Guest Editor's Preface

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The idea of this monographic issue originated in a workshop that took place at the University of Pisa on October 3, 2014 on the legacy of Bernard Williams's *Shame and Necessity*.[1] The goal is to reflect from different perspectives on one particular problem on which Williams's book gave a decisive contribution, namely, on the nature, history, and moral relevance of shame in contrast with other emotions such as guilt and fear.

Shame and Necessity was published in 1993 as a result of the Sather Lectures that Bernard Williams gave in 1989 at the University of California, Berkeley. When the book came out it attracted the attention of both philologists and philosophers.[2] With a polemical stance towards what he called the "progressivist view," Williams proposed a philosophical critique of some fundamental moral concepts in light of what he found illuminating in the Greek ethical world.

By "progressivism" Williams meant to refer to the view, accepted by several scholars, that in ancient Greek literature, and especially in epic and tragedy, one would find an essentially primitive conception of psychological motivation, of action and of responsibility. According to such interpretation, the Homeric world lacked the distinction between body and soul, without which one could not attribute responsibility to an agent for his or her intentional actions, and conceive of moral action as based on the will. In turn, the tragedies were populated by heroes at the mercy of divine forces, and subject to forms of necessity that were clearly incompatible with free will and autonomy.

The simplest way to express the contrast between the Greeks' ethical world and the modern moral conception is to claim that the advent of Christianity

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[1] Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, Sather Classical Lectures, Volume 57, University of California Press, Berkeley 1993. From now on *Shame and Necessity* will be abbreviated as *SN*.

[2] See for example M. Miller, "Review of *Shame and Necessity*," *Modern Philology*, Vol. 93, No. 2, 1995, 217-225; T. Irwin, "Critical Notice of B. Williams, *Shame and Necessity*," *Apeiron*, 27 1994, 45–76; P. Woodruff, "Review of *Shame and Necessity*," *Ancient Philosophy*, 16 1996, 177–80. A. A. Long, "Williams on Greek Literature and Philosophy", in *Bernard Williams* (edited by A. Thomas), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, 155-180.

allowed for progress from a culture of shame (based on appearance and fundamentally heteronomous) to a culture of guilt (based on interiority and the autonomy of the will).

In itself Williams's polemical stance towards progressivism *qua* historical interpretation would not have been very interesting if it had not been part of a very complex project. Indeed, in *Shame and Necessity* one can see several interrelated issues being addressed:

a) Accuracy in the history of thought. The question is how to develop a view of the past free from a prejudice in favour of modern concepts and at the same time also immune to the temptation of believing in the possibility of an absolute point of view.

b) The Greek conception of ethical and psychological phenomena. This includes the question of whether Homeric characters are capable of deliberation, how they ascribe responsibility, if and how they act on the basis of their deliberations, how Homeric and tragic characters see themselves in relation to their actions and intentions.

c) Necessity and shame. When the Homeric and tragic characters affirm certain actions as necessary, they are neither thinking in terms of hypothetical imperatives, nor autonomously choosing on the basis of categorical imperatives. What kind of necessity are they invoking when, like Ajax, they affirm that there is only one path that remains open to them and they claim that they *must* take it? How does shame work as a motivation for action? On the one hand the Greek characters who appeal to shame seem to express concerns which involve their sense of personal identity (performing certain actions appears to them as a betrayal of who they really are), while on the other hand shame is also a response to concrete social expectations. How are we to understand the relationship between activity and passivity, autonomy and heteronomy in the specific case of shame?

d) Moral concepts belonging to the contemporary philosophical discourse (such as will, autonomy, spontaneity, moral responsibility, guilt, regret). Are they as clear as the progressivist view claims they are? Can they withstand criticism when contrasted with alternative explanations of actions and emotions as they emerge from an analysis of Greek literature that does not take those very concepts for granted?

Because the answers to these questions are dependent on each other, *Shame and Necessity* can function as a critical reflection on contemporary ethics because it is at the same time a reflection on paths that ethics never took or left behind.

Williams found such paths hidden behind the ideological reconstructions provided by the progressivist view. In order for his project to work he had first to show that there was a peculiar combination of theoretical, historical and philological problems in the premises governing the distinction between the Greek culture of shame and the post Christian culture of guilt. He concentrated on the

shortcomings of progressivism and argued that it led to misunderstanding some major ethical aspects of Greek life. Nietzsche's influence is evident in his critical reflection on the relationship between history, philosophy and literature, which sets the premises for a philosophically interesting and philologically informed reading of the texts.[3]

The ultimate goal was to show that the most common explanatory concepts employed in contemporary moral philosophy were not adequate. Ascribing responsibility is not just a matter of recognizing intentions. It involves different ways in which an agent can be identified with or dissociated from his or her actions, the interaction between what someone does and what just happens to him or her, and the complex web of personal and social expectations that make one emotionally respond in certain ways to certain actions.

The cultural gap between the Greeks and us is significant if we consider contemporary and ancient *theories* of action, while it becomes considerably smaller if we lay bare the structures that actually govern our behavior. To accomplish this Williams moved beyond theory to literature and legal texts. There is a difference, he argued, between "what we think and what we merely think that we think" (*SN*, 7), and he thought that his reflections on Greek literature helped uncovering it. This is why he explored the ways of attributing responsibility in the Anglo-American legal system, rather than concentrating only on contemporary philosophical moral theories, while with respect to the ancients his attention was devoted mainly to Homer and the tragic poets (with a preference for Sophocles) rather than to philosophers like Plato and Aristotle.[4]

By focusing on how the epic and tragic characters deliberate, blame themselves or are proud of what they do, Williams challenged the most common views concerning the similarities and differences between the Greeks and us. This in turn helped him show the gap between our theories and the attitudes we ordinarily have towards our actions:

> If our modern ethical understanding does involve illusions, it keeps going at all only because it is supported by models of human behavior that are more realistic than it acknowledges. It is these models that were expressed

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[3] On Williams and Nietzsche, see R. Geuss, "Thucydides, Nietzsche and Williams," *Outside Ethics*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford 2005, 219-233.

[4] Cfr. *SN*, 14: "Most of the texts that I consider in this book do not even look like philosophy, and my aim is not to make them do so. Tragedy, in particular, is important to many of the questions I want to ask, but its importance is not going to be discovered by treating it as philosophy, or even, rather more subtly, as a medium for discussion that was replaced by philosophy. By the same token, to point out the obvious fact that these plays are not works of philosophy tells us nothing at all about what their interest for philosophy might be."

differently, and in certain respects more directly, in the ancient world. In these relations there is […] a two-way street between past and present; if we can liberate the Greeks from patronizing misunderstandings of them, then that same process may help to free us of misunderstandings of ourselves (*SN*, 11).

Since his turning to the history of thought was motivated by theoretical questions, one interesting consequence of the project Williams undertook with *Shame and Necessity* was that the book spoke to analytic and continental philosophers alike. Williams was impatient both with analytic jargon not informed by historical sensitivity, and with a philological practice not conscious of its philosophical premises. With respect to philologists and historians his critical attitude is obvious in *Shame and Necessity*, but if we turn to "Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline" we can see very clearly the kind of criticism he leveled against some argumentative habits common among analytic philosophers:

Paul Grice used to say that we 'should treat great and dead philosophers as we treat great and living philosophers, as having something to say to us.' That is fine, so long as it is not assumed that what the dead have to say to us is much the same as what the living have to say to us. Unfortunately, this is probably what was being assumed by those who, in the heyday of confidence in what has been called the 'analytic history of philosophy', encouraged us to read something written by Plato 'as though it had come out in *Mind* last month'—an idea which, if it means anything at all, means something that destroys the main philosophical point of reading Plato at all. The point is not confined to the 'analytic' style. There is an enjoyable passage by Collingwood in which he describes how 'the old gang of Oxford realists', as he called them, notably Prichard and Joseph, would insist on translating some ancient Greek expression as 'moral obligation' and then point out that Aristotle, or whoever it was, had an inadequate theory of moral obligation. It was like a nightmare, Collingwood said, in which one met a man who insisted on translating the Greek word for a trireme as 'steamship' and then complained that the Greeks had a defective conception of a steamship.

Of course, *Shame and Necessity* had such ambitious aspirations that it was exposed to criticisms from each specialized field it touched upon, and twenty-two years after its publication it is not easy to ascertain whether it had the impact it deserved on ancient philosophy scholarship.

Bernard Williams has often been accused of being primarily a destroyer of theories rather than someone willing and capable to offer alternatives. The scathing irony with which he sometimes addressed theories he found inadequate gave the impression (to some) that he was fundamentally a skeptic who enjoyed dismantling anything that looked like a system (and most famously what he used

to call the morality system).

The characterization of Williams as a skeptic is mostly correct. Nonetheless, he had seen something crucial. There was indeed a problem that he approached from different points of view, a source of confusion which he tried to warn us against in quite a few of his writings. What I take to be his fundamental insight can be expressed negatively, though it was meant to have positive consequences: *philosophy ought not to aim at total awareness*. He took this point to be important both with respect to historical accuracy and with respect to ethics. What had to be avoided by the historian was the mistake of thinking that by giving up the belief in an absolute standpoint one was going to surrender historical accuracy altogether. He argued for this idea several times. One clear example was his reply to Putnam in "Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline":

> But the second assumption I have ascribed to Putnam, that if there were an absolute conception, it would somehow be better than more perspectival representations—that is simply false. Even if it were possible to give an account of the world that was minimally perspectival, it would not be particularly serviceable to us for many of our purposes, such as making sense of our intellectual or other activities, or indeed getting on with most of those activities. For those purposes—in particular, in seeking to understand ourselves—we need concepts and explanations which are rooted in our more local practices, our culture, and our history, and these cannot be replaced by concepts which we might share with very different investigators of the world. The slippery word 'we' here means not the inclusive 'we' which brings together as a purely abstract gathering any beings with whom human beings might conceivably communicate about the nature of the world. It means a contrastive 'we', that is to say, humans as contrasted with other possible beings; and, in the case of many human practices, it may of course mean groupings smaller than humanity as a whole.[5]

In ethics the impossibility of total awareness is due to the fact that we always think *from dispositions*. What we see, the way we see it, our best insights come from our dispositions to see things in certain specific ways, to illuminate our actions according to priorities that we receive from the world and cannot undo (clearly an Aristotelian thought). This is how Williams states this point in the "Postscript" to *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*:

> I hope I have made it clear that the ideal of transparency and the desire that our ethical practice should be able to stand up to reflection do not demand total

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[5] B. Williams, "Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline (2000)," in B. Williams, *Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline*, A.W. Moore, (ed.), Princeton University Press, Princeton 2006, 180-199 (186-7).

explicitness, or a reflection that aims to lay everything bare at once. Those demands are based on a misunderstanding of rationality, both personal and political. We must reject any model of personal practical thought according to which all my projects, purposes, and needs should be made, discursively and at once, considerations *for* me. I must deliberate *from* what I am. Truthfulness requires trust in that as well, and not the obsessional and doomed drive to eliminate it.[6]

In *Shame and Necessity* the warning against the temptation of absolute transparency takes the form of a defense of shame, both as a moral emotion and as a distinctive trait of Greek culture. Shame is contrasted with guilt, which is normally associated, especially by the progressivists, with a more developed moral sense, based on psychological depth, autonomy and self-sufficiency.

In the Greek conception of shame Williams sees preserved some fundamental aspects of guilt, but without the virtues that progressivism attributed to guilt. Shame looks at who I am, and for this reason it encourages attention to what I did or omitted to do, like guilt. But, in contrast with guilt, shame keeps me more strongly connected with others: when I feel ashamed I am not just concerned with what I did *to someone*, but also with what the action reveals *about me*, and, as Williams argues, this question cannot be properly addressed without taking into account how others I respect would react to it. (The other of shame can be concrete or internalized. Fussi and Montes Sánchez address this point in the articles they wrote for this issue).

From the point of view of shame I can be critical of the social expectations to which I am responding, but I cannot sever all ties with them: I cannot go so far as to consider my reflections as stemming from a pure form of rationality, or to consider myself free from my received dispositions of character. Williams's warning to those who take this route is that they run the risk of motivational solipsism (*SN*, 99-100). His retort to those who accuse the Greeks' reliance on shame of leading to selfishness on the one end and to heteronomy on the other hand, is to point out that this kind of critique ultimately leads to contradictory requests concerning the role others should play:

> When it is complained that the Greek ethical outlook, or at least that of the archaic Greeks, is both egoistic and at the same time heteronomous, because it rests conventionally on the opinion of others, there is a constant and powerful tendency for these two complaints to turn against each other. Which is supposed to be the trouble, that these people thought too much about others' reactions, or too little? (*SN*, 100).

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[6] B. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (with a commentary on the text by A. W. Moore), Routledge, London and New York, 2006 ("Postscript," 199-200).

If I understand him correctly, Williams thought that shame forces us to acknowledge that there is always a place and a time *from which* we think. The fact that shame is bound to local practices and expectations makes it ultimately opaque to reason, but this limitation has the important consequence that it keeps philosophical thinking away from embracing illusory hopes. It drives us to realism.

Williams admired Plato enormously, but he thought that precisely because Plato had not given shame the place it deserved in his psychological theory, he believed that philosophy could or should be a liberation from humanity. As others before me have noted, this accusation was misguided. Actually, shame played a central role in Plato's ethical and psychological reflection, and this is true both from the point of view of the arguments explicitly defended by Socrates, and from the point of view of the behavior exemplified by him in the dialogues.

On the argumentative side one should consider the importance of the political and ethical role attributed to spiritedness in the *Republic*, since that part of the soul plays a key role in education, involves social recognition and is responsible for emotions like shame, pride, anger and indignation. On the dramatic side one should mention that Thrasymachus's blushing is clearly a turning point in the first book of the *Republic*. Furthermore, as Laura Candiotto shows in the paper she presents in this volume, the shame felt by the different characters in the *Gorgias* contributes not just to the efficacy of their refutation, but involves the audience as well. That Williams's criticism of Plato was not correct of course does not make his connecting the recognition of the importance of shame with philosophical realism less worthy of reflection.

The essays collected in this volume take their bearings from Williams's discussion of shame, both from the theoretical and the historical point of view. The discussion concentrates on the nature and phenomenology of shame, and on its relationship with emotions like fear or anger, and virtues like courage. The papers follow two main lines of inquiry: two of them (written respectively by Alessandra Fussi and by Alba Montez Sánches) focus on Bernard Williams's account, while for the last two papers (by David Roochnik and by Laura Candiotto) *Shame and Necessity* is the background for further inquiries on the role of shame in ancient thought.

Alessandra Fussi concentrates on Williams's defense of the Greek conception of shame against some commonly held critical views: 1) that shame expresses selfish concerns and it ignores the needs of others; 2) that it belongs to the so called objective attitudes and inhibits second-person responses; 3) that it is dependent on social conventions and is therefore both superficial (since it mostly relies on appearance) and heteronomous (since it depends on external values). In the last part of her paper she concentrates on the role of others in shame. She examines the problem of the other's attitude (do we feel shame only when others are critical of us?), and finally turns to Williams's distinction between the concrete

other and the internalized other, and discusses some difficulties connected with the identity of the other whose views are internalized.

Precisely the notion of the internalized other is the main focus of Alba Montes Sánchez's contribution. She examines in detail Williams's position in *Shame and Necessity*, contrasts it with recent accounts of shame and finally presents and endorses a Sartrean view. In order to clarify the role others play in the feeling of shame Montes Sánchez initially differentiates shame from embarrassment and disgrace. In the second part of her paper she discusses Calhoun's objection to Williams: if respect for the other's judgment is necessary for shame, then ultimately I am my own judge, since I cannot respect judgments that I would not myself share. Calhoun thinks this is wrong: sometimes we are shamed by people we don't respect and by judgments we don't endorse. In her view, this is not a sign that others have contaminated our value system. It simply shows that shame is not about evaluations; it is about their practical impact on the life we share with others. Montes Sánchez observes critically that Williams and Calhoun are both too restrictive in giving others the power to shame us. It is not true, she affirms, that others cannot shame us unless we allow them to do so by respecting them or entering into shared practices with them. Rather, "everybody has, to a higher or lesser degree, the power to shame us *unless we withdraw it* from them through contempt or disengagement, for example." It is on the basis of this view that Montes Sánchez proceeds to retrieve the Sartrean account of shame. The role the other plays in shame is not that of evaluating me, but, more fundamentally, that of allowing me to focus on myself as the object of someone else's perception. The other is fundamental not *qua* internalized other but, rather, as constitutive of the possibility of inter-subjectivity, and hence of transforming me into a subject capable of feeling shame.

The fact that shame is aroused when we feel judged by people we respect (and not just by anybody who happens to be our witness) is a point that Williams shares with Aristotle, who first formalized it. It is to Aristotle's account of the relationship between courage and shame in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that David Roochnik devotes his paper. The problem he addresses is the relationship between courage (which for Aristotle is a virtue) and shame (which is a quasi-virtue: shame is an emotion, not a disposition like virtue, but it is instrumental to virtue because it is appropriately felt by young people in the process of becoming good men). Aristotle affirms that there is a difference between those who exhibit authentic courage and those who exhibit only "political courage" (1116a17). While courageous men "act on account of (*dia*) the *kalon*" (1116b30-31), those who act out of political courage (and are not motivated merely by fear of their superiors) face death in battle because they would be ashamed if they did not. The difference between such men and the truly courageous appears very thin, since both are motivated by what is beautiful and noble. Citizen-soldiers, Aristotle affirms, act "on account of virtue (*di' aretên*). For they do so on account of shame (*aidô*) and a

desire (*orexin*) for the *kalon*, since they have a desire for honor, and in order to avoid blame, which is *aischron*" (1116a27-29). Roochnik distances himself from Irwin's interpretation, for whom the difference rests on the fact that only the truly courageous are altruistic. In facing death they consider the good of others and nothing else, while the citizen-soldiers aim at their selfish interest: they seek honor and the glory of a noble death. According to Roochnik, in Irwin's interpretation the *kalon* is unduly moralized, and it loses the connotation of visibility that is essential to it: something *kalon* is not just noble, but beautiful and fine. Roochnik proposes an interpretation that takes into account two points made by Williams: 1) The internalized other is essential to shame. 2) Shame makes us relate not just to others but to ourselves.

If we remember that shame is an appropriate emotion for young people, we can imagine young soldiers motivated by a desire to be appreciated by their fellow soldiers, by their superiors and by the citizens at large. They act nobly on account of virtue because they desire their deeds to shine in glory. When they get older they will have internalized the sense of the *kalon* for which it is worth fighting. At that point their actions will not just be altruistic (virtue for Aristotle is never disjoined from a concern for one's own happiness), but motivated by a sense of such actions as are appropriate to the kind of people they deem to be. Acting for the sake of the noble will mean, at that point, to act in such a way that one can see himself as *kalon* and hence maintain a sense of his own identity as the kind of person who does certain things and would blame himself for doing something *aischron*. Ultimately, in Roochnik's paper we can see an Aristotelian developmental account from the capacity to feel appropriately ashamed of oneself to that of feeling appropriately proud of oneself.

The volume ends with Laura Candiotto's paper on the role of shame in Socrates's refutation of his interlocutors in Plato's dialogues. More specifically, Candiotto observes that in the dialogues that portray conversations with important public figures (for example politicians, sophists, generals or rhetoricians), Socrates' interlocutors react to their refutation with two alternative attitudes. They either accept the shame of a defeat in argument as an emotional recognition of ignorance (as is the case of Charmides in the dialogue that takes his name), or they try to hide their feelings (as does Critias in the same dialogue, or Callicles in the *Gorgias*) for fear of losing face. In this second instance, the audience plays the role of an extended mind. Those who are present at the refutation become aware that Socrates's interlocutors are unable to acknowledge their failings, and this is for the audience an occasion to see through the social masks exhibited by these public figures and realize what kind of people they really are. That the refutation reaches out to the audience has two consequences: 1) The audience is allowed a critical stance with respect to public figures who tend to use rhetorical defenses in order to hide their shortcomings. 2) Those shortcomings, once perceived by the audience, bounce back to the refuted interlocutors, who are

therefore forced to revise their self-image.

Candiotto's conclusion is that the extended elenchus involves cognitive and emotional means. Its visible aspect is *aporia*, which is the result of a process whereby Socrates, interlocutor and audience through the mediation of shame realize a form of catharsis. The audience is purified from the superficial opinions it initially entertained about the interlocutors and led to consider the subjects under discussion under a different light. The interlocutors, in turn, receive from the audience the possibility of experiencing the shame they initially refused to accept, and this initiates a process of transformation in their attitude towards truth.

The authors whose contributions appear in this volume approach *Shame and Necessity* from different perspectives. To some the book reveals important aspects about Williams's attempt to understand ethics from a genealogical perspective; others find inspiration from the way historiographical categories are questioned. Some are bent on finding connections between Williams's theory of shame and those of authors who preceded or followed him, while others find in this book the invitation to a dialogue with contemporary theories. Williams used to say that philosophical arguments do not need to form a system: it would be good enough if they hung together, "like conspirators perhaps."[7] This is an interesting key to Williams's work. One might hope it can also characterize the essays presented here.

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[7]) B. Williams, "Replies," in J. E. J. Altham & R. Harrison (eds.), *World, Mind, and Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1995, 185–224 (186).