CHAPTER FOUR

Shame and Autonomy

Ajax, when he has fixed on suicide, in almost the last words that he addresses to another human being, says:

> Now I am going where my way must go.[1]

His word is *poreuteon:* an impersonal expression of necessity, a frequent form of speech with Sophocles' heroes. In similar terms, Oedipus says, "I must rule" and "I must hear it." "What are you doing to me?" says Heracles' son to him in the *Trachiniai.* "What has to be done," he replies.[2] It is just one of the ways in which these characters express insistence, refusal, defiance, and other intransigent attitudes, which often evoke from others, equally, expressions of necessity. The model of these characters is to be found in Homer, above all in Achilles, with his rejection of the embassy, and his terrible refusal of Hector.[3]

What necessity are they expressing? It is an important question, and it is easy to go the wrong way towards answering it. The influence of modern morality and Kantian ideas encourages one to ask first whether this is the "must" of duty, the categorical imperative of morality.[4] The answer to that comes readily: the courses of action that some of these characters are taking, and the reasons they give for them, are enough to show that this is not what is at issue. But if that is so, then all that is left on the

Kantian story is that this should be what Kant called a "h
thetical" imperative: a "must" that is relative merely to w
the agent wants to do, as when one says, "I must go n
meaning by it no more than that he must go if he is to do w
ever it is he intends to do. Now it is obvious that the Sophoc
heroes do not straightforwardly mean this. Ajax or Oedipu
capable of having the thought that some step is necessary me
in the sense that it is required by some objective he happens
have; but this is not the thought of either of them in these case
They do not happen just to have some objective to which th
actions are necessary: their heroic "must"s are not experienc
as hanging from an "if" at all. The "must" seems, indeed, cat
gorical, and when Ajax says he must go, he means that he mu
go: period.

It looks, then, as though this "must" represents neither
Kant's imperatives. But the Kantian continues past this poi
and insists that there is an "if", but it is concealed—conceale
indeed from the agents themselves. The necessity the agents ex
press *is* relative, on this view, but it is relative to some desire
that has merely been taken for granted. This desire—the ac
count continues—provides a psychological pressure that the
agents wrongly take for an absolute demand. What that desire
may be depends on the case. It may be fear of the gods, or an
unreflective disposition to fit in with the demands of public
opinion or, at the Achillean limit, simply the projects of a mas
sive self-assertion. But whatever the desire may be, the Kantian
continues, the hidden structure of the "must" comes out the
same. So long as it has not yet reached the unique categorical
demand of morality itself, "I must do this" can never mean
more than "this course of action is necessary if I am to have
what I want or to avoid what I fear."

Here we see the cunning of the Kantian construction, the
power it has to make its articulation of morality seem inescap
able. This can help us to understand its influence in shaping the

progressivist account of the ancient Greek world. Everyone
knows that simply to pursue what you want and to avoid what
you fear is not the stuff of any morality; if those are your only
motives, then you are not within morality, and you do not
have—in a broader phrase—any ethical life. If the Kantian di-
agnosis is correct, then the Greeks do emerge as premoral, with
one or two meritorious exceptions in whom some moral illu-
mination filtered through: Antigone, perhaps, on some accounts
of her, or Socrates. The Greeks were indeed children, and young
children, in a Piagetian tale of moral development, and the Ho-
meric heroes were accurately represented in a verse that was
reprinted in the article on Achilles in Bayle's *Dictionnaire:*

> Nine years Achilles, fair as Day,
> And valiant as his Sword in battle,
> Cry'd for his Mistress, ta'en away,
> Like little Master for his Rattle.[5]

The Kantian account cannot be accepted. It has insoluble
problems on its own territory, in particular to give an account
of how the unique demand of duty is itself supposed to work;
that is not our concern here.[6] What does concern us, and should
concern the Kantian, is that in the Greek nursery itself people
were able to realise that mere self-indulgence and fear were not
all that were expected; they recognised, for instance, virtues of
courage and justice. If that is so, there must be options for ethi-
cal thought and experience that the Kantian construction con-
ceals. There are; in exploring them it is helpful to bear in mind
how Kantian associations constantly work to short-circuit our
understanding of them.

This is nowhere more true than with the concept of shame.
In the scheme of Kantian oppositions, shame is on the bad side
of all the lines. This is well brought out in its notorious associ-
ation with the notion of losing or saving face. "Face" stands for
appearance against reality and the outer versus the inner, so its

values are superficial; I lose face or save it only in the eyes of others, so the values are heteronomous; it is simply my face I save or lose, so they are egoistic. These conceptions of what shame has to be, and of how ethical relations that are importantly governed by shame have to work, are all incorrect. (rather, I am going to argue, if there is anything in them at all, will be found only at the end of a very long line, at a level where the issues involved are much more interesting and problematic than these handy dismissals would suggest. This is so not merely with developments or sophistications of shame that are found later in Greek antiquity. It is true even where the dismissive view has been most confidently applied, in Homer. There is some truth in the idea that Homeric society was a shame culture, which persisted (if in altered forms) certainly into later antiquity and no doubt longer than that. But if we are to make such a claim, we have to get clearer about what is involved in shame itself.

The basic experience connected with shame is that of being seen, inappropriately, by the wrong people, in the wrong condition.[8] It is straightforwardly connected with nakedness, particularly in sexual connections. The word *aidoia*, a derivative of *aidōs*, "shame",[9] is a standard Greek word for the genitals, and similar terms are found in other languages. The reaction is to cover oneself or to hide, and people naturally take steps to avoid the situations that call for it: Odysseus would be ashamed to walk naked with Nausikaa's companions. From this there is a spread of applications through various kinds of shyness or embarrassment. When the gods went to laugh at the spectacle of Aphrodite and Ares caught inextricably *in flagrante delicto* by Hephaistus's nets, the goddesses stayed at home, *aidōi*, "from shame." In the same vocabulary Homer can describe Nausikaa's embarrassment at the idea of mentioning to her father her desire for marriage, Penelope's refusal to appear by herself before the suitors, and Thetis's hesitation to go and visit the gods. Rather

similarly, but farther away from the sexual, Odysseus is embarrassed or ashamed that the Phaiakians should see him crying; and one can place in the same area an isolated occurrence of the noun *aidōs* in the orators, when Isocrates says that in the old days if young men had to cross the *agora*, they did so "with great shame and embarrassment." The avoidance of shame in these cases serves as a motive: you anticipate how you will feel if someone sees you.[10]

A further step is taken when the motive is fear of shame at what people will say about one's actions. In Homer, there are frequent appeals on the battlefield to *aidōs* as a reason for fighting. So Ajax stirs his companions on:

> Dear friends, be men; let shame be in your hearts . . .
> among men who feel shame, more are saved than die.

Nestor appeals to shame "in the sight of other men," as well as asking the warriors to remember their wives and children, their property and their parents, whether living or dead. Indeed, the one word *aidōs*, "shame", serves as a battle cry.[11]

It is possible to see this kind of prospective shame as a form of fear. The Greeks hesitated in face of Hector "in shame of refusing him, in fear of taking up his challenge," and one can see them as being pushed by fear from two sources, one behind them and one in front. The verbs of shame can take the grammatical constructions of fear. So when Hector repents of the mistakes he made by not listening to Polydamas, and comes to the sense that he has ruined the people by his recklessness, he fears that unless he goes to face Achilles, someone inferior to him will speak badly of him:

> I feel shame before the Trojans and the Trojan women with
> trailing
> robes, that someone who is less of a man than I will say of me:
> "Hector believed in his own strength and ruined his people."[12]

Fear is there, but, as we shall see, fear is not the whole story.

The reaction in Homer to someone who has done something that shame should have prevented is *nemesis*, a reaction that can be understood, according to the context, as ranging from shock, contempt, and malice to righteous rage and indignation.[13] It should not be thought that *nemesis* and its related words are ambiguous. It is defined as a reaction, and what it psychologically consists of properly depends on what particular violation of *aidōs* it is a reaction to. As Redfield has put it, *aidōs* and *nemesis* are "a reflexive pair."[14] When Achilles is described as *aidoios nemesētos*, it means that he is, as we well know, touchy about violations of his honour, violations that other people's sense of *aidōs* should prevent them from making: he has a strong sense of *aidōs* himself, and it should protect him from slights. *Nemessētos* (the standard form) usually means not "prone to indignation", but "worthy of indignation", but it is natural, and indeed basic to the operation of these feelings, that *nemesis*, and *aidōs* itself, can appear on both sides of a social relation. People have at once a sense of their own honour and a respect for other people's honour; they can feel indignation or other forms of anger when honour is violated, in their own case or someone else's. These are shared sentiments with similar objects, and they serve to bind people together in a community of feeling.[15]

It is those connections that Poseidon hopes to mobilise when he urges on the troops by an appeal not just to shame, but to *nemesis* as well (13.122). But the things that are *nemessēta* in Homer, fit objects of these reactions, are not simply running away in battle. In the *Iliad*, they include a common man's speaking in the assembly and a god's being too friendly with a mortal; in the *Odyssey*, sending one's mother away, giving poison for arrows, Odysseus appearing before his wife in rags, and the behaviour of the suitors, who are repeatedly described as *anaideis*, "shameless".[16]

The idea, which is associated particularly with the work of A. H. Adkins, that in the Homeric shame culture individuals were overwhelmingly concerned with their own success at the expense of other people is wrong at the level of principle: the structures of *aidōs* and *nemesis* are essentially interactive between people, and they serve to bond as much as to divide.[17] If the shame system is to be convicted of basic egoism, even in its Homeric embodiment, it will have to be at a deeper level than this. Much the same is true of the idea that the shame system is immaturely heteronomous, in the sense that it supposedly pins the individual's sense of what should be done merely on to expectations of what others will think of him or her. This, too, if it is true at all, is true only at a much deeper level than is usually suggested. Just as it is a mistake to think that Homeric shame has as its object only the competitive successes or failures of the individual, it is another mistake to think that Homeric shame involves merely adjustment to the prejudices of the community. In this case, however, there is not just one mistake involved but two, and they have to be distinguished. One is just a silly mistake, while the other is more interesting.

The silly mistake is to suppose that the reactions of shame depend simply on being found out, that the feeling behind every decision or thought that is governed by shame is literally and immediately the fear of being seen. Suppose someone invites us to believe that the Homeric Achilles, if assured he could get away with it, might have crept out at night and helped himself to the treasure that he had refused when it was offered by the embassy: then he has sadly misunderstood Achilles' character, or what Alexander Pope called his "Manners", of which he wrote, "They are well mark'd; and discover before-hand what Resolutions that Hero will take."[18] If everything depended on the fear of discovery, the motivations of shame would not be internalised at all. No one would have a character, in effect, and, moreover, the very idea of there being a shame *culture*, a

coherent system for the regulation of conduct, would be unintelligible.

Even if shame and its motivations always involve in some way or other an idea of the gaze of another, it is important that for many of its operations the imagined gaze of an imagined other will do.[19] It is not so, of course, with the most elementary case, the shame of exposure when naked; someone who was afraid in that case of being exposed to a merely imaginary observer would be afraid of his own nakedness, and his fear would be pathological.[20] But the imaginary observer can enter very early in the progression towards more generalised social shame. Sartre describes a man who is looking through a keyhole and suddenly realises that he is being watched. He might think that it was shameful to do it, not just to be seen doing it, and in that case, an imagined watcher could be enough to trigger the reactions of shame. To overlook the importance of the imagined other is what I just called the silly mistake.

The second and more interesting mistake concerns the identity, and the attitudes, of the other whose gaze is in question. Shame need not be just a matter of being seen, but of being seen by an observer with a certain view. Indeed, the view taken by the observer need not itself be critical: people can be ashamed of being admired by the wrong audience in the wrong way. Equally, they need not be ashamed of being poorly viewed, if the view is that of an observer for whom they feel contempt. Hector was indeed afraid that someone inferior to him would be able to criticise him, but that was because he thought the criticism would be true, and the fact that such a person could make it would only make things worse. The mere fact that such a person had something hostile to say would not in itself necessarily concern him. Similarly on the Greek side of the war, the opinions of Nestor carried weight, and those of Thersites did not.

In some cases, the operations of shame indeed relate just to the attitudes or reactions of a specified social group. What Penelope was weaving, she told the suitors, was a shroud for Odysseus's father,

> lest any
> Achaian woman in this neighborhood hold it against me
> that a man of many conquests lies with no sheet to wind him.[21]

But it is striking even in Homer how someone who is motivated by the idea of shame may not be thinking simply about the reactions of some socially specified reference group. The internalisation of shame does not simply internalise an other who is a representative of the neighbours. Telemachus, complaining to the Ithacan assembly about the behaviour of the suitors, tells them that they must both be outraged themselves and feel shame in the face of other men who live around,[22] and he is not saying the same thing twice. Nausikaa is afraid of what people will say if they see her with the handsome stranger, and that there will be a scandal; but she adds:

> And I myself would think badly of a girl who acted so.[23]

I mentioned earlier the bonding, interactive, effects of shame. An agent will be motivated by prospective shame in the face of people who would be angered by conduct that, in turn, they would avoid for those same reasons. Nausikaa is conscious of how she shares with others the reactions that they might have to her. Her case brings out clearly something that was true also on the battlefield, though perhaps it was less obvious there because of the emphasis in the battle on individual feats of arms: there has to be something for these interrelated attitudes to be about. It is not merely a structure by which I know that you will be annoyed with me because you know that I will be annoyed with you. These reciprocal attitudes have a content: some kinds of behaviour are admired, others accepted, others despised, and it is those attitudes that are internalised, not simply the prospect

of hostile reactions.[24] If that were not so, there would be, once more, no shame *culture*, no shared ethical attitudes at all.

But this tells us something more about what I have called the internalised other: it explains, in fact, why the other need not be a particular individual or, again, merely the representative of some socially identified group. The other may be identified in ethical terms. He (and I should stress particularly here that the pronoun carries no implications of gender) is conceived as one whose reactions I would respect; equally, he is conceived as someone who would respect those same reactions if they were appropriately directed to him.

But if the other is identified in ethical terms, is he any longer playing any real role in these mental processes? Has he any independent part in my psychology if he is constructed out of my own local materials? If he is imagined to react simply in terms of what I think is the right thing to do, surely he must cancel out: he is not an *other* at all.

It is a mistake to take that reductive step and to suppose that there are only two options: that the other in ethical thought must be an identifiable individual or a representative of the neighbours, on the one hand, or else be nothing at all except an echo chamber for my solitary moral voice. Those alternatives leave out much of the substance of actual ethical life. The internalised other is indeed abstracted and generalised and idealised, but he is potentially somebody rather than nobody, and somebody other than me. He can provide the focus of real social expectations, of how I shall live if I act in one way rather than another, of how my actions and reactions will alter my relations to the world about me.

This is how, in the last chapter, we found it to be with Ajax. He could not go on living, and that was because of just such a reciprocal structure as we have now seen in the workings of shame. It was in virtue of the relations between what he expected of the world and what the world expects of a man who

expects that of it. "The world" there is represented in him by an internalised other, and it is not merely any other; he would be as unimpressed by the contempt of some people as he would be by the reassurances of others. But the other in him does represent a real world, in which he would have to live if he went on living. In his particular case, the interlocked expectations between himself and the world are of course peculiarly connected with his status as an heroic warrior, and that is why, in his case, his grotesquely unsuccessful and ridiculous attempt counts for so much.

In Ajax's case, we are shown who the other is, or at least who he must be like. Ajax is considering what to do:

> What countenance can I show my father Telamon?
> How will he bear the sight of me
> If I come before him naked, without any glory,
> When he himself had a great crown of men's praise?
> It is not something to be borne.[25]

Not only is his language full of the most basic images of shame, of sight and nudity, but it expresses directly a reciprocal relation between what he and his father could not bear. But, once again, it is not the mere idea of his father's pain that governs the decision, nor the fact that it is, uniquely, his father. Ajax is identified with the standards of excellence represented by his father's honours. And so he concludes:

> The noble man should either live finely or die finely.[26]

He has no way of living that anyone he respects would respect—which means that he cannot live with any self-respect. That is what he meant when he said *poreuteon*, that he had to go.

It might be thought that the heroic figure in Sophocles who stands in the greatest contrast to Ajax, whose consciousness is most obviously directed to a demand that transcends mere social esteem, and, even more, reaches beyond self-assertion, is Antigone; she has most often been seen so in the course of her

demanding and variegated *Nachleben*, which has been interestingly documented by George Steiner.[27] Indeed she does call, very famously (454–55), on the "unwritten, solid, laws of the gods" as opposed to Creon's "instructions"; and her last words appeal to a value of piety. Though I do not want to say much about Antigone, I think we should ask, at any rate, how far she transcends self-assertion, and in what ways.

We are not shown her deciding; she is another who arrives decided, and at the beginning there is a jarring assertion of self rather than merely an acknowledgement of something required:

> These are the instructions they say the fine Creon has given
> to you and to me—yes, to *me*.[28]

The impression given by these lines is borne out when she contemptuously repudiates, later, Ismene's support. At the bottom of it seems to be not only a project for which she is prepared to die, but a project of dying. She is in love with her brother's death.[29]

Because of much that has happened since, particularly because of Hegel, we tend to see this as a play about political morality. We are led to this by the occasion, the material, of Antigone's defiance, and then we may be puzzled to find, if we look closely, less to mirror this in Antigone's representation of herself than we might have expected. I suspect in fact that Antigone—Sophocles' Antigone, if there is now such a figure—is even more like Sophocles' Electra, a manifestly obsessed character, than the relations of each to her sister already suggest. It is of course true that when Antigone gets what she wants, she does so in nobility, while for Electra the darkness at the end is thicker than at the beginning, because her hatred has been turned into blood. But Creon's obstinacy does not simply elicit a noble response from Antigone. It triggers a ready and massive self-assertion, and the fact that her end can mean what it does

mean (and, still more, what it has come to mean) is in a sense Antigone's good luck.

The play of Sophocles that is most remarkably involved in the workings of shame, the expectation of it and its attempted avoidance, is the *Philoctetes*. When Odysseus tries to persuade Neoptolemus to help him in deceiving Philoctetes, he is brilliantly shown as seeking to bring about something that is precisely designed to undo the effects of a prospective shame, namely, to bracket the action from the rest of life. He says:

> I know, my boy, that you are not of a nature
> to say such things or use a low trick;
> but it is pleasant to lay hold of victory,
> so be bold:[30]

—an appeal to courage itself, a well-known persuasive device against decency, which is still current—*dikaioi d'authis ekphanoumetha*. And that means not "another time, we shall appear to be just," but ". . . we shall be revealed as being just."[31] Then Odysseus states quite precisely what he wants:

> But now for a short part of a day without shame,
> give me yourself: and then for the rest of time
> you can call yourself the most decent of men.

Neoptolemus refuses at this point, saying rather conventionally:

> My lord,
> I prefer to fail nobly rather than to win shabbily.

When Odysseus eventually persuades him, by appealing to the reputation he will get for this success, Neoptolemus says:

> All right, I'll do it, and put the shame aside.[32]

The most natural translation of the word I have translated as "put aside" is "get rid of" or "expel"; but it can also mean

"neglect" or "pass by" something that is still there to be attended to. But I do not think that it can mean, as has been proposed, "I'll put up with the shame."[33] This he cannot do: if it is present to him, he cannot put up with it, and this becomes clear to him later, when he changes his mind. Neoptolemus, although he himself is an heroic warrior, is one for whom the standard by which he measures his own worth quite clearly involves values beyond so-called competitive success, though he is open to the attractions of that, too, which is why he can be temporarily seduced. He learns enough from these experiences to become confident in trying to teach Philoctetes something, in order to reclaim him from savagery and solitude to a shared world. Philoctetes asks him whether, after all this, he is not ashamed to be doing the Atreides' work, and Neoptolemus can say:

> How can someone be ashamed, when they are being of help?[34]

when he is helping, now, Philoctetes.

In this discussion, I have been using the English word "shame" in two ways. It has translated certain Greek words, in particular *aidōs*. It has also had its usual modern meaning. I have been able to use it in both these ways without its falling apart, and this shows something significant. What we have discovered about the Greeks' understanding of these reactions, that they can transcend both an assertive egoism and a conventional concern for public opinion, applies equally well to what we recognise in our own world as shame. If it were not so, the translation could not have delivered so much that is familiar to us from our acquaintance with what we call "shame".

Yet we have another word, "guilt", for which the Greeks had no direct equivalent. This determines for us another concept, and perhaps a distinct experience. Some people think that this difference between ourselves and the Greeks is ethically very important. We must ask whether this is so. First we have to consider how shame and guilt are, in our conception of things, re-

lated to one another. The mere fact that we have the two words does not, in itself, imply that there is any great psychological difference between shame and guilt. It might merely be that we set up an extra verbal marker within one and the same psychological field, in order to pick out some particular applications of what would otherwise be shame—its application to one's own actions and omissions, perhaps.

This might be so, but I do not think that in fact it is. The distinction between shame and guilt goes deeper than this, and there are some real psychological differences between them. The most primitive experiences of shame are connected with sight and being seen, but it has been interestingly suggested that guilt is rooted in hearing, the sound in oneself of the voice of judgement;[35] it is the moral sentiment of the word. There are further differences in the experience of the two reactions. Gabriele Taylor has well said that "shame is the emotion of self-protection,"[36] and in the experience of shame, one's whole being seems diminished or lessened. In my experience of shame, the other sees all of me and all through me, even if the occasion of the shame is on my surface—for instance, in my appearance; and the expression of shame, in general as well as in the particular form of it that is embarrassment, is not just the desire to hide, or to hide my face, but the desire to disappear, not to be there. It is not even the wish, as people say, to sink through the floor, but rather the wish that the space occupied by me should be instantaneously empty.[37] With guilt, it is not like this; I am more dominated by the thought that even if I disappeared, it would come with me.

These differences in the experience of shame and of guilt can be seen as part of a wider set of contrasts between them.[38] What arouses guilt in an agent is an act or omission of a sort that typically elicits from other people anger, resentment, or indignation. What the agent may offer in order to turn this away is reparation; he may also fear punishment or may inflict it on

himself. What arouses shame, on the other hand, is something that typically elicits from others contempt or derision or avoidance. This may equally be an act or omission, but it need not be: it may be some failing or defect. It will lower the agent's self-respect and diminish him in his own eyes. His reaction, as we just saw, is a wish to hide or disappear, and this is one thing that links shame as, minimally, embarrassment with shame as social or personal reduction. More positively, shame may be expressed in attempts to reconstruct or improve oneself.

The discussion in this chapter, as elsewhere in this study, is directed to an historical interpretation from which we can ethically learn something, and I have included psychological materials in it only to the extent that it may help to focus that discussion. A deeper exploration of the relations between shame and guilt is needed if we are going to be able to carry our understanding of these historical and ethical issues farther; as a start on that inquiry, I have added some further speculations on these matters as an appendix (Endnote 1).

The immediate point is that if these distinctions between shame and guilt are even roughly correct, then it looks as though *aidōs* (and the other Greek terms) cannot merely mean "shame", but must cover something like guilt as well. We noticed earlier in this chapter that *nemesis*, the reaction that was appropriate in the Homeric world to breaches of *aidōs*, could include anger, indignation, and resentment as much as contempt or avoidance. The idea of reparation is prominent in Homer, as we saw in the last chapter, and the need for it, for gestures that compensate and heal, must surely be recognised in any society if the notion of holding oneself responsible is to have any content. Along with that recognition, there goes the thought that a victim is owed compensation, or has a right to it, and this was also part of the ideas that we examined in the last chapter. In the Greek world there was room, too, for forgiveness. It is often thought that forgiveness speaks more effectively to guilt than to shame: if the people who have been wronged forgive me, then perhaps the case is withdrawn from the internal judge, but their forgiveness has less power to repair my sense of myself. But forgiveness was as familiar in the Greek world as in ours and was seen as an appropriate and commendable reaction, for several different kinds of reasons.[39]

If all these things—indignation, reparation, forgiveness—are typically associated with what we call "guilt" rather than with what we call "shame", then should we say that even Homeric society was acquainted with guilt as much as with shame? Should we conclude, then, that Homeric society was not, after all, a shame culture and that this contrast between our world and that society has been based simply on a mistake about a word? I do not think so. It is certainly true that the shame culture has been understood in much too simple a way, and we have seen this much in the course of getting an adequate idea of shame itself. But it has not been simply a mistake to emphasize the importance of shame in Greek societies. Even though some reactions in those societies were structured in the same way as our reactions of guilt, they were not simply guilt if they were not separately recognised as such; just as shame is not the same when it does not have guilt as a contrast. What people's ethical emotions are depends significantly on what they take them to be.[40] The truth about Greek societies, and in particular the Homeric, is not that they failed to recognise any of the reactions that we associate with guilt, but that they did not make of those reactions the special thing that they became when they are separately recognised as guilt.

If we ask exactly how great a difference lies between the Greeks and ourselves in this respect, we run into a problem that I mentioned in the first chapter, of distinguishing what we think from what we think that we think. One thing that a marked contrast between shame and guilt may express is the idea that it is important to distinguish between "moral" and "nonmoral"

qualities. Shame itself is neutral on that distinction: we, like the Greeks, can be as mortified or disgraced by a failure in prowess or cunning as by a failure of generosity or loyalty. Guilt, on the other hand, is closely related to the conceptions of morality, and to insist on its particular importance is to insist on those conceptions. It is said that we make a lot of the distinction between the moral and the nonmoral and emphasise the importance of the moral. But how far, and in what ways, is this really true of our life, as opposed to what moralists say about our life? Do we even understand what the distinction is, or how deep it really goes?[41] There is perhaps no single question on which an understanding of the Greeks can join more helpfully with reflection on our own experience. We paralyse both that understanding and that reflection if we simply take it for granted that the distinction is at once deep, important, and self-explanatory.

Once we stop taking this for granted, we may see some advantages in the Greeks' ways of understanding the ethical emotions. One way in which we can be helped by the Greek conception that brings (something like) guilt under a wider conception of (something more than) shame is that it can give us a wiser understanding of the connections between guilt and shame themselves. We can feel both guilt and shame towards the same action. In a moment of cowardice, we let someone down; we feel guilty because we have let them down, ashamed because we have contemptibly fallen short of what we might have hoped of ourselves.[42] As always, the action stands between the inner world of disposition, feeling, and decision and an outer world of harm and wrong. *What I have done* points in one direction towards what has happened to others, in another direction to what I am.

Guilt looks primarily in the first direction, and it need not be guilt about the voluntary. We considered in the last chapter the utterly familiar fact that what has happened to others through our agency can have its own authority over our feelings, even

though we brought it about involuntarily. The agent-regret I described there can be psychologically and structurally a manifestation of guilt. It may be said that it is "irrational" guilt, but to say this, unless it is intended as comfort, carries no useful message; it does not mean, for instance (it had better not), that we would be more admirable people if we did not have such feelings. A better candidate for what might be called "irrational" guilt is guilt felt simply at breaking a rule or a resolution, where there is no question of wrong to others or reparation. Robbed of those implications, guilt narrows down suspectly to a desire for punishment. It might then be helpfully replaced by what it should have been in the first place, shame.

Shame looks to what I am. It can be occasioned by many things—actions, as in this kind of case, or thoughts or desires or the reactions of others. Even where it is certainly concerned with an action, it may be a matter of discovery to the agent, and a difficult discovery, what the source of the shame is, whether it is to be found in the intention, the action, or an outcome. Someone might feel shame at the letter he has mailed, because it is (and he knew as he wrote it that it was) a petty and stupid response to a trivial slight; and the shame is lightened, but only to some degree, when it turns out that the letter was never delivered. Just because shame can be obscure in this kind of way, we can fruitfully work to make it more perspicuous, and to understand how a certain action or thought stands to ourselves, to what we are and to what realistically we can want ourselves to be. If we come to understand our shame, we may also better understand our guilt. The structures of shame contain the possibility of controlling and learning from guilt, because they give a conception of one's ethical identity, in relation to which guilt can make sense. Shame can understand guilt, but guilt cannot understand itself.

This is clearly illustrated by a point I have just mentioned, that guilt, insofar as it concerns itself with victims, is not nec-

essarily or obviously restricted to voluntary actions. I may rightly feel that victims have a claim on me and that their anger and suffering looks towards me, even though I have acted involuntarily. The conceptions of modern morality, however, insist at once on the primacy of guilt, its significance in turning us towards victims, and its rational restriction to the voluntary. It is under considerable strain in insisting on all these things at once.[43] In fact, if we want to understand why it might be important for us to distinguish the harms we do voluntarily from those that we do involuntarily, we shall hope to succeed only if we ask what kinds of failing or inadequacy are the source of the harms, and what those failings mean in the context of our own and other people's lives. This is the territory of shame; it is only by moving into it that we may gain some insight into one of the main preoccupations of the morality that centres itself on guilt.

To the modern moral consciousness, guilt seems a more transparent moral emotion than shame. It may seem so, but that is only because, as it presents itself, it is more isolated than shame is from other elements of one's self-image, the rest of one's desires and needs, and because it leaves out a lot even of one's ethical consciousness. It can direct one towards those who have been wronged or damaged, and demand reparation in the name, simply, of what has happened to them. But it cannot by itself help one to understand one's relations to those happenings, or to rebuild the self that has done these things and the world in which that self has to live. Only shame can do that, because it embodies conceptions of what one is and of how one is related to others.

If guilt seems to many people morally self-sufficient, it is probably because they have a distinctive and false picture of the moral life, according to which the truly moral self is characterless. In this picture, I am provided by reason, or perhaps by religious illumination (the picture owes much to Christianity), with a knowledge of the moral law, and I need only the will to

obey it. The structures most typical of shame then fall away: what I am, so far as it affects the moral, is already given, and there is only the matter of discerning among temptations and distractions what I ought to do. (This false picture is closely related to illusions that we have examined in earlier chapters, such as the idea of a moralised basic structure of the mind, and the search for an intrinsically just conception of responsibility.) In not isolating a privileged conception of moral guilt, and in placing under a broader conception of shame the social and psychological structures that were near to what we call "guilt", the Greeks, once again, displayed realism, and truthfulness, and a beneficent neglect.

The conception of the moral self as characterless leaves only a limited positive role to other people in one's moral life. Their reactions should not influence one's moral conclusions, except by assisting reason or illumination. If what others will think of me plays an essential role in my moral determinations, then morality is thought to have skidded into the heteronomy that at the beginning of this chapter we recognised as a familiar charge against the mechanisms of shame. There are some important distinctions to be made here, but this conception of the moral does very little to help us make them. On the contrary, the main distinctions that we need are to be found within the workings of shame itself.

By the later fifth century the Greeks had their own distinctions between a shame that merely followed public opinion and a shame that expressed inner personal conviction. In Euripides' *Hippolytus*, such a distinction is not only expressed but does much, in a complex and sophisticated way, to structure the action.[44] Phaedra destroys herself and those around her in her determination to secure for herself an unambiguous and undoubted good reputation. Hippolytus, accused of wrongs he has not committed, becomes so desperate when his purity is not understood and accepted that at the climactic moment of his at-

tempt to justify himself his wish is to be his own audience.[45] He has invoked the buildings of the house as witnesses of his innocence; Theseus grimly replies that he does well to call on testimony that is speechless. Then Hippolytus says:

> Oh! how I wish that I could stand in front of myself,
> and weep at the miseries that I am suffering.

Theseus answers:

> You have always been more inclined to be in awe
> of yourself, then to treat your parents decently.

Hippolytus's wish is not only extraordinary in itself, but it shifts the focus, as Theseus's reply acknowledges, from one kind of inwardness to another. Hippolytus has been struggling with the fact that his father will not believe that he is innocent of an action that he and everyone else would regard as unforgivable. In his wish, he does not call on himself as a witness on his own behalf: as that, he would be as useless as the walls, if for the contrary reason, that he would be all speech and no substance. He wants to be a witness not for, but of, Hippolytus, his only sympathiser, and this shifts attention away from what he knows about himself—the falsity of Phaedra's accusation—and directs it to his virtuous character, his integrity as a man of purity and honour. The starkly narcissistic image that expresses this leads Theseus to the damaging charge that Hippolytus's virtue has always been self-regarding. *Sebein*, "to worship or hold in awe", is the word he uses for Hippolytus's attitude to himself: Hippolytus regards his soul as a holy place, set aside from the necessary business of caring about other people.

This provides a contrast to Phaedra's error, but it is not a simple one. She was obsessed with herself, and so is Hippolytus. In her case, the obsession took the form of conventional shame, an overwhelming concern for her own reputation. That concern is self-directed, but it honours, in a certain way, the existence of

others. If, as Phaedra herself puts it, that sort of shame can destroy the house, it is because it is directed only to what others think and say. Hippolytus's self-concern, by contrast, leaves out other people altogether; in regarding himself as an unpolluted place, he has withdrawn entirely from humanity, from both their opinions and their needs.

The *Hippolytus* creates a space in which "inner-directed" and "other-directed" aspects of *aidōs* can be laid against each other in several different contrasts. Hippolytus's view of himself in his confrontation with Theseus, represents the truth about what he has done as opposed to what others falsely think: at this point, "inner" is to "outer" as reality is to appearance. Theseus's criticism of Hippolytus, however, and of his private virtue of self-protection and purity, identifies the "inner" as a devotion to self that is contrasted with a proper concern for others. With Phaedra, too, the relations between public and private are wrong, but in another direction; she is concerned with others, but overwhelmingly in the form of fear—a fear of the private becoming public and of how her reality will, truly, appear. Charles Segal has rightly said that the play contrasts "inward and outward, private and public realms, 'shame' and 'repute'."[46] Those three oppositions do not all mark the same contrast: indeed, each of them can be used to mark more than one of the contrasts that are at work.

Greek thought itself had the materials, and powerful ones, to bring out the ambivalence and possible betrayals of shame. It is a question not of some moral motivation quite different from shame, but of the articulation of shame itself. Even before we reach the remarkable constructions of the *Hippolytus*, the Greeks' understanding of shame, I have claimed, was strong and complex enough to dispose of the familiar criticism that an ethical life shaped by it is unacceptably heteronomous, crudely dependent on public opinion. But I also said at the beginning of this chapter that if there were anything in those criticisms, it

would have to be found at a much deeper level, and the question remains whether there is anything at all to be found at a deeper level. If there is, it will be found in the fact that the internalised other, as I put it, still has some independent identity: that it is not just a screen for one's own ethical ideas but is the locus of some genuine social expectations. If a charge of social heteronomy is to stick at a more interesting level, its claim will have to be that even this abstracted, improved, neighbour lodged in one's inner life represents a compromise of genuine autonomy.

This charge most familiarly comes from distinctively modern, in particular Kantian, conceptions of morality, but a version of it can be found in the Greek world itself. It was made by Plato. The *Republic* pursues by a long and political route a question that Glaukon put in the second book in the form of a thought experiment, one that sets out from the idea of Gyges' Ring of invisibility. We are to suppose the just man and the unjust man in isolation from any corresponding social appearance, abstracted from all the normal conventional forces that respectively encourage and discourage those dispositions:

> The perfectly unjust man, then, must be given the most perfect injustice, and we must not take anything away from him, but rather allow him, although he does the greatest injustice, to fix himself a perfect reputation for justice. . . . Next to him in the argument, let us set up the just man, who will be a simple and noble person, who, as Aeschylus says, wants to be just rather than to seem it. We will have to take away the possibility that he seems just. For if he seems just, there will be the honors and awards that go with that, and it will then be unclear whether he is just for the sake of justice, or for the sake of the honors and awards.[47]

What Plato tries to do in the *Republic* is to show that the isolated and misunderstood man of justice will have a life more worth living than the other. This will be so, according to Plato, because the soul of the just man will be in the best condition,

and that will be so because he knows what is just. But more than this is required if this experiment in motivational solipsism is to work. The subject of the experiment will have to know that he knows: he will have to be, in fact, in the condition that Plato requires of his Guardians. The members of the lower classes in the city, we are eventually told, do not have self-supporting motivations of justice; only the Guardians, who have attained the self-revealing state of knowledge, have those. If the other classes could ethically survive at all when not subjected to the actual power of the Guardians—and that is a deeply ambiguous issue in the *Republic*[48]—they *would* need an internalised other: an inner Guardian. The Guardians do not need that, because they have internalised something else, and carry in them a paradigm of justice gained from their intellectual formation (more exactly, revived in them by it).

A great deal is assumed in the formulation of this thought experiment. When we are presented with it, we are simply told that this man *is* just and that he is misunderstood by a perverse or wicked world. This is something we are supposed to understand from outside the imagined situation. We are given the convictions of the just man himself, and those are taken to be both true and unshakable. But suppose we decline to stand outside and to assume the man's justice. Suppose we change the terms of the solipsistic experiment and arrange it from the agent's perspective, rather than from ours or from Plato's; suppose we make it, in effect, an exercise in ethical Cartesianism. Then we should describe the situation in these terms: this is a man who thinks that he is just, but is treated by everyone else as though he were not. If he were given merely that description of himself, it is less clear how steady his motivations would prove. Moreover, it is less clear how steady we think they should prove. For given simply that description, there is nothing to show whether he is a solitary bearer of true justice or a deluded crank.

When we think of people in a situation described as Glaukon describes his thought experiment, we salute them as morally autonomous: as reformers, perhaps, or as people who, in one of Bertrand Russell's favorite phrases, will not follow a multitude to destruction. When we do this, and try to wave to them over time or through the glass of the thought experiment, we are assuming implicitly that they have some essential thing ethically in common with us. Plato, and in quite a different way, Kant, thought that what was in common was the power of reason, and this is why for each of them, in these different ways, the moral self is indeed characterless. But if we now think, plausibly enough, that the power of reason is not enough by itself to distinguish good and bad; if we think, yet more plausibly, that even if it is, it is not very good at making its effects indubitably obvious, then we should hope that there is some limit to these people's autonomy, that there is an internalised other in them that carries some genuine social weight. Without it, the convictions of autonomous self-legislation may become hard to distinguish from an insensate degree of moral egoism.

That word brings out something that has been implicit in this argument from the beginning. 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? The only thing that makes it seem as though the two complaints line up with one another is the simple idea that the ethic of archaic Greece was competitive.[49] A competition is precisely something in which you have the egoistic aim of trying to win, but you also unquestioningly accept rules that have been laid down by someone else. Under the competitive ethic, as it has been conceived, the views of others are invoked, but in favour of

conventionally encouraged forms of self-assertion. But as we have already seen, those conceptions are inadequate to describe even the behaviour of men on the Homeric battlefield. As soon as the interpretation of the two complaints changes at all from that given by the simple model of competition, it becomes quite obvious that they cannot be lined up. It is clear in the case of Plato's thought experiment: the thought experiment tries to dispense entirely with heteronomy, but it is designed for a purpose that in progressivist terms is still egoistic (though its egoism is that of self-concern rather than self-assertion). The divergence between these different criticisms helps to explain the notable unease among progressivist writers, about how far Plato may be thought to have reached on the road to true morality: he seems to have got all the way by one measure and hardly to have started by another.

The necessity with which we started, the necessity that Ajax recognised, was grounded in his own identity, his sense of himself as someone who can live in some social circumstances and not others, and what mediated between himself and the world was his sense of shame. He, being a warrior under the heroic code, balanced that identity on a narrow base of personal achievement. So of course did Achilles and Hector in the *Iliad*, but we can catch the note in figures less grand and tragic than these; in the wistful remark of Nestor, for instance, recalling the achievements of his youth: "So I was among men, if I was ever anything."[50] Similar ideas exist in other honour codes. Heroes in Calderón are given to saying *Soy que soy*, "I am what I am," and the same idea is illustrated wonderfully, by subtraction or denial, in the words of Shakespeare's Parolles:

> Yet I am thankful. If my heart were great
> 'Twould burst at this. Captain I'll be no more;
> But I will eat and drink and sleep as soft
> As captain shall. Simply the thing I am
> Shall make me live. . . .

> Quiet sword, cool blushes, and Parolles, live
> Safest in shame.[51]

But it is not only the particular and perilous demands of the honour code that may involve a sense of one's identity. The structure of shame can be the same without those particular values and expectations. The ethical work that shame did in the ancient world was applied to some values that we do not share, and we also recognise the separate existence of guilt. But shame continues to work for us, as it worked for the Greeks, in essential ways. By giving through the emotions a sense of who one is and of what one hopes to be, it mediates between act, character, and consequence, and also between ethical demands and the rest of life. Whatever it is working on, it requires an internalised other, who is not designated merely as a representative of an independently identified social group, and whose reactions the agent can respect. At the same time, this figure does not merely shrink into a hanger for those same values but embodies intimations of a genuine social reality—in particular, of how it will be for one's life with others if one acts in one way rather than another. This was in substance already the ethical psychology even of the archaic Greeks, and, despite the modern isolation of guilt, it forms a substantial part of our own.