

QUESTION 144

Shame

Next we have to consider each part of temperance specifically, and, first of all, the *integral* parts, which are *shame* (*verecundia*) (question 144) and *moral uprightness* (*honestas*) (question 145).

With respect to a sense of shame, there are four questions: (1) Is shame a virtue? (2) What things does shame have to do with? (3) Before whom does a man feel shame? (4) To whom does it belong to be ashamed?

Article 1

Is shame a virtue?

It seems that shame (*verecundia*) is a virtue:

Objection 1: As is clear from the definition of virtue that is posited in *Ethics* 2, it is a property of a virtue to exist in the mean or middle (*in medio*) according to reason's determination. But shame consists in a mean of this sort. Therefore, shame is a virtue.

Objection 2: Everything praiseworthy is either a virtue or something that belongs to a virtue. Now shame is something praiseworthy. But it is not a part of any virtue. For it is not a part of *prudence*, since it exists in the appetite and not in reason. Nor, again, is it a part of *justice*, since shame involves some sort of passion, whereas justice does not have to do with the passions. Similarly, it is also not a part of *fortitude*, since fortitude involves enduring and attacking, whereas shame involves some sort of backing away. Nor, again, is it a part of *temperance*, since temperance has to do with sentient desires, whereas shame is some sort of fear, as is clear from the Philosopher in *Ethics* 4 and from Damascene in *De Fide Orthodoxa* 2. Therefore, it follows that shame is a virtue.

Objection 3: As is clear from Tully in *De Officio* 1, 'morally upright' (*honestum*) agrees with *virtue*. But shame is a part of moral uprightness; for instance, in *De Officiis* 1 Ambrose says, "Shame is the companion and kinsman of the placid mind; it is averse to impudence, a stranger to any kind of excess; it loves sobriety, favors what is upright, seeks beauty." Therefore, shame is a virtue.

Objection 4: Every vice is opposed to some virtue. But there are vices opposed to shame, viz., *shamelessness* (*inverecundia*) and *disordered shock* (*inordinatus stupor*). Therefore, shame is a virtue.

Objection 5: As is explained in *Ethics* 2 and 4, similar habits are generated from [similar] acts. But shame involves a praiseworthy act. Therefore, a habit is caused by many such acts. But as is clear from the Philosopher in *Ethics* 1, a habit of praiseworthy works is a virtue. Therefore, shame is a virtue.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics* 2 and 4 the Philosopher claims that shame is not a virtue.

I respond: *Virtue* is taken in two ways, viz., *properly speaking* (*proprie*) and *generally speaking* (*communiter*):

Properly speaking, as *Physics* 7 explains, "a virtue or power (*virtus*) is a certain perfection." And so anything that is incompatible with perfection, even if it is something good, falls short of the notion of a virtue. But shame is incompatible with perfection. For shame is the fear of something unseemly that is worthy of reproach (*timor alicuius turpis quod est exprobrabile*); hence, Damascene says, "Shame is the fear of an unseemly act." But, as was established above when we were talking about the passions (*ST* 1-2, q. 41, a. 2 and q. 42, a. 3), just as *hope* has to do with a good that is possible and arduous, so *fear* has to do with an evil that is possible and arduous. But an individual who is perfected by the habit of a virtue does not think of his doing something that is unseemly and worthy of reproach as possible and arduous for him, i.e., as something that it is difficult for him to avoid; nor does he actually do anything unseemly in the light of which he might fear dishonor (*opprobrium*). Hence, shame is not properly speaking a virtue, since it falls short of the perfection of a virtue.

On the other hand, everything that is good and praiseworthy in human acts and passions is called a

virtue *generally speaking*. And on this score shame is sometimes called a virtue, since it is a praiseworthy passion.

Reply to objection 1: *Existing in the mean* is not *sufficient* for the notion of a virtue, even though it is one of the particulars that is posited in the definition of virtue. Rather, what is further required is that it be an *elective habit*, i.e., a habit that operates by choice.

However, ‘shame’ names a *passion* and *not a habit*. And its movement arises not from choice, but from the impetus of the passion. Hence, shame falls short of the notion of a virtue.

Reply to objection 2: As has been explained, shame is the fear of what is unseemly and worthy of reproach. Now it was explained above (q. 142, a. 4) that the vice of intemperance is the most unseemly and worthy of reproach of all the vices. And so shame belongs more principally to temperance than to any other virtue by reason of *what moves it*, i.e., the *unseemly*—though not because of the species of the passion, i.e., fear.

Still, to the extent that the vices opposed to the other virtues are unseemly and worthy of reproach, shame can belong to the other virtues as well.

Reply to objection 3: Shame fosters moral uprightness by *removing things* contrary to moral uprightness and *not* in such a way that *it itself* attains to the perfected notion of moral uprightness.

Reply to objection 4: Any defect whatsoever is a cause of a vice, but not everything good is sufficient for the notion of a virtue. And so it need not be the case that everything to which a vice is directly opposed is a virtue—even though, as regards its origin, every vice is opposed to some virtue. And so insofar as shamelessness arises from an excessive love of unseemliness, it is opposed to temperance.

Reply to objection 5: Many instances of being ashamed do indeed cause the habit of an acquired virtue by which an individual avoids the unseemly things that the shame has to do with; however, the habit is not acquired in order that the individual might keep on feeling ashamed. Instead, by the habit of the acquired virtue the individual is such that he *would be* ashamed if the subject matter of shame were present.

Article 2

Does shame have to do with an unseemly act?

It seems that shame does not have to do with an unseemly act (*verecundia non sit de turpi actu*):

Objection 1: In *Ethics* 4 the Philosopher says that shame is “the fear of disgrace (*timor ingloriationis*).” But sometimes those who are not doing anything unseemly suffer disgrace—this according to Psalm 68:8 (“For Your sake I have borne disgrace (*opprobrium*), shame (*confusio*) has covered my face”). Therefore, it is not the case that shame properly has to do with an unseemly act.

Objection 2: It seems to be the case that the only things that are unseemly have the character of a sin. But a man is ashamed of certain things that are not sins, e.g., if an individual carries out servile works. Therefore, it seems not to be the case that shame properly has to do with an unseemly act.

Objection 3: As *Ethics* 1 puts it, the operations of the virtues are “beautiful” and not unseemly. But sometimes individuals are ashamed to do works of virtue; as Luke 9:26 says, “If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him ...” Therefore, it is not the case that shame has to do with an unseemly act.

Objection 4: If shame properly had to do with an unseemly act, then it would have to be the case that a man is more ashamed of acts that are more unseemly. But sometimes a man is more ashamed of things that are less sinful even while he glories in the most serious of sins—this according to Psalm 51:3 (“Why do you glory in malice?”). Therefore, shame does not properly have to do with an unseemly act.

But contrary to this: In *De Fide Orthodoxa* 2 Damascene agrees with Gregory of Nyssa that “shame is the fear involved in an unseemly act” or “in effecting something unseemly.”

I respond: As was explained above when we were talking about the passion of fear (*ST* 1-2, q. 41, a. 2 and q. 42, a. 3), fear properly has to do with an *arduous evil*, i.e., an evil that is difficult to avoid. Now there are two sorts of unseemliness (*turpitude*):

One sort is sinful (*vitiosa*) and consists in the deformity of a voluntary act. Properly speaking, this sort of unseemliness does not have the character of an arduous evil, since what consists solely in an act of the will does not seem to be arduous and elevated beyond a man’s power, and because of this it is not apprehended under the notion *fearful* (*terribile*). That is why in *Rhetoric* 2 the Philosopher claims that there is no fear of such evils.

The other sort of unseemliness is, as it were, a punishment (*poenalis*) that consists in vilifying someone, in the same way that the fame of glory consists in honoring someone. And since vilification of this sort has the character of an arduous evil, in the same way that honor has the character of an arduous good, shame, which is the fear of unseemliness, principally and primarily has to do with dishonor or disgrace (*vituperium seu opprobrium*). And since dishonor is owed to vice in the same way that honor is owed to virtue, it also follows as a consequence that shame has to do with sinful unseemliness (*respicit turpitudinem vitiosam*). Hence, as the Philosopher explains in *Rhetoric* 2, a man is less ashamed of those defects that do not arise from any fault of his own.

Now there are two ways in which shame relates to sin (*respicit culpam dupliciter*):

(a) An individual ceases to commit sins because of his fear of being dishonored (*desinat vitiosa agere propter timorem vituperii*).

(b) In the unseemly things that a man does, he avoids public scrutiny because of his fear of being dishonored (*in turpibus quae agit vitet publicos conspectus propter timorem vituperii*).

According to Gregory of Nyssa, the first of these involves *embarrassment* (*pertinet ad erubescendum*), whereas the second involves *shame* (*ad verecundiam*). That is why he says that someone who is ashamed hides himself in what he does, whereas the one who is embarrassed fears falling into dishonor.

Reply to objection 1: Shame properly speaking involves disgrace (*respicit ingloriationem*) insofar as disgrace is owed to sin, which is a voluntary defect. Hence, in *Rhetoric* 2 the Philosopher says, “A man is more ashamed of all those things of which he himself is the cause.”

By contrast, the virtuous individual disdains insults that are thrown at him, since they are inflicted on him undeservedly—just as the Philosopher says of magnanimous individuals in *Ethics* 4, and just as Acts 5:41 says of the apostles that “they went away rejoicing from the presence of the council, because they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name of Jesus.”

However, because of the imperfectness of an individual’s virtue, it is possible for him to be ashamed in the face of dishonor brought upon him because of his virtue. For it is the more virtuous individual who has the greater disdain for exterior goods or evils. Hence, Isaiah 51:7 says, “Do not fear the insults of men.”

Reply to objection 2: In the same way that, as was established above (q. 63, a. 3), honor points to any sort of excellence even though it is not truly owed to anything other than virtue, so, too, even though blame is properly owed to sin alone, it nonetheless points to any sort of defect, at least in the opinion of men. And this is why some individuals are ashamed of poverty, or low social status (*ignobilitas*), or servitude, or other such things.

Reply to objection 3: Shame does not have to do with virtuous acts taken in their own right (*in se consideratis*). However, it happens incidentally (*contingit per accidens*) that an individual is ashamed of them, either because they are thought of as sins in the opinion of men or else because the man is trying to avoid being marked by his virtuous works as presumptuous or even hypocritical.

Reply to objection 4: It sometimes happens that certain sins are more serious but less shameful,

either because they have less of the nature of unseemliness, as with spiritual sins compared to carnal sins, or because they exhibit an abundance of some temporal good, in the way that a man is more ashamed of cowardice than of rashness, or more ashamed of theft than of robbery, because of a certain appearance of power [in the latter]. And the something similar holds in the case of other sins.

Article 3

Does a man feel more ashamed before persons who are connected with him?

It seems that a man does not feel more ashamed before persons who are connected with him:

Objection 1: *Rhetoric 2* says, “Men are more embarrassed before those whom they want to be held in high esteem by (*ab illis a quibus volunt in admiratione haberi*).” But a man desires this most of all from his betters, who are sometimes not very closely connected with him (*qui quandoque non sit magis coniuncti*). Therefore, it is not the case that a man feels more ashamed before those who are more closely connected with him.

Objection 2: Those who perform similar works seem to be more connected with one another. Now a man is not embarrassed by his own sin in the presence of those whom he knows are subject to a similar sin, since, as *Rhetoric 2* puts it, “A man does not forbid his neighbors to do what he himself does.” Therefore, it is not the case that a man feels ashamed before those with whom he is most closely connected.

Objection 3: In *Rhetoric 2* the Philosopher says, “Men feel more ashamed before those who divulge what they know to many people, e.g. satirists and story-tellers (*irrisores et fabularum fictores*).” But those who are more connected to one do not normally divulge vices. Therefore, one should not feel ashamed before them most of all.

Objection 4: In the same place the Philosopher says, “Men feel ashamed especially before those in whose eyes they have never previously gone amiss, and before those from whom they are asking a favor for the first time, and before those whom they wish to become friends with.” But such individuals are less connected with them. Therefore, it is not the case that a man feels more ashamed before those with whom he is more connected.

But contrary to this: *Rhetoric 2* says, “A man is more embarrassed before those who will always be with him.”

I respond: Since blame is opposed to honor, it follows that just as honor implies a sort of testimony to someone’s excellence, and mainly excellence with respect to virtue, so, too, dishonor—which shame is the fear of—implies testimony to someone’s defectiveness, and mainly defectiveness that involves some sin. And so to the extent that an individual’s testimony is thought of as having more weight, one feels more ashamed before him.

Now an individual’s testimony can be thought of as having more weight either (a) because of its *certitude of truth* or (b) because of *its effect*:

Now there are two reasons why *certitude of truth* is present to an individual’s testimony. First, because of his *rectitude of judgment*, as is clear from the case of the wise and virtuous, whom a man is more desirous of being honored by and before whom he feels more ashamed. Hence, no one feels ashamed before children and animals, and this because of the lack of judgment that exists in them. Second, because of *knowledge of those about whom the testimony is given*, since each individual judges well the things that he knows, whereas we do not in any way feel shame before those who are strangers and completely unknown to us and whom news of our deeds has not reached.

As for *its effect*, some testimony has great weight because of the advantage or damage that proceeds from it. This is why men are more desirous of being honored by those who can help them and why they

are more ashamed before those who can harm them. And this is also why, in a certain respect, we are more ashamed before persons we are connected with and with whom we will always be living, since constant damage, as it were, might result from this, whereas the damage that comes from strangers and cursory acquaintances passes quickly.

Reply to objection 1: The argument in light of which we are ashamed before our betters is similar to the argument in light of which we are ashamed before those who are more closely joined to us. For just as the testimony of those who are better is thought of as more effective because of the *general* knowledge they have of things and the firm judgment they have of the truth, so, too, the testimony of persons close to us seems more effective because they have more knowledge of *particulars* that have to do with us.

Reply to objection 2: We do not fear the testimony of those who are conjoined to us by a similar sin because we do not think that they will see our defect as something unseemly.

Reply to objection 3: We are ashamed before those who divulge things because of the damage that comes therefrom, viz., our defamation in the eyes of many.

Reply to objection 4: It is likewise (a) because of the damage that follows that we are more ashamed before those among whom we have done nothing bad—more specifically, because we thereby lose the good opinion which they had of us—and also (b) because contraries, when juxtaposed to one another, seem greater, with the result that when an individual suddenly perceives something unseemly about someone whom he had previously thought well of, he apprehends it as even more unseemly.

Again, we are more ashamed before those from whom we are asking a favor for the first time, or before those whom we now for the first time wish to befriend, because of the damage which comes from this and which is an obstacle to the favor's being granted and the friendship's being formed.

Article 4

Is it possible for shame to exist in virtuous men?

It seems that it is possible for shame to exist in virtuous men:

Objection 1: The effects of contraries are themselves contraries. But those who abound in malice do not feel shame—this according to Jeremiah 3:3 (“You had a harlot’s appearance, you did not know to feel embarrassed”). Therefore, those who are virtuous have more shame.

Objection 2: In *Rhetoric 2* the Philosopher says, “Men are embarrassed not only by vices, but by indications of vices.” But the latter happens in the case of the virtuous as well. Therefore, shame can exist in the virtuous.

Objection 3: Shame is the fear of disgrace. But some virtuous men also happen to be disgraced, e.g., when they are falsely defamed or, again, when they undeservedly suffer insults. Therefore, shame can exist in a virtuous man.

Objection 4: As has been explained (q. 143), shame is a part of temperance. But the part is not separate from the whole. Therefore, since temperance exists in a virtuous man, it seems that shame does, too.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics 4* the Philosopher says, “Shame does not belong to an assiduous man.”

I respond: As has been explained (aa. 1-2), shame is the fear of something unseemly. Now there are two ways in which it can happen that an evil is not feared: (a) because it is not thought of as evil, and (b) it is not thought of as a possibility or as something difficult to avoid. Accordingly, there are two ways in which shame can be absent in an individual:

First, things of which one should be ashamed are not apprehended as unseemly. And this is the way in which men who are steeped in their sins lack shame; they are not displeased with their sins, but instead

glory in them.

Second, because individuals do not think of the unseemliness as possible for themselves or as something that is not easily avoidable. And this is the way in which old men and virtuous men lack shame. Yet they are disposed in such a way that if there were something unseemly in them, then they would be ashamed of it; this is why in *Ethics* 4 the Philosopher says, “Shame exists conditionally in the assiduous individual.”

Reply to objection 1: As has already been explained, a lack of shame occurs by diverse causes in the worst of men and in the best of men. However, shame is found in those men who behave in a middling way, insofar as they have some love of the good and yet are not totally immune from the bad.

Reply to objection 2: It belongs to the virtuous individual not only to avoid vices, but also to avoid anything that has the appearance of vice—this according to 1 Thessalonians 5:22 (“Refrain from all evil appearance”). Again, in *Ethics* 4 the Philosopher says that virtuous individuals should avoid those things which are evil “in truth” as well as those things which are evil “according to opinion.”

Reply to objection 3: As has been explained (a. 2), the virtuous individual disdains defamation and insults as things that he does not deserve. And so he does not much feel ashamed about them. Still, there is some movement of shame that precedes reasoning, just as with the rest of the passions.

Reply to objection 4: Shame is a part of temperance *not* in the sense that it *enters into the essence of temperance*, but in the sense that it *behaves like a disposition toward temperance (quasi dispositiva se habens ad ipsam)*. Hence, in *De Officiis* 1 Ambrose says that “shame lays down the first foundations of temperance,” viz., insofar as it excites a horror of unseemliness.