a historical identity constituted in part by a lineage (ethnic, racial, linguistic, geographical), then you have some responsibility for what your lineage wrought. One could reject the conditional obligation by denying that one has an identity that involves ties to a people or a lineage, or, what might come to the same thing, by asserting that each person is an autonomous individual only responsible for what they do or did in their lifetime (end of story). In the other direction, one can justify a sense of collective responsibility by way of nonindividualistic metaphysics of the self and without mentioning ethnic or any other kind of identity, but instead some kind of what P. J. Ivanhoe calls “the oneness hypothesis,” where one is in solidarity with all of a nation or all of humanity or, at the limit, the cosmos itself (see Markus and Kitayama 1991; Ivanhoe 2017; Ivanhoe et al. 2018).

3. I am still thinking about how best to describe the mature sense of shame in both psychological and metaphysical terms. I do not think it is easy to capture the sense of shame in terms of the three main types of principled moral theories—deontology, consequentialism, or contract theories. Nor is it easy to capture the sense of shame in terms of character or virtue theories. Principle-based theories emphasize the principles one ought to abide by and tend to be neutral or silent on which socializing emotions should enforce the principles. Virtue theories, meanwhile, normally conceive each virtue as having an affective component, which is required for its proper execution. Shame is given an important role in Confucianism and Buddhism, but not so much in neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. There are historical reasons for this. Aristotle thought shame was only a quasi-virtue. By the time there was an Aristotelian revival in the medieval West, it was in the hands of Christian and Arab philosophers, who officially preferred, broadly speaking, the emotions of anger, fear, and guilt to shame for enforcing morality. I do not think that the sense of shame is a dedicated mental faculty, innate or acquired. Nor is it a particular virtue. I tend to think of it as akin to a master virtue or supervisory disposition. In this respect, the mature sense of shame has features in common with Aristotelian *phronesis* and Confucian *zhi*. But the disposition, as I am conceiving it, has both a more affective character than either *phronesis* or *zhi* and also powerful deontic features: it tells the person whose sense of shame it is, that this is not the sort of thing that one ought to do. If the deontic standard is that this is not the sort of thing a truly good person does, then the critic of shame might say, “See, once again shame has shown its global nature; it says ‘I am a failure,’ or ‘I am bad.’” Not at all. Almost no one is perfectly good or ideally good. When one does what one ought to be ashamed of (even if totally undetected), one feels shame about being insufficiently attentive to the norms and best practices expected by the community that one depends on for flourishing. The kind of shameful act—Is it financially greedy? Does it display an indifference to the truth? Does it violate a

promise?—indicates to the agent what aspects of their character deserve attention and work. To be sure, the self-work is about you, but it is almost never about all of you or every aspect of yourself. If people are prone to getting confused about this point, then it is the responsibility of the moral community to clear up the confusion. See Jiminez (2020), Krishnamurthy (2022), Lebron (2013).

4. For further reading on Confucian shame, see Kwong-loi Shun (2001), Van Norden (2007), Geaney (2004), Seok (2017a, 2017b), and Barrett (2014).

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A NOTE ON THE TYPE



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Pleasant Jefferson (“P. J.”) Conkwright (1905–1986) was Typographer at Princeton University Press from 1939 to 1970. He was an acclaimed book designer and AIGA Medalist.

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