

AQUINAS ON SHAME, VIRTUE, AND THE VIRTUOUS PERSON

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AQUINAS ON SHAME, VIRTUE, AND
THE VIRTUOUS PERSON

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Shame is a true Christian virtue, and also a human virtue. . . . Being ashamed of oneself is a virtue of the humble, of the man or woman who is humble.¹

Pope Francis, *Encountering Truth*

SOME SCHOLARS within the Aristotelian tradition, notably C. C. Raymond and K. Kristjánsson, have recently questioned the Stagirite's denials that shame (*aidōs*) can be a moral virtue in the proper sense of the term and that a virtuous person needs a sense of shame in addition to other moral virtues.² Aristotle famously claims that, although shame is the 58an between bashfulness and shamelessness, shame is “more like a feeling than a state of character” and that “one is ashamed of what is voluntary, but the virtuous person will never voluntarily do base things.”³ Raymond and Kristjánsson argue that Aristotle has overlooked two interrelated distinctions: first, the distinction between an episodic or occurrent *feeling of shame* and a durable emotional disposition of a *sense of shame*, and second, the distinction between retrospective shame (which follows upon base actions) and prospective shame (which inhibits base actions).⁴ Even if it be conceded that virtuous

¹ Pope Francis, *Encountering Truth* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2015), 43. 29

² C. C. Raymond, “Shame and Virtue in Aristotle,” in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, vol. 53, ed. E. Caston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 111-61; 32 K. Kristjánsson, *Virtuous Emotions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 87-101.

³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1128b10-11, 28-29 (trans. T. Irwin [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999]).

⁴ Raymond, “Shame and Virtue in Aristotle,” 115 and 131ff.; cf. K. Kristjánsson, *Virtuous Emotions*, 92 and 96ff. By “emotional disposition” these authors refer to

persons might not need to draw upon retrospective shame, according to Kristjánsson¹⁰, they will still need proper dispositional shame or prospective shame as “a deterrent voice to warn them against potentially base future courses of action.” If not, Aristotle would be committed to a conception of a saintly or morally infallible virtuous person.⁵ For his part, Raymond contends that, if Aristotle admits that honor and social standing constitute external goods and that virtuous persons are not indifferent to what people think of them (to such a degree that avoiding disrepute can be the goal of action), “it seems that Aristotle should allow that *aidōs* can be a ‘prohairetic’ mean as well,” that is to say, a virtue, since “knowing when, how, and to what extent to care about the opinion of others will require practical wisdom.”⁶

This article addresses these interpretations by exploring the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas,⁷ given that in his treat-

an “emotional tendency” or “emotional proneness” that disposes someone to feel a given emotion “at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end and in the right way” (cf. *Nic. Ethic.* 1106b17-35).¹⁰

⁵ Kristjánsson, *Virtuous Emotions*, 97. He admits that by advocating that a proper dispositional shame be understood as a full-fledged virtue he departs from the orthodox Aristotelian tradition.

⁶ Raymond, “Shame and Virtue in Aristotle,” 158-59.

⁷ For a fuller treatment on Aquinas’s account of shame, see H. Dwi Kristanto, *The Praiseworthy Passion of Shame: An Historical and Philosophical Elucidation of Aquinas’s Thought on the Nature and Role of Shame in the Moral Life* (Rome: Gregorian and Biblical Press, 2019). The book examines shame as a praiseworthy passion: its nature, its role in the moral life, its connection with moral growth, conscience, social rank, gender, and violence. This article focuses more on arguing why shame is, for Aquinas, not a genuine moral virtue and why, in order to be virtuous, the passion of shame needs to be sustained by humility and magnanimity. There have been very few significant¹⁹ treatments of Aquinas’s concept of shame, a notable exception being A. Guindon, “La ‘crainte honteuse’ selon Thomas d’Aquin,” *Revue thomiste* 69 (1969): 589-623. Guindon limits himself to a lexicographic analysis of some shame-related words in Aquinas’s works. Other articles offer merely a concise and general presentation of Aquinas’s views on shame, since they⁷⁴ with the topic of shame in the context of providing a panoramic account of the history of emotions in the Middle Ages. Generally, they compare Aquinas’s idea of shame with those of St. Augustine and Richard of St. Victor. See J. Müller, “Scham und menschlichen Natur bei Augustinus und Thomas von Aquin,” in *Zur Kulturgeschichte* 46 *Scham*, ed. M. Bauks and M. Meyer (Hamburg: Meiner, 2011), 55-72; S. Knuuttila, “The Emotion of shame in Medieval Philosophy,” *Spazio filosofico* 5 (2012): 243-49; S. Vecchio, “La honte et la faute: La réflexion sur la verecundia dans la littérature théologique des XIII^e et XIII^e siècles,” in *Shame between Punishment and Penance: The Social Usage of Shame in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times*, ed. B. Sere and J. Wettlaufer (Florence: Sismel-Ed. del Galluzzo, 2013), 105-21;

ment of shame, especially in “De verecundia” (*STh* II-II, q. 144, aa. 1-4), he draws substantially on Aristotle’s ideas about shame in both the *Nicomachean Ethics* (2.7.1108a31-36; 4.9.1128b10-35) and the *Rhetoric* (2.6.1383b11-1385a15). I shall argue in section I that since, unlike Aristotle, Aquinas does not conceive of persons with acquired virtues as morally infallible, he does not preclude the experience of (both retrospective and prospective) shame in the virtuous person’s moral life. Indeed, in keeping with the Philosopher, Aquinas holds that shame is best understood as a passion of the soul (or an emotion), and yet he also claims, as I shall expound in section II, that shame’s concurrence is necessary for the virtue of temperance, for shame is an integral part of this cardinal virtue. Felt in an appropriate degree with respect to a truly disgraceful action (be it one already done or one yet to be done), shame is morally praiseworthy and, as such, can be called a virtue in the loosest sense of the term.⁸ Aquinas retains the idea, however, that shame is properly speaking not a moral virtue because it falls short of the perfect notion (*ratio*) of a virtue as a habit that operates from choice (*habitus electivus*) and as a habit that produces good actions (*habitus operativus*). Since, furthermore, the person who experiences shame naturally tends to shrink and to hide from others, to the extent that sometimes shame even “sends the person into despair,”⁹ in section III of this paper I shall extend Aquinas’s argument by suggesting that, for shame not only to be praiseworthy but also to produce a beneficial outcome in the person, it must be accompanied by the paired virtues of humility and magnanimity. In suggesting this, I go beyond what Aquinas

C. Casagrande and S. Vecchio, “La vergogna tra passione e virtù,” in *Passioni dell’anima: Teorie e usi degli affetti nella cultura medievale*, ed. M. Casagrande (Florence: Sismel-Ed. del Galluzzo, 2015), 263-81. Another article by T. Ryan (“Aquinas on Shame: A Contemporary Interchange,” in *Aquinas, Education and the East*, ed. T. B. Mooney and M. Nowacki [Dordrecht: Springer, 2013]) focuses on demonstrating the relevance of Aquinas’s ideas of shame for the contemporary practice of moral education. For this purpose, Ryan compares Aquinas’s idea of shame as a moral emotion with that of E. Probyn (E. Probyn, *Blush: Faces of Shame* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005]).

⁸ See *STh* II-II, q. 144, a. 1.

⁹ *Super I Cor.*, c. 4, lect. 3.

explicitly says, though the idea is latent in his biblical commentaries.

I. AQUINAS ON SHAME AS FEAR OF DISGRACE

Aquinas understands shame (*verecundia*, *erubescencia*, *pudor*, or *confusio*)¹⁰ as one of the species of the passion of fear. Shame is the fear of disgrace (*timor turpitudinis*) and, more precisely, of disgrace that damages one in the opinion of others (*turpitude laedens opinionem*).¹¹ Thus, Aquinas follows Aristotle closely in conceiving of shame as essentially fear of disrepute or of dishonor (*timor ingloriationis*). What is at stake in shame is one's reputation; when one feels ashamed, one is afraid that one's worth in the eyes of others is significantly diminished, as when, for example, one becomes an object of ridicule or derision.¹²

The passion of fear, according to Aquinas, is a movement of the sensory appetite away from a future possible evil that is imminent and difficult to avoid. The sensory appetite is the power of the soul that moves animate beings toward or away from any objects apprehended—through sensory perception, imagination, and, in human beings, also through intellective cognition—under the intention of good or evil. While the movement of the sensory appetite constitutes the formal element of a passion, the bodily change that accompanies and is proportional to such a movement makes up the material element of the passion. In fear, the material element consists in a certain contraction in the appetite: “the heat and vital spirits abandon the heart instead of concentrating around it,” with the result that one who is afraid becomes pale, trembling, and speechless and is inclined to run away.¹³

¹⁰ For an extended study of these terms, see Kristanto, *Praiseworthy Passion of Shame*, 81-156. Notwithstanding some differences in nuance, all these words share a common feature of denoting the fear of disgrace (*timor de turpi*).

¹¹ *STh* I-II, q. 41, a. 4.

¹² See *STh* II-II, q. 75, a. 1.

¹³ *STh* I-II, q. 44, a. 1, ad 1 and ad 2. English translations of quotations from the *Summa theologiae* come from the translation by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Bros., 1948; rev. and repr. by The Aquinas Institute, 2012). However, whereas the revised version of this translation translates *verecundia* as “shamefacedness” (archaic), I prefer to follow the Blackfriars edition (*Summa Theologiae*, vol. 43 [2a2ae, qq. 141-154], trans. Thomas Gilby, O.P. [New

In the case of shame, its formal element is the sensory appetite's movement away from the imagined or recognized disgrace that spoils one's reputation. Shame's material element is a contraction⁵ of the appetite of the soul, depicted by Aquinas as follows: "the soul, as though contracted in itself, is free to set the vital spirits and heat in movement, so that they spread to the outward parts of the body: the result being that those who are ashamed blush."¹⁴ In another place, commenting on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he writes, "honor and shame are reckoned among external things, and, therefore, since a man fears the loss of honor by shame, he blushes as the humors and spirits stream back to the surface."¹⁵ No doubt, modern psychology, benefiting from today's neuroscience, can provide a better physiological explanation.¹⁶ Yet Aquinas's most important point here is that because shame, like fear, involves the somatic phenomenon⁶ of bodily change, which pertains more to a passion than to a habit, it is evident that shame is not a virtue.¹⁷

The disgrace that elicits shame may derive from a variety of sources, ranging from a fault or a sinful action (*culpa*), for which one can be held responsible, to states of affairs, such as a poor family background or physical deformities, for which one need take no responsibility at all.¹⁸ Aquinas even notices that, though shame does not regard virtuous actions *per se*, sometimes one may *accidentally* feel ashamed of doing virtuous actions if the actions look disgraceful to others or "because he is afraid of being marked as presumptuous or hypocritical for doing virtuous deeds."¹⁹ The actions one might consider more disgraceful are not coextensive with the

York: Cambridge University Press, 2006)) and translate *verecundia* as "feeling of shame" or "sense of shame."

¹⁴ Ibid., ad 3.

¹⁸ IV *Nic. Ethic.*, lect. 17 (Leonine ed., 47/2:260). The English translation is from *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, vol. 1, trans. C. I. Litzinger, O.P. (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1964).

¹⁶ See for example, T. L. Gruenwald et al., "When the Social Self Is Threatened: Shame, Physiology, and Health," *Journal of Personality* 72 (2005): 1191-216. The authors link occurrence of shame, understood as an emotional response to the acute threat to the "social self," with the increase of proinflammatory cytokine activity, cortisol, heart rate, and blood pressure.

¹⁷ IV *Nic. Ethic.*, lect. 17 (Leonine ed., 47/2:260-61).

¹⁸ *STh* II-II, q. 144, a. 2.

¹⁹ Ibid., ad 2.

more sinful actions; in fact, “sometimes a man is more ashamed of lesser sins [e.g., petty theft, carnal sins], while he glories in those which are most grievous [e.g., robbery, spiritual sins].”²⁰ This is because ultimately “shame is not fear of the very act of sin, but of the disgrace or ignominy which arises therefrom, and which is due to an extrinsic cause.”²¹ For Aquinas shame is different from repentance (*poenitentia*) precisely in that repentance directly regards the *sin* itself, whereas shame regards an *effect* of sin, that is, ignominy or dishonor.²² A sinful action would not *per se* cause one to feel shame, unless such an action entails opprobrium and jeopardizes one’s reputation. That said, following Aristotle, Aquinas affirms that one will feel more shame if the disgrace in question results from voluntary defect (*defectus voluntarius*), that is, from one’s own fault or from other things of which one is the cause.²³

Aquinas, this time drawing on John Damascene and Nemesius (attributed by Aquinas to Gregory of Nyssa), states that shame can regard fault or sinful action (*culpa*) in two distinct manners: prospectively and retrospectively.²⁴ In the first manner, shame, through fear of reproach, prevents one from performing a sinful action. In this case, the disgrace feared lies in an action that is yet to be done.²⁵ Aquinas, following the two aforementioned authors, calls this forward-looking or prospective shame *erubescencia*. In the second manner, the disgrace feared lies in an action already done or in an action that is in the course of being done.²⁶ In this case, shame, through fear of reproach, prompts one who has done or is doing a base action to avoid the public gaze. Aquinas names this backward-looking or retrospective shame *verecundia*. Despite this distinction, throughout his writings

²⁰ *STh* I-II, q. 144, a. 2, ad 4; *STh* I-II, q. 66, a. 9, ad 2; q. 116, a. 2, ad 3.

²¹ *STh* I-II, q. 42, a. 3, ad 4: “verecundia non est timor de actu ipso peccati, sed de turpitudine vel ignominia quae consequi possum, quae est a causa extrinseca.”

²² *IV Sent.*, d. 17, q. 2, a. 1, qcla. 1: “pudor respicit effectum peccati, qui est ingloriatio, quia verecundia secundum philosophum est timor ingloriationis; sed dolor directus ipsum peccati respicit.”

²³ *STh* I-II, q. 144, a. 2, corp. and ad 1. Cf. Aristotle, *Rhet.* 711384a14.

²⁴ *STh* I-II, q. 41, a. 4; *STh* II-II, q. 144, a. 2; see John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa* 2.15 (PG 94:932); Nemesius, *De natura hominis* 21 (PG 40:689).

²⁵ *STh* I-II, q. 41, a. 4: “turpiter in actu committendo.”

²⁶ *Ibid.*: “de turpi iam facto”; *STh* II-II, q. 144, a. 2: “in turpibus quae agit.”

Aquinas often uses *erubescencia* and *verecundia* interchangeably, and he treats both prospective and retrospective shame as one and the same passion characterized by a common feature, namely, the fear of reproach (*timor vituperii*).²⁷ Both are forms of fear that share the same efficient cause: reproach or opprobrium. Hence, to the extent that both types of shame belong to the category of passion, the distinction in question does not imply any ontological difference, but merely a temporal one: *before* or *after* the disgraceful action.

In contrast to honor, which denotes attestation to one's excellence, especially the excellence that comes from one's virtue, reproach denotes attestation to one's defect, especially the defect consequent upon one's sin. Accordingly, as Aquinas sees it, one feels more shame before those whose attestations are weightier, either because their attestation carries more certitude of truth or because it brings about a more detrimental effect.²⁸ One feels more shame in front of wise and virtuous persons, not only because their judgment is more truthful but also because one actually desires more to be admired or honored by them. One is also more liable to feel shame before those to whom one is closely connected, insofar as they are better acquainted with one's conduct and one is continually around them.²⁹ Likewise, because tale-bearers can cause greater harm by defaming one at large, despite perhaps not knowing the details of one's conduct, one feels greater shame before tale-bearers.³⁰

Aristotle states in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that shame is not appropriate to every age but only to the young, for they often go wrong through living by their feelings but can be prevented from going wrong by shame. By contrast, shame should no longer characterize older people and virtuous persons, since they should not perform any action which is a source of shame. "If some actions are really disgraceful and others are only thought to be so," Aristotle writes, "that does not matter, since neither should be done, and so the decent

²⁷ *STh II-II, q. 144, a. 2*. On this point I concur with the conclusion of Guindon in "L'acte honteux" selon Thomas d' Aquin," 590-96.

²⁸ *STh II-II, q. 144, a. 3*.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

person should not feel shame.”³¹ For Aristotle, in sum, “the decent person will never voluntarily do disgraceful actions”—be it disgraceful according to truth (*kat’ alētheian*) or only according to opinion (*kata doxan*).³² An ancient commentator, Alexander Aphrodisias, criticizes Aristotle’s failure to recognize realistically “that we ourselves, [although] we have already reached this age, feel shame [*aidōs*] at many things and frequently.”³³ Alexander observes that shame is not alien to older people or to those who live a noble and respected life; in the ultimate analysis, disrepute is not only consequent upon truly disgraceful actions but also may come from misrepresentation.³⁴

In general Aquinas endorses Aristotle’s stance on shame, including the idea that shame is appropriate and praiseworthy for the young but not for older and virtuous persons.³⁵ That notwithstanding, in his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, while agreeing with Aristotle that shame, properly speaking, regards voluntary defects for which reproach is due and that it is inconsistent with virtue, since a virtuous person will not voluntarily perform a base action, he adds a proviso that shame, just like sickness, might involuntarily occur in virtuous persons.³⁶ Similarly, in the *Summa* he adopts Aristotle’s principal line of argument and highlights that the old and the virtuous lack a sense of shame because they apprehend disgrace impossible to themselves or as easy to avoid.³⁷ Of course, shame is in the virtuous hypothetically, for “they are so disposed, that if there were anything disgraceful in them they would be ashamed of it.”³⁸ Aquinas, however,

³¹ Aristotle, *Nic. Ethic.* 4.9.1128b23-26.

³² Aristotle, *Nic. Ethic.* 4.9.1128b28-29.

³³ A. Aphrodisias, *Ethical Problems*, Problem 21 (trans. R.W. Sharples [London, 1990], 141.26-27).

³⁴ Aphrodisias, *Ethical Problems*, Problem 21 (Sharples, trans., 142.5-7).

³⁵ *Super I Tim.*, c. 2, lect. 2; *Super Tit.*, c. 2, lect. 1. For the gender dimension of shame, especially shame’s relationship with the body and sexuality in women, see Kristanto, *Praiseworthy Passion of Shame*, 344-51. Aquinas believes that shame is a laudable passion recommended particularly for women. See *Super I Cor.* c. 14, lect. 7; and *Super I Tim.*, c. 2, lect. 2.

³⁶ IV *Nic. Ethic.*, lect. 17 (Leonine ed., 47/2:261): “Secus autem esset si verecundia esset eorum quae involuntarie possunt accidere, sicut aegritudo involuntarie accidit homini.”

³⁷ *STh II-II*, q. 144, a. 4.

³⁸ *Ibid.* Aquinas refers here to *Nic. Ethic.* 4.9.1128b29-30.

makes this last point stronger by acknowledging explicitly that virtuous persons are not immune to shame when they are slandered or suffer reproach undeservedly.³⁹ In other words, Aquinas recognizes that acting virtuously is not sufficient for avoiding disrepute, since one's reputation is also partly determined by luck. Despite stating that "the virtuous man despises ignominy and reproach, as being things he does not deserve," Aquinas is willing to admit the fact that "some feelings of shame, like the other passions, may forestall reason."⁴⁰

A passage from his commentary on Psalm 43 provides another textual support for Aquinas's realistic acknowledgment that virtuous persons are not absolutely unsusceptible to shame. Commenting on verse 16 of the psalm, he offers this opinion:

Shame is, according to the Philosopher, a fear of something disgraceful. Now, there are two kinds of disgrace. One is disgrace according to truth [*turpitudine secundum veritatem*]. This is the disgrace of sin [*turpitudine peccati*], and shame due to this kind of disgrace does not affect virtuous persons, since they do not have in themselves a consciousness of some sin that would provoke the feeling of shame. Instead, such a shame affects the wicked. . . . Second is disgrace according to opinion [*turpitudine secundum aestimationem*]. This is the disgrace that one suffers externally due to humiliation and opprobrium. And this kind of disgrace also affects perfect men [*in perfectis viris*].⁴¹

Hence, although perfect or virtuous persons are not affected by shame due to disgrace according to truth (i.e., disgrace consequent upon a sinful action), in Aquinas's view they are still susceptible to shame due to disgrace according to opinion (i.e., disgrace following some undeserved reproach or humiliation). In brief, just as sickness may undesirably afflict someone, shame due to undeserved reproach may accidentally strike a virtuous person.

More importantly, Aquinas believes that the person with acquired moral virtues is not morally infallible. Only God is perfect in the absolute sense (*simpliciter*). A virtuous man, as a wayfarer on earth, can be perfect only in a restricted sense

³⁹ *STh* II-II, q. 144, a. 4, obj. 4. 5

⁴⁰ *STh* II-II, q. 144, a. 4, ad 3: "Infamationes et opprobria virtuosus, ut dictum est, contemnit, quasi ea quibus ipse non est dignus. . . . Est tamen aliquis motus verecundiae praeveniens rationem, sicut et ceterarum passionum."

⁴¹ *In Ps.* 43, no. 8.

(*secundum quid*).⁴² Indeed, acquired virtuous habits incline a person to acting rightly, insofar as they give him a right judgment about the end. The inclination of the moral virtues, however, is not without choice.⁴³ A virtuous habit does not produce virtuous actions automatically, because “it is not necessary to use a habit, since it is subject to the will of the person who has that habit.”⁴⁴ Aquinas stresses that a habit is “something we use when we will,”⁴⁵ and, hence, “one who has a habit may fail to use it or may act contrary to it.”⁴⁶ In his revelation-informed anthropology, postlapsarian human nature is deeply marked by *fomes peccati*, that is, the corruption of the sensory appetite, which inclines the sensory appetite to what is contrary to reason and “which is never completely destroyed in this life.”⁴⁷ Consequently, “those with a virtuous habit sometimes act against the inclination of their own habit, because something appears otherwise to them according to some standard, for instance, through passion or some allurements.”⁴⁸ Thus, compared to Aristotle, Aquinas is more realistic in stating that “acquired virtue does cause us to avoid sin—not in every case, but for the most part.”⁴⁹ If persons with acquired virtuous habits are morally fallible, inasmuch as they may sometimes backslide and commit (or desire to commit) a sinful action they know they ought not to, then it is legitimate to assume that at times they may experience shame due not only to the disgrace that is according to opinion but also to the disgrace that is according to truth.⁵⁰

⁴² *STh* I-II, q. 161, a. 1, ad 4; cf. *De Verit.*, q. 24, a. 9, ad 4.

⁴³ *STh* I-II, q. 58, a. 4, ad 1: “*Seclatio virtutis moralis est cum electione*”.

⁴⁴ *STh* I-II, q. 78, a. 2; see also q. 71, a. 4: “*habitus in anima non ex necessitate producit operationem, sed homo utitur eo cum voluerit*.”

⁴⁵ *STh* I-II, q. 78, a. 2: “*habitus definitur esse quo quis utitur cum voluerit*”; see *De Virtut.*, a. 1.

⁴⁶ *STh* I-II, q. 52, a. 3.

⁴⁷ *STh* I-II, q. 74, a. 3, ad 2; *STh* III q. 27, a. 3.

⁴⁸ *De Caritate*, a. 12. The English translation is that of J. Hause and C. E. Murphy, *Disputed Questions on Virtue* (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 2010).

⁴⁹ *De Virtut.*, a. 9, ad 5; Cf. a. 10, ad 14.

⁵⁰ In his commentary to *STh* II-II, q. 144, a. 1, Cardinal Cajetan alludes to this possibility.

II. SHAME: NOT A VIRTUE PROPER BUT AN INTEGRAL PART OF TEMPERANCE⁵¹

To say that shame is in the virtuous person, however, does not amount to affirming that shame is a virtue. For Aquinas, shame is in the virtuous person as an integral part of temperance, but not as a species of virtue or as a secondary virtue annexed to temperance. Before considering this point, let us first look at several reasons why Aquinas, similar to Aristotle, refuses to grant to shame the status of a full-fledged virtue.

A) Why Shame Is Not a Virtue Proper

In the first place, as stated earlier, for Aquinas, as for Aristotle, shame is more a passion than a habit (*habitus*), since it involves bodily change. There is an ontological difference between a passion and a habit. A passion belongs to the metaphysical category of movement (*motus*), whereas a habit belongs to the category of quality (*qualitas*). A passion is a transitory movement of the sensory appetite of those composite beings made of soul and body, in response to their evaluative apprehension of an object. A passion is thus a passivity, something that nonhuman and human animals occasionally suffer (*pati*). By contrast, a habit, to which genus belong the moral virtues, is a quality long-lasting or hard to change. It is a stable disposition whereby the possessor is well- or ill-disposed to feel and to act in a certain way. A habit is not a passivity but a principle of action. Aquinas says, “a moral virtue is not a movement, but rather a principle of the movement of the appetite, being a kind of habit.”⁵²

In the second place, but in relation to the first, shame is not a virtue because it is not an *elective* habit. Some critics of the Aristotelian account of shame have objected that, while the first argument above applies well to retrospective shame or to the occurrent *feeling of shame*, it does not seem to apply

⁵¹ For a fuller treatment on Aquinas's idea of shame as an integral part of temperance, see Kristanto, *Praiseworthy Passion of Shame*, 235-57. Several arguments why shame is, for Aquinas, not a moral virtue can also be found scattered in different parts of the book (pp. 85-85, 88, 188-214, 247). Here I attempt to bring those arguments together in a more concise and systematic way.

⁵² *STb* I-II, q. 59, a. 1.

to prospective shame or to what they call the “emotional disposition” of the *sense of shame*, because this latter implies that its possessor is disposed to feel shame in an appropriate way.⁵³ Aquinas himself never really speaks of shame as a disposition. The notion of disposition in his understanding, moreover, is different from that of habit. Habit is a perfect quality, which is not easily lost, whereas disposition is an imperfect quality⁵⁴ and can be easily lost. He says metaphorically, “a disposition becomes a habit, just as a boy becomes a man.”⁵⁴ Even if it is granted that a sense of shame implies some disposition, Aquinas would argue that it still lacks another important requisite to count as a full-fledged virtue: it does not operate from deliberate choice. He admits that an appropriately felt shame observes the rational mean and thus fulfills one important requisite included in the definition of virtue. Yet he further argues that “observing the mean is not sufficient for the notion of virtue, but it is requisite, in addition to this, that it be an elective habit, that is to say, operating from choice [*ex electione operans*].”⁵⁵ For Aquinas, the arousal of shame is impulsive; it does not *directly* proceed from judgment of reason and choice: “shame’s movement does not result from choice but from an impulse of passion.”⁵⁶ Shame is not something one typically feels at will or by design; it occurs instantaneously, without one’s anticipatory consent.⁵⁷

We recall that a moral virtue is a habit that from its very nature is related to the will, inasmuch as “a habit is that which one uses when one wills.”⁵⁷ The movement of shame, by contrast, may occur against one’s will, even when one knows well that one need not feel it. Aquinas gives an example of a religious mendicant who feels shame when he must go begging under the vow of poverty.⁵⁸ Though the mendicant knows that he is actually doing a virtuous action (i.e., begging because of a spiritual motive) and desires not to feel shame, nonetheless, since in public opinion begging is deemed

⁵³ See Kristjánsson, *Virtuous Emotions*, 96–97; Raymond, “Shame and Virtue in Aristotle,” 115.

⁵⁴ *STh* I-II, q. 49, a. 2.

⁵⁵ *STh* II-II, q. 144, a. 1, ad 1.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *STh* I-II, q. 50, a. 5.

⁵⁸ *Contra Impug.*, p. 2, c. 6, ad 22.

disgraceful, he cannot but naturally feel ashamed. In this context, the feeling of shame is inappropriate and needs subsequently to be regulated by right reason in order not to hamper one's noble practice of religious life. Shame is clearly more a passion than a virtue, since its movement begins in the appetite and then needs to be regulated to conform to reason, whereas the movement of a virtue begins in the reason and ends in the appetite, inasmuch the latter is moved by reason.⁵⁹ Indeed, shame can observe the rational mean, but Aquinas stresses that "virtue is a mean between passions, not by reason of its essence, but on account of its effect; because, to wit, it establishes the mean between passions."⁶⁰ Virtue is not equivalent to and the same as the mean; rather, virtue is that which determines the mean.

Unquestionably the arousal of a praiseworthy shame, which is felt about the right things, at the right times, and in the right manner, indicates that a person has a good will, since, for Aquinas, one is liable to shame only if one has loved what is morally good and beautiful (*honestum*) and detested what is morally evil and ugly (*turpe*).⁶¹ Nevertheless, this praiseworthy shame, according to Aquinas, participates in reason and voluntariness only indirectly, that is, through a kind of overflow (*per quamdam redundantiam*).⁶² He explains that the disgrace of sin (i.e., one's social and moral decline) cannot be apprehended merely by the senses, but is apprehended necessarily by the intellect.⁶³ Following the intellectual apprehension, the will or the superior appetite moves to detest the disgrace of sin, and, as the motion of the will becomes adequately intense, it overflows to the lower appetite or the sensitive appetite, moving the latter to fear of such a disgrace, that is, shame.⁶⁴ Hence, inasmuch as, through the mechanism of overflow, shame flows not directly but only indirectly from a deliberate choice, it cannot be regarded as an *elective* habit but is better understood as a passion.

⁵⁹ *STh* I-II, q. 59, a. 1.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, ad 1.

⁶¹ See *IV Sent.*, d. 19, q. 2, a. 1, ad 5; *De Verit.*, q. 26, a. 6, ad 16.

⁶² *De Verit.*, q. 26, a. 3, obj. 13 and ad 13.

⁶³ In a similar way, but in a converse sense, honor as respect paid by others in recognition of one's excellence is an external good that can be apprehended not by the senses, but by the mind. See *STh* I-II, q. 60, a. 5.

⁶⁴ *De Verit.*, q. 26, a. 6.

In the third place, shame's only indirect participation in reason and voluntariness means that it is not a reliable guide, in the sense that it does not always lead to good action. It is true that a prospective sense of shame might inhibit one from committing a sinful action. Yet, at times it might also hamper one from confessing one's sins⁶⁵ or from performing a noble or virtuous action if the action happens to appear disgraceful to others, as is shown clearly by the example of the religious mendicant above.⁶⁶ In this sense, shame falls short of an operative habit. For Aquinas, "it is essential for human virtue to be an operative habit [*habitus operativus*],"⁶⁷ meaning that it is "a good habit, productive of good works."⁶⁸

Following Aristotle, Aquinas holds that virtue is a perfection of a power "which makes its possessor good, and his work likewise good."⁶⁹ Now, "since shame is the fear of something base, namely, that which is disgraceful," according to Aquinas, "shame [be it prospective or retrospective] is inconsistent with perfection."⁷⁰ With regard to prospective shame, Aquinas writes, "one who is perfect as to a virtuous habit does not apprehend that which would be disgraceful and base to do [*exprobrabile et turpe ad faciendum*], as being possible and arduous, that is to say, difficult for him to avoid."⁷¹ In other words, one who is perfect in terms of a virtuous habit would not entertain any thought of performing something base, such that he would hardly need a prospective shame to restrain himself from base action. With regard to retrospective shame, Aquinas says, "nor does one who is perfect as to a virtuous habit actually do any base action [*actu facit aliquid turpe*], so as to be in fear of disgrace."⁷² To put it another way, one who has committed a base action and feels shame about it must not have reached a perfection in his virtuous habit. Thus, falling short of the perfection of virtue,

⁶⁵ See *Contra Impug.*, p. 2, c. 3 (Leonine ed., 41A:1970)

⁶⁶ See *STh* III, q. 72, a. 9. Due to shame, one might recoil from confessing the name of Christ.

⁶⁷ *STh* I-II, q. 55, a. 2.

⁶⁸ *STh* I-II, q. 55, a. 3.

⁶⁹ Aristotle, *Nic. Ethic.*, 2.6.1106a16-17.

⁷⁰ *STh* II-II, q. 144, a. 1.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

shame cannot be considered a virtue in the proper sense of the term.

An objection may arise from this third argument, as Aquinas himself notices while drawing a comparison between shame and repentance in the *Tertia pars* (*STh* III, q. 85, a. 1). Similar to shame, repentance, too, is about base actions or sins. Thus, repentance, which consists in sorrow for past sins, seems to imply some imperfection as well. One may ask why repentance can be considered a virtue in the proper sense, whereas shame cannot be considered so. Responding to this objection, Aquinas highlights that repentance presupposes a moderated sorrow for past sins with the intention of removing them.⁷³ He writes,

Virtue, in fact, includes a right choice on the part of the will. This, however, applies to repentance rather than to shame, because shame regards the disgraceful deed as present, whereas repentance regards the disgraceful deed as past. Now it is contrary to the perfection of virtue that one should have a disgraceful deed actually present, of which one ought to be ashamed; whereas it is not contrary to the perfection of virtue that one should have previously committed disgraceful deeds, of which it behooves one to repent, since one from being wicked becomes virtuous.⁷⁴

Hence, repentance is not inconsistent with the perfection of virtue, because it regards disgraceful action as past, insofar as by virtue of repentance the previously wicked person has now attained perfection or has become virtuous. In repentance, one not only feels sorrow for past sin, but at the same time also willingly aims at the destruction of that sin. Hating the past sin leads one to repentance.⁶³ In contrast, shame is inconsistent with perfection, since shame is a reaction to a disgraceful deed as present, meaning that at present the person still somehow desires the past sin to the extent that he has not yet reached a perfect disposition.⁷⁵

Unlike repentance, which disposes one to amend what one has committed against others and against God,⁷⁶ shame does

⁷³ *STh* III, q. 85, a. 1: “poenitens assumit moderatum dolorem de peccatis praeteritis, cum intentione removendi ea”; cf. q. 85, a. 3.

⁷⁴ *STh* III, q. 85, a. 1, ad 2.

⁷⁵ I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer who has helped to clarify Aquinas's point in this passage.

⁷⁶ Aquinas suggests that, insofar as it involves merely sorrowing physically for evil done (e.g., with tears), repentance can be considered as only a passion; yet insofar as

not always dispose one to perform good works. Aquinas admits that, due to shame, one may recoil from sinning and may thus follow the morally right path,⁷⁷ yet in various places he also notes that shame may drive one to cover up one's sins.⁷⁸ He observes, "The one who feels shame does not dare to speak nor to appear before other men."⁷⁹ The ashamed person tends to lower his eyes and does not dare to compare himself with others.⁸⁰ Out of a sense of shame one may also fail to follow one's right judgment and may fall instead into a superficial conformity so as not to offend others. This latter case is exemplified, according to Aquinas, by the reaction of the Twelve upon hearing Jesus' teaching that his flesh is the Bread of Life (John 6:51): they could have, out of a sense of shame, kept silent about any objections they had to Jesus' teaching.⁸¹ Likewise, Aquinas notes that "those who are born of lower class are ashamed to recognize their siblings when they are promoted to higher social position."⁸² Shame, therefore, cannot be a virtue, since it does not always incline one to produce good works and, as such, it lacks the perfection that should characterize a virtuous habit. In order to be productive of good works, as I will argue in the last section, shame needs to be accompanied by humility and magnanimity.

In the fourth place, a moral virtue (e.g., courage) is acquired through habituation, that is, by repeatedly doing good actions (e.g., courageous actions). In general, the experience of shame is painful, to such an extent that one usually wants to avoid repeating it. As noted above, shame is felt not only for one's voluntary action but also for a wide variety of reasons, including a state of affairs that does not necessarily have a moral import. Being repeatedly shamed by

it entails the intention of amending, repentance must involve choice and thus can be considered as a virtue. *STh* III, q. 85, a. 4: "We can speak of repentance in two ways: first, insofar as it is a passion, and thus, since it is a kind of sorrow, it is in the concupiscible part as its subject; second, insofar as it is a virtue. . . . Repentance, insofar as it is a virtue, is subjected to the will, and its proper act is the purpose of amending what was committed against God" (emphasis added).

⁷⁷ *IV Sent.*, d. 19, q. 2, a. 1.

⁷⁸ See *IV Sent.*, d. 19, q. 2, a. 3, qcla. 3, exp.; *Contra Impug.*, p. 2, c. 3.

⁷⁹ *Super Galatam*, c. 47 (Leonine ed., 28:196).

⁸⁰ *STh* II-II, q. 161, a. 2, ad 1.

⁸¹ *Super Ioan.*, c. 6, lect. 8.

⁸² *Super Hebr.*, c. 2, lect. 3.

another for one's bodily defect, for instance, rather than producing a good outcome in the person, will very likely produce what psychologists call "toxic shame" that destroys one's personal well-being.⁸³ Indeed, shame experienced as a result of one's evil action—for example, shame a husband feels for having been unfaithful to his faithful wife—might prompt one to repent and not to repeat such a sinful and shameful action. In this case shame produces a good outcome and can thus be called "good shame" inasmuch as it helps one to control one's depraved lust and to moderate one's behavior. The experience of good shame such as this, if repeated in various circumstances, according to Aquinas, will not produce an "acquired virtue of shame"—or, to use Cajetan's terminology, *virtus verecundandi*⁸⁴—but it will produce "an acquired virtue whereby one avoids what is shameful."⁸⁵ Cajetan rightly points out that the acquired virtue meant by Aquinas here is temperance: being frequently ashamed will not produce a disposition to feel shame (*dispositionem ad verecundandum*) but will generate the virtue of temperance.⁸⁶ "That notwithstanding," Aquinas adds, "as a consequence of this acquired virtue [i.e., temperance], one would be more ashamed, if confronted with shame-inducing matter."⁸⁷ This means that persons with the acquired virtue of temperance will not cease to be sensitive to shame, in the sense that "they are so disposed that, if there were anything disgraceful in them they would be ashamed of it."⁸⁸ Indeed, though a sense of shame is not a virtue, it constitutes an integral part of the virtue of temperance, to which topic we now turn.

⁸³ See J. Bradshaw, *Healing the Shame That Binds You* (Florida: Health Communications, Inc., 2005), 21.

⁸⁴ Cajetan, *In STb II-II*, q. 144, a. 1.

⁸⁵ *STb II-II*, q. 144, a. 1, ad 5: "ex multoties verecundari causatur habitus virtutis acquisitae per quam aliquis turpia vitet."

⁸⁶ Cajetan, *In STb II-II*, q. 144, a. 1: "ex operibus verecundiae non verecundiae virtus, sed temperantiae virtus fit."

⁸⁷ *STb II-II*, q. 144, a. 1, ad 5: "Sed ex illo habitu virtutis acquisitae [i.e., temperantiae] sic se habet aliquis quod magis verecundaretur si materia verecundiae adesset."

⁸⁸ *STb II-II*, q. 144, a. 4.

B) Shame as an Integral Part of Temperance

Acquired temperance is a cardinal virtue that enables a person to control properly or to moderate his concupiscible appetite in general and his desire for the bodily pleasures regarding food, drink, and sex—the “pleasures of touch”—in particular. Temperance directs and orders one’s pursuit and enjoyment of bodily pleasures so that these latter become well-ordered, in the sense of becoming consonant with the good of reason. The desires for food, drink, and sex are common to human and nonhuman animals. Temperance, however, renders human beings capable of living such bodily desires in a distinctively human way, that is, in accordance with their dignity as rational beings. This means that a temperate man desires food and drink of a reasonable quantity and quality—that is, necessary for the preservation of his well-being, and becoming to his given circumstances. He also desires to have sexual relations only with his wife and only on appropriate occasions. His well-ordered bodily desires and pleasures reflect the dignity of rational animality. In temperance, for Aquinas, the beauty and honorability (*honestas*) proper to men as rational animals shine more brightly.

The vice of intemperance, by contrast, denotes a bad habit of indulging the desire for bodily pleasures in an excessive or unproportioned way, that is, more than as is necessary and becoming. Consequently, whereas beauty and honorability are attributes most appropriate for temperance, disgrace and shamefulness are attributes most appropriate for intemperance. This is, according to Aquinas, for two reasons. First, intemperance is “most repugnant to human excellence, since it is about pleasures common to us and the lower animals.”⁸⁹ Second, intemperance is “most repugnant to man’s clarity or beauty, inasmuch as the pleasures which are the matter of intemperance dim the light of reason from which all the splendor and beauty of virtue arises; wherefore these pleasures are described as being most slavish.”⁹⁰ Thus, whereas temperance, which consists in a certain moderate and fitting proportion, “more than any other virtue lays claim to

⁸⁹ *STh* II-II, q. 142, a. 4.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* (translation slightly modified)

² a certain comeliness [*decorum*], the vices of intemperance excel others in disgrace [*turpitudinem*].”⁹¹

Shame (*verecundia*) together with a sense of honor (*honestas*) constitute, according to Aquinas, the integral parts of temperance. An integral part of a cardinal virtue is distinguished from its subjective parts (i.e., various species of virtues, distinct from one another according to their specific objects but not from the cardinal virtue which is present in each species according to its entire essence and operative power) and from its potential parts (i.e., other virtues connected with the cardinal virtue but that are directed to secondary acts or matters, without having the whole power of the principal virtue). The integral parts of a virtue are the conditions whose concurrence is necessary for the perfect act of the virtue: “integral parts are those by which the perfection of the whole is integrated.”⁹² It should be underlined, however, that “properly speaking, these integral parts are themselves *not virtues*, but only conditions for the virtue that integrates them.”⁹³ Integral parts, according to Aquinas, belong to the constitution of the whole, as wall, roof, and foundation are constitutive parts of the whole building of a house. Yet, he says, “the integral whole is not present in every single part, neither according to its essence nor according to its power; as the whole [essence of the] house is not in its walls, so the whole virtue is not [in its parts]; and consequently, the integral whole is in no way predicated of its parts.”⁹⁴ Hence, “house” is not predicated of a wall, since the essence of a house is not contained in a wall.

Shame and a sense of honor are components of the cardinal virtue of temperance, in the sense that the concurrence of both is necessary for the realization of temperance, just as the presence of wall, roof, and foundation is necessary for the construction of a house. Aquinas says that through shame “one recoils from the disgrace that is contrary to temperance,” while through a sense of honor “one loves the beauty of temperance.”⁹⁵ On the one hand, the sense of honor

⁹¹ *STh* II-II, q. 143, a. 1.

⁹² *STh* III, q. 90, a. 3, s.c.

⁹³ *III Sent.*, d. 33, q. 3, a. 1, qcla. 1.

⁹⁴ *STh* III, d., ad 1.

⁹⁵ *STh* II-II, q. 143, a. 1.

as the affection for being worthy of honor in a more positive fashion inspires one to deal with one's desire for food, drink, and sex in a decent or becoming manner. On the other hand, shame as fear of disgrace or dishonor in a more negative fashion prompts one to distance oneself from indulging one's desire for the pleasures of touch in an indecent or unbecoming manner. A person with a sense of honor has a vivid consciousness of his dignity as a rational being and aspires to conduct himself in a way that corresponds to his dignity, namely, in a way that is "well-proportioned to the spiritual clarity of reason."⁹⁶ A person with a sense of shame remains vigilant not to overstep the boundary of what is decent or becoming with regard to his pursuit and enjoyment of bodily pleasures, in order not to fall into disgrace or dishonor. In this respect, Aquinas²⁴ contends that "a sense of shame fosters a sense of honor by removing that which is contrary to the latter, but not so as to attain the perfection of the sense of honor."⁹⁷

Thus, by inspiring one with the horror of whatever is disgraceful, a prospective sense of shame is helpful in motivating one to temper one's concupiscible appetite, especially the desire for the pleasure of touch. Constituting an integral part of temperance, though, does not mean that shame enters into the essence of temperance, for temperance is more than a mere sense of shame. Drawing on St. Ambrose, Aquinas states that, filling one with the fear of dishonorableness, "shame lays the first foundation of temperance."⁹⁸ A sense of shame, which arises as an impulse of feeling rather than a³⁹ an act of freedom, is only a prelude to temperance: "shame is a part of temperance, not as though it entered into its essence, but as disposing to it."⁹⁹ A temperate person will still need to make a deliberate choice as to whether following the impulse of his sense of shame is right or not, for such an impulse at times can be misleading. As the example of the religious mendicant above indicates, it can happen that an action one has judged to be right (or

⁹⁶ *STb* II-II, q. 145, a. 2.

⁹⁷ *STb* II-II, q. 144, a. 1, ad 3.

⁹⁸ *STb* II-II, q. 144, a. 4, ad 4. Aquinas refers to Ambrose's *De officiis ministrorum* 1.211.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

temperate, just, courageous, etc.) sometimes appears disgraceful to others, to such an extent that in order to be able to perform the action, one needs first to overcome the assault of the natural feeling of shame. Shame alone, being an impulsive passion, will not produce good works unless it is accompanied by the necessary virtues.

III. SHAME, HUMILITY, AND MAGNANIMITY

Like any other passion, shame can be good or bad depending on whether it regards the right object, whether it is felt in the right ways, and whether it ultimately leads to good acts. Aquinas, often quoting Sirach 4:21, says that there is shame that leads to glory and grace, but that there also is shame that leads to sin.¹⁰⁰ Shame leads to sin when it drives one to hide rather than either to confess one's fault or to confront its evil consequences, if any, for others. Shame is likewise bad when it leads one to servile conformity for the sake of appeasing certain others, for this means that shame leads one into the sins of dissimulation and hypocrisy, which are opposed to the virtue of truthfulness whereby one presents oneself to be what one is. Shame is not laudable when it sends one into despair or into violent rage. Contrariwise, shame is good when it leads one in a prospective manner to shun sinful actions, or when in a retrospective manner it leads one to repentance. Feeling ashamed for the sin done, according to Aquinas, can become the beginning of a life reform (*principium emendationis vitae*).¹⁰¹

Although opprobrium or reproach that triggers shame is "properly due to sin alone," Aquinas notes, "nevertheless, at least in human opinion, it regards any kind of defect."¹⁰² In shame one's defect or shortcoming is revealed both to oneself and to others, which revelation can diminish both one's self-respect and the respect of others. Consequently, the ashamed person typically has no courage to appear and to speak before others; he tends to cast down his eyes as though not daring to

¹⁰⁰ See *In Ps* 24, n. 3; *In Ps* 34, n. 17; *In Ps* 39, n. 7; *In Matt.*, c. 18, lect. 2; *Super I Cor.*, c. 4, lect. 3.

¹⁰¹ *In P* 8, n. 7.

¹⁰² *STh* II-II, q. 144, a. 2, ad 2.

compare himself with others. Contemporary psychologists describe the ashamed person as “wishing to sink through the floor and hide from the penetrating gaze of the other.”¹⁰³ Shame involves feeling inferior to what one expects from oneself and to what others expect. Insofar as one desires to be loved as much as one desires to be honored,¹⁰⁴ shame, as the fear of dishonor, also involves the fear of becoming unworthy of others’ love. A disgraceful action might cost one exclusion from or rejection by relevant others. It is understandable, therefore, that shame can lead one not only into the concealment of one’s defect but also, and even worse, into despair.

Because for Aquinas shame, properly speaking, is only a passion, nowhere in his works does he speak about the gift or the infused version of shame. By contrast, repentance can be twofold: (1) a passion, insofar as it occurs in the sensitive appetite and involves bodily alteration; (2) a virtue, insofar as it occurs in the rational appetite and involves right choice on the part of the will.¹⁰⁵ Because repentance can be a genuine virtue, Aquinas speaks not only about the habit of repentance, but also about repentance as infused by God.¹⁰⁶ By means of infused repentance God turns the heart of the sinning person to himself. Whereas various acquired virtues are governed by prudence (*prudentia*) in the human pursuit of temporal good, various infused virtues are governed by divine friendship or divine love (*caritas*) in the human pursuit of supernatural good, namely, beatific union with God.¹⁰⁷ As said above, the passion of shame involves the fear of rejection by relevant others because one’s shameful defect makes one feel unworthy of others’ love. Shame can become, as E. Stump points out, “a potent source of distance between the [a]shamed person and the others, and it can also introduce

¹⁰³ E. J. Anthony, “Shame, Guilt, and the Feminine Self in Psychoanalysis,” in *Object and Self: A Developmental Approach*, ed. S. Tuttmann et al. (New York: International University Press, 1981), 203.

¹⁰⁴ *STh* II-II, q. 27, a. 1, ad 2; Cf. Aristotle, *Nic. Ethic.* 8.8.1159a12-13.

¹⁰⁵ *STh* III, q. 85, a. 1.

¹⁰⁶ *STh* III, q. 85, a. 5.

¹⁰⁷ C. Vogler, “Turning to Aquinas on Virtue,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Virtue*, ed. N. E. Snow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 233.

distance between [a]shamed person and God.”¹⁰⁸ Thinking of himself as defective or ugly, the ashamed person can experience self-loathing, which is an inner division that can prevent an interpersonal union between the ashamed person and God. In this way, shame is not compatible with infused virtue, since the passion of shame arises only in the context of a betrayal of love and is thus opposed to the interpersonal virtue of *caritas* (divine friendship).¹⁰⁹

Aquinas does not specifically elaborate on how shame can bring about positive outcomes in the person who experiences it, yet he provides some clues in his commentaries on the Gospels.¹¹ For instance, commenting on the way Jesus died, he writes, “It was specially in keeping with His humility, that, as He chose the most disgraceful manner of death [*turpissimum genus mortis*], so likewise it was part of His humility that He did not refuse to suffer shame [*confusionem*] in so celebrated a place [Jerusalem].”¹¹⁰ As Aquinas sees it, it is in virtue of humility that Jesus was able to bear shame and to go through the crucifixion for the sake of attaining a more valuable end (i.e., the salvation of humankind). Similarly, commenting in the *Catena aurea in Marcum* on the scene of a leper who kneels down and implores Jesus to heal him (Mark 1:40-45), Aquinas cites St. Bede, who says that the leper’s bodily gestures manifest the latter’s humility and shame, “for everyone should feel ashamed of the stains of his life.”¹¹¹ The leper must be ashamed of his physical defect, and it is also reasonable to imagine that he naturally desires to hide his disgraceful stain from others. Yet, thanks to the leper’s humility, Bede writes, “such a feeling of shame [*verecundia*] did not stifle confession: he showed his wound and begged for healing.”¹¹² Again, it is by virtue of humility that the passion of shame does not cripple the person or even send

¹⁰⁸ E. Stump, “Guilt, Shame, and Satisfaction,” in idem, *Atonement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 52.

¹⁰⁹ A. Pinsent, review of R. Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions*, in the *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* (<https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/thomas-aquinas-on-the-passions>).

¹¹⁰ *STh* III, q. 46, a. 10.

¹¹¹ In *Catena aurea in Marcum* c. 1, lect. 13: “In faciem procidit, quod humilitatis est et pudoris, ut unusquisque de vitae suae maculis erubescat.”

¹¹² Ibid.: “sed confessionem verecundia non repressit: ostendit vulnus, et remedium postulavit.”

him into despair; instead, humility enables the person to react positively in spite of his disgraceful defect.

In Aquinas's account, humility is a moral virtue which deals with the movement of the appetite toward great things, so that it does not aim at them against right reason.¹¹³ Humility, in other words, regulates the passion of hope, "to temper and restrain the mind, lest it tend to high things immoderately."¹¹⁴ In order not to let himself be carried away by craving things above him, a humble person must "know his disproportion to that which surpasses his capacity."¹¹⁵ He needs to have a realistic or truthful assessment of his ability and not to think of himself as greater than he actually is. For Aquinas, "knowledge of one's own defect belongs to humility, as a rule guiding the appetite."¹¹⁶ A humble person is disposed to acknowledge his own shortcomings. In the context of Aquinas's Christian commitments, a humble person is well aware of his place in the order of creation: that is, that he is dependent on God and on other human beings. Having a true self-esteem, he knows his strengths and has confidence in them, but he does not trust in them in an excessive way, since, while aiming at excellence, he puts his confidence in God's help.¹¹⁷ He is willing to see and to recognize that those around him might have some good or excellence that he does not, or that he has some evil or deficiency which they do not, and so he is disposed to subject himself to others.¹¹⁸ For Aquinas, humility chiefly consists in man's subjection to God; thus, when a humble person subjects himself to others he does so for God's sake, recognizing God's gifts in them.¹¹⁹

Shame can demoralize or even paralyze a person because it focuses his attention on defects that seem certain to diminish his worth in the opinion of relevant others. Shame is marked by some self-centeredness; due to shame, one can turn to navel-gazing and the avoidance of others. If humility enables one to experience shame in a positive manner, it is because by virtue of humility one embraces some other-centeredness, which allows one to see the defect in a much

¹¹³ *STh* II-II, q. 161, a. 1.

¹¹⁴ *STh* II-II, q. 161, a. 2.

¹¹⁵ *STh* II-II, q. 161, a. 2, ad 3.

¹¹⁶ *STh* II-II, q. 161, a. 2, ad 3.

¹¹⁷ *STh* II-II, q. 161, a. 28.

¹¹⁸ *STh* II-II, q. 161, a. 1, ad 5; q. 161, a. 2, ad 3; and q. 161, a. 3, ad 1.

larger perspective. A humble person sees himself as a creature of God: though he may seek to become perfect through living virtuously, “his perfection is found wanting in comparison to God.”¹¹⁹ He knows that he is always in need of God’s assistance, for humility “makes man submissive and ever open to the influx of divine grace.”¹²⁰ Humility allows the ashamed person to acknowledge his creaturely limitations and to see the prospect of redemption beyond his defective self. He does not despise the opinion of others about himself, yet he does not let himself be captive to their judgment either, since he does not measure his self-worth entirely in terms of public opinion but also in terms of his dependence on God. If the humble leper mentioned in the example above dared to present himself and to beg for a remedy for his shameful defect, presumably it is because he took God as the last and truest judge of his self-worth.

For Aquinas, however, humility is complemented by magnanimity. While humility keeps one from desiring great things that surpass one’s capacity or just deserts, magnanimity reminds one of one’s valuable capacity and urges one to deem oneself worthy of great things. Whereas humility enables the ashamed person to accept his defect in a realistic way, magnanimity strengthens his spirit against despair and impels him to go beyond his shameful defect by attempting to achieve excellence in accordance with right reason.¹²¹ A magnanimous man does not fail in hope in the face of the arduous task of transforming his defect into excellence. By contrast, in a pusillanimous person who has a low opinion of himself, who ignores his own worth and capacities, and who shrinks from attempting to do great things due to excessive fear of failure,¹²² shame is very unlikely to produce a positive

¹¹⁹ *STh* I-II, q. 161, a. 1, ad 4.

¹²⁰ *STh* II-II, q. 161, a. 5.

¹²¹ In arguing that, in addition to humility, shame needs the presence of magnanimity in order to produce a good outcome, I revise my argument in my above-mentioned book. The book referred to confidence (*fiducia*) rather than magnanimity. In fact, for Aquinas “confidence belongs to magnanimity.” A magnanimous man has both confidence in others that can be of service to him and confidence in himself that he has enough abilities to obtain certain good. As a certain mode of hope, that is, hope strengthened by good opinion about others and about him, confidence itself is not a virtue but a condition for the virtue of magnanimity (*STh* II-II, q. 129, a. 6).

¹²² *STh* II-II, q. 133, a. 2.

outcome; instead, it will only dissuade him from attempting to amend his defect and to become a better sort of person.

As some scholars have noted,¹²³ Aquinas's account of magnanimity, rooted in a Christian anthropology, differs from that of Aristotle. Aquinas agrees with Aristotle that a magnanimous man "strives to do what is deserving of honor, yet not so as to think much of the honor accorded by man."¹²⁴

If a magnanimous man desires and attempts to perform great acts of virtue, he does them not because he craves recognition from others or glory, but because he considers them as appropriate expressions of the excellence that he has. More than just seeking honor qua public recognition, a magnanimous man strives, above all, to be worthy of honor by performing great acts of virtue, in much as honor is the attestation to virtue. Hence, "the magnanimous man cares more for truth than for opinion. . . . He will not depart from what he ought to do according to virtue only because he is preoccupied with what others think."¹²⁵ Notwithstanding all this, Aristotle's magnanimous man still measures his worth or greatness in terms of his superiority vis-à-vis others. He exalts self-sufficiency and dislikes being indebted to others, for this would imply shameful deficiency, dependency, and inferiority. Aristotle writes, "He is the sort of person who does good but is ashamed when he receives it; for doing good is proper to the superior person, it receiving it is proper of the inferior. . . . The recipient is inferior to the giver, and the magnanimous man wishes to be superior" (*Nic. Ethic.* 4.3.1124b9-13).

By Aquinas's standards, Aristotle's magnanimous man is presumptuous, on account of his pretentious self-sufficiency, that is, his independence from both divine and human assistance. Aquinas's magnanimous man is shaped by humility and, thus, rather than feeling ashamed of being a debtor to another's favor, he feels grateful for it. "Magnanimity makes a man deem himself worthy of great things in consideration

¹²³ See Mary M. Keys, "Aquinas and the Challenge of Aristotelian Magnanimity," *History of Political Thought* 24 (2003): 37-65; R. Konyndyk DeYoung, "Aquinas's Virtues of Acknowledged Dependence: A New Measure of Greatness," *Faith and Philosophy* 62 (2004): 214-27.

¹²⁴ *STh* II-II, q. 129, a. 1, ad 3; Cf. Aristotle, *Nic. Ethic.* 4.3.1123b22-25.

¹²⁵ IV *Nic. Ethic.*, lect. 10 (Leonine ed., 47/2:153-56).

of the gift he holds from God.”¹²⁶ In addition to gratitude for and confidence in God’s help, a magnanimous man also exhibits attitude for and confidence in others’ assistance: “Insofar as he needs others, it belongs to the magnanimous man to have confidence in others, for it is also a point of excellence in a man that he should have at hand those who are able to be of service to him.”¹²⁷ He recognizes his potential for performing great acts of virtue as a gift from God, and at the same time he accepts with a great heart the fact of his lack of perfection: “There is in man something great which he possesses through the gift of God and something defective which accrues to him through the weakness of nature.”¹²⁸ Thus, in Aquinas’s account, humility restrains the mind of Aristotle’s magnanimous man from falling into the presumption that is due to excessive self-confidence.

Acknowledging his dependence on God and on others, Aquinas’s magnanimous man is not ashamed to ask for help and to receive a favor from another, when that is necessary. If the leper of Mark 1:40-45 was able not only to accept his physical defect but also to appear in public in a hopeful attempt to find a remedy, that is because he was not only humble but was simultaneously also magnanimous. Likewise, if the crucified Jesus was able to bear the most shameful manner of death and to face the contemptuous gaze of the hostile onlookers without falling into despair and failing in hope for his bodily resurrection and glorification,¹²⁹ that must

¹²⁶ *STh* II-II, q. 129, a. 3, ad 4.

¹²⁷ *STh* II-II, q. 129, a. 6, ad 1.

¹²⁸ *STh* II-II, q. 129, a. 3, ad 4.

¹²⁹ In Aquinas’s account humility-informed magnanimity, in some respects, can coincide with the theological virtue of hope. Both humility-informed magnanimity and the theological virtue of hope encourage and strengthen the mind of a believer for a strenuous task of attaining a possible but difficult good in the awareness of God’s unfailing assistance. Yet they also differ in some respects. First, while as a moral virtue subordinate to courage magnanimity resides in the irascible part of the soul, the theological virtue of hope belongs to the will or the rational appetite. Second, magnanimity and hope differ with regard to their objects. The possible but difficult good in question for magnanimity is a great thing deserving great honor. Being confident in the gifts he has received from God, Aquinas’s magnanimous man is hopeful of being capable of accomplishing great things. In the case of the theological virtue of hope, the good in question is God himself. Hope makes a believer tend to God both as the ultimate good to be obtained and as a strong helper to rely on while pursuing that ultimate good. For a fuller treatment of the theological virtue of hope see, R. Cessario, O.P., “The Theological Virtue of Hope,” in *The*

be due to his humility-informed magnanimity. Magnanimity renders someone capable of performing a virtuous action even if such an action looks disgraceful in the eyes of others. The magnanimous man does take care of his good name. Yet he does great acts of virtue not for the sake of human glory, as he does not take empty pleasure in human praise. Insofar as he strives more to be *honorable* than to be *honored*, and *cares more for truth than for opinion*, he *is* able to despise any honor or disgrace that he does not actually deserve. Informed by humility, the magnanimous man is not ashamed of shame, including shame due to disgrace according to truth; he is liable to shame where there is adequate reason to feel it. Instead of paralyzing him, shame can motivate him to improve by amending the defective aspect of his self.

CONCLUSION

Unlike some Aristotelian scholars mentioned in the introduction, therefore, Aquinas does not see why the Stagirite should have recognized shame, particularly in its prospective form of a sense of shame, as a genuine moral virtue. There is no question, *pace* Raymond, that one's good name or reputation is an external good that renders an individual more trustworthy and thus guarantees him more success in his social life. Indeed, by doing virtuous acts, a virtuous person desires not only to be good but also to be reputed as good. It is in his interest to avoid anything that would bring him disrepute. Nevertheless, good reputation is not the ultimate good, and above a good reputation there are other still more valuable goods. In Aquinas's perspective, if one shuns doing what is morally more valuable only in order to avoid disrepute, then one must either be imperfect with regard to his virtuous habits—perhaps he is a young moral learner who relies heavily on his sense of shame—or be lacking in humility-informed magnanimity. Shaped by the paired virtues of humility and magnanimity, truly virtuous

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Ethics of Aquinas, ed. S. J. Pope (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 232-43. In the case of shame that generates despair, the theological virtue of hope can have a significant role to play. The theological virtue of hope enables the ashamed person not to lose sight of the goal of perfect happiness and not to give up the arduous journey of reforming or reinventing one's defective self but to lean on God as the savior and friend who will help him to complete that journey.

persons are able to transcend the passion of shame and to forgo their good reputation in order to attain some higher goods (e.g., a spiritual good).

Thus, rather than relying on a sense of shame, truly virtuous persons should rely on their rational judgment and deliberate choice. This is not to say that, in Aquinas's account, retrospective shame or a prospective sense of shame play no role at all in the virtuous man's life. Since virtuous persons are not morally infallible, they might appropriately feel retrospective shame when they lapse into base actions. Additionally, inasmuch as virtuous persons are mindful of their dignity and honorability, a prospective sense of shame continues to inspire them to act temperately. On this point, Kristjánsson, who criticizes Aristotle for having undervalued the role of a sense of shame in virtuous persons, would happily agree with Aquinas. That notwithstanding, for Aquinas the temperate person cannot simply follow his sense of shame either, for at times the sense of shame can be misleading. The temperate person still needs to deliberate whether his sense of shame is rationally justifiable or not. Hence, although shame can be virtuous, that is, morally praiseworthy, especially in the humble and magnanimous person, it still falls short of the perfect notion of a moral virtue because of the very fact that it does not operate from choice and needs to be sustained by other virtues in order to produce a beneficial outcome.

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