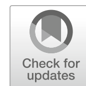
Chapter 23
Desire and the Emotion of Shame



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Abstract This chapter offers a consideration of shame as an emotion that educates the desires by providing an interpretation of Plato's *Gorgias*. In the dialogue, Socrates uses the emotion of shame in order to awaken the desire for the good at the expense of the desire for power as he questions his interlocutors about their conception of the good life. In doing so he provides the reader with arguments for the moral value of shame. Shame, in the dialogue, is understood both as conventional shame, in terms of the awareness of a discrepancy between one's opinions and the norms of the polity, and as moral shame, in terms of the experience of an internal contradiction between one's desires and the innate desire for the good. Socrates rehabilitates conventional shame in the face of the sophistic argument that it is a disingenuous emotion. He also relies on moral shame as part of the elenchus which is his mode of questioning that is meant to promote self-knowledge and help the interlocutor not to live at odds with himself. The chapter argues that the understanding of shame in Plato's *Gorgias* provides an interesting corrective to liberal theories of shame that can be found in the philosophies of John Rawls and Martha Nussbaum.

Keywords Shame · Socratic · Plato's *Gorgias* · Moral education · Elenchus

23.1 Introduction

The field of virtue ethics is known to provide a coherent theoretical basis for character education (Carr 1991, 2008). One of the important reasons that virtue ethics provides a coherent theoretical basis is the particular attention paid to the role of desires and emotions in the process of moral education. Classical philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, who provide the foundation for virtue ethics, regard the ordering of desires and emotions as essential to the "morally well-attuned soul" (Carr

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2008). Good character, as they understood it, involves not only a particular intellectual but also a particular emotional condition. This means that the teaching of ethical habits not only includes the cultivation of moral judgment but also the education of the desiring activity. In Socratic terms, the care for the soul involves the attempt at promoting harmony between the reasoning and desiring parts of the soul, so that the entire soul becomes directed towards the good.

In different dialogues, and in particular the *Gorgias*, Plato singles out shame as an emotion that plays a role in the education of desire. In the dialogue, the emotion of shame has the primary function of reordering the desires in line with the desire for the good. Plato's emphasis on the moral value of shame may serve as an interesting corrective to modern literature in which shame is generally regarded as a negative emotion. In his political theory, John Rawls understands shame as undermining self-esteem, leading to anxiety about one's conception of the good and plan of life, and the subsequent lack of confidence in one's ability to carry out one's intentions (Rawls 1999). Shame thus understood is a politically debilitating emotion which, according to Rawls, rational actors seek to avoid. Focusing on its moral value, Martha Nussbaum argues that the emotion of shame is undesirable. She regards shame as an emotion that isolates the individual and destroys his relationship with the world. Shame, according to Nussbaum, causes young children to hide and shut down, which prevents their moral growth because they feel incapacitated and unable to make amends. As such, she argues that shame is detrimental to morality, community, and to a creative inner life (Nussbaum 2004).

Both Rawls and Nussbaum generally position themselves within the liberal framework, which allows little room for a positive evaluation of the emotion of shame. The liberal principle of equality undermines the notion of subjecting one's self to social norms, and the liberal principle of freedom involves the ability to do as one pleases as long as one's actions do not harm others. Liberal freedom is premised on individual autonomy, whereas the emotion of shame presumes the existence of social norms and relationships. In short, shame seems to be an emotion that is out of place in modern times.

Furthermore, and perhaps as a result of the liberal framework, contemporary scholars of philosophy of education tend to neglect the potentially constructive role of shame in the educative process. This the case even for scholars who are otherwise attracted to the Socratic model of education.[1] Shame, as an emotion, is said to interfere with intellectual education. Being regarded as a pernicious emotion, it feels awkward to accept that shame can—and sometimes should—be part of the educative journey of a student. Shaming practices seem to have no place in the modern classroom.

[1] See, for example, Peter Kreeft's 2004 *Socratic Logic*, which—in some ways understandably so—ignores the role of emotions, in particular shame. The same applies to the abundance of literature on the Socratic method applied to the secondary level of education, such as Fischer (2019), Peeples (2018), Wilberding (2014), Haroutunian-Gordon (2009), Saran and Neisser (2004), Kasachkoff (1998).

The broad argument of this chapter is that Plato's *Gorgias* challenges us to reengage with the moral value of shame. In the *Gorgias*, Plato presents the emotion of shame as an integral part of Socrates' attempt to bring his interlocutors to an awareness of their moral deficiencies. Some go as far as to say that Socrates' method, the elenchus, may be defined as "shaming refutation" (Tarnopolsky 2010). When it comes to *Gorgias*, I argue that this is appropriate. Furthermore, I argue that one of the insights that can be derived from Plato's *Gorgias* is that there are two kinds of shame, each of which has moral value. The first kind of shame is conventional, consisting in failing to meet an established moral standard or ideal (Bensen Cain 2008). The *Gorgias* (Plato 1925) presents the reader with a series of conversations between Socrates and, consecutively, Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles. These conversations take place at the house of Callicles in front of an audience who had initially come to hear Gorgias' display speech.[2] The presence of the audience means that shame, and shaming tactics, gain in significance, and the risk of losing face plays a distinct role in Socrates' dialectical approach at different moments in the dialogue. As Socrates seeks to convert his interlocutors away from a life of material success in terms of wealth and power, and toward a life premised on an understanding of, and desire for, the good, he uses the emotion of shame understood as conventional shame in all three cases.[3]

The second kind of shame is more fully internal. This kind of shame is the result of a confrontation between one's own opinions and desires, on the one hand, and one's innate moral sense, on the other. In his conversation with Polus, Socrates develops the argument that the desire for the good is inherent to human nature (*Gorg*. 468b1-c9; 499e6-10). Of course, the desire for the good is one desire among many, and it is not always—or often not—the main motivating force of human behavior. Other desires may be more powerful, and especially in the case of Callicles the desire for power appears to be particularly strong. Moreover, human beings may make mistakes about what is good, causing them to ignore their desire for the good in their actions. Even so, Socrates relies on the innate desire for the good in the questioning of his interlocutors. Given the natural desire for the good, any desire that departs from the good must necessarily cause internal conflict. Socrates' questioning in the *Gorgias* seeks to bring such internal conflict between the different desires to the surface. This leads to different outcomes—such as shame, perplexity, moral apprehension, or mere confusion—for each character, underscoring the idea that the success of moral education ultimately depends on the character of the person being educated.

In short, Socrates uses both conventional and moral shame as part of the attempt to bring his interlocutors to a higher level of moral awareness about their own

[2]The audience is noticeably present at different moments in the dialogue, see *Gorg*. 455c6, 458c, 473e5, 487b4, 490b2.

[3]The presentation of Socrates as supportive of specific social expectations departs from the more radical interpretation of Socratic philosophy as inherently critical and undermining of social norms, i.e., Villa (2001).

desires. Of course, when we think about shame in the modern classroom, there can be negative effects. Shaming a student can be pernicious in creating resentment and can occur for mistaken political or ideological purposes. My contribution in this chapter is to show that Plato helps us to understand the emotion of shame in a fundamentally human way, that is, as part of caring for the soul of the student.[4] Shame is an emotion that contributes to the ordering of the soul, that is, to establishing harmony between, on the one hand, the desires and emotions and, on the other hand, one's capacity to reason about the good. In this way, the arousal of shame is a constitutive part of the education of desire.

We will now turn to the dynamics of shame in Plato's dialogue the *Gorgias* to see how Socrates uses this emotion in an attempt to provoke his interlocutors to reorder their desires and pursue the good.

23.2 The Case of Gorgias: Two Kinds of Shame

Socrates' first interlocutor, Gorgias of Leontini, is in some ways the easier case, in that he appears to be more receptive to Socrates' shaming tactic compared to the other two. Gorgias comes across as basically a decent man. Socrates goes relatively easy on him and Gorgias shows himself to be "a good loser" (Dodds 1959). There is shame involved in the dialectical exchange but not to such an extent that Gorgias withdraws from the dialogue altogether. Rather, he continues to intervene at crucial moments in order to advance the discussion in an attempt to learn from the conversation (*Gorg*. 463a, 463d-e, 497b4-5, 506a10-b3) (Tarnopolsky 2010).

At the same time, Gorgias does not come off unscathed. The conversation starts out with Socrates asking him about power of rhetoric. Gorgias claims that his art provides a public speaker with freedom and, above all, with power over others. According to Gorgias, rhetoric provides men with:

> "the ability to persuade with speeches either judges in the law courts or statesmen in the council-chamber or the commons in the Assembly or an audience at any other meeting that may be held on public affairs . . . by virtue of this power you will have the doctor as your slave, and the trainer as your slave; your money-getter will turn out to be making money not for himself, but for another,—in fact for you, who are able to speak and persuade the multitude." (*Gorg*. 452e1-10)

Rhetoric is presented as an amoral technique of persuasion, in particular persuasion of the masses. Socrates mercilessly cuts through the argument. What if one of Gorgias's students uses the ability to speak persuasively for evil purposes? Is Gorgias' art morally neutral, or is the teacher of rhetoric in part responsible for the use and abuse of his art? We may ask the same question ourselves—as teachers—today.[5] Is the

[4]This aspect, and in particular the second kind of shame, is not always brought out explicitly. Tarnopolsky (2010) and Corey (2018) tend to focus on the first kind of shame. Kahn (1996) offers a helpful discussion the second kind of shame, to which the current chapter is indebted.

[5]See Kiss and Euben (2010) for a helpful attempt at engaging with this question.

modern teacher responsible for the moral development of the student, or does education merely involve passing on skills and information?

Gorgias initially denies any kind of moral responsibility: “if a man becomes a rhetorician and then uses this power and this art unfairly, we ought not to hate his teacher and cast him out of our cities. . . . it is the man who does not use it aright who deserves to be hated and expelled and put to death, and not his teacher” (*Gorg*. 457b5-c4). However, his opinion results in an inconsistency. Gorgias replies to Socrates’ question whether a rhetorician needs to know what is “just and unjust, base and noble, good and bad” (*Gorg*. 459d2) that the art of rhetoric does not include this knowledge. Indeed, Gorgias finds this one of the great things about his art, that “there is no need to know the truth of the actual matters, but one merely needs to have discovered some device of persuasion which will make one appear to those who do not know to know better than those who know” (*Gorg*. 459b10-c3). Gorgias considers this to be a wonderful convenience, because as such one can learn just a single art—the art of rhetoric—and forget all the others (*Gorg*. 459c4-6). Out of uneasiness, however, since Socrates had warned him earlier that he would run into difficulty (*Gorg*. 457e3-5), he admits to Socrates that if a pupil does not yet comprehend what is just and unjust, base and noble, good and bad then Gorgias would teach him: “Why, I suppose, Socrates, if he happens not to know these things he will learn them too from me” (*Gorg*. 460a4-5). Accepting the Socratic premise that virtue is knowledge and, hence, that knowing justice means being just (cf. *Gorg*. 460c1-2), Gorgias’ view that he would teach a pupil justice and injustice clashes with his earlier admission of the possibility that a pupil would abuse the art of rhetoric.

In anticipation of being refuted, Gorgias has made the “mistake” to acknowledge that he would teach his students what is just and unjust. We know from the *Meno* that Gorgias never claimed to teach virtue (*Meno* 95c) (Kahn 1996). Socrates, or rather Plato as author of the dialogue, tricks Gorgias into admission. His student Polus cries out that Socrates has intentionally provoked the situation: “it was yourself who led him into that set of questions!” and calls it bad taste (*Gorg*. 461c3-7). Although perhaps it is not a really bad taste, Polus is still right. Gorgias has been shamed into professing that he knows what justice is and that he would teach it to others. No one, so argues Polus, would deny this in front of an Athenian audience.

The audience represents conventional Athenian morality and does not want teachers who teach young aspiring politicians the art of rhetoric without developing their understanding of what is good and just. Especially in a democracy, people do not welcome being manipulated. Socrates relies on the morality of his audience which, for all intents and purposes, is a sound morality. The shaming seems particularly effective because as someone from abroad who seeks to get paid for his art Gorgias quickly feels apprehension at saying things that are out of line with the conventions of the host city. Gorgias has developed a kind of moral apprehension about his opinion that rhetoric as an art can be taught separately from the good.

We see, here, the contours of two kinds of shame at work. The first kind of shame is a negative emotion that comes from the experience of a discrepancy between the existing social norms and one’s own behavior. We may call this conventional shame,

consisting in failing to meet an established moral standard or ideal. Gorgias feels the conflict between his own understanding of rhetoric and the expectations of his audience, which causes him to rescind the claim that a teacher of rhetoric need not also teach his students about the good.

But there is also a second kind of shame, one that is more fully internal. This kind of shame is the result of a confrontation between one's own opinions and innate moral sense, which Plato describes as the human desire for what is good (Kahn 1996). This second kind of shame acts in the face of the desire for the good that resides in each human soul. Plato's Socrates claims that all human beings wish for what is good (*Gorg*. 468c6, cf. 468b1-c9; 499e6-10). Following the wish for what is good, human beings do things for the sake of the good, not for the sake of the bad. Now, human beings may mistake the bad for the good, but this does not eliminate the desire for the good. Tyrants, for example, may think that they do as they wish in abusing their power but, so Socrates claims, in fact, do not do what they wish because they suppress or ignore their deepest desire for genuinely doing good (*Gorg*. 466d8-e1). Similarly, Gorgias may think that he does good by teaching rhetoric without educating them morally. But is this really wishing for, and doing, good?

The second kind of shame is an emotion that results from the internal contradiction between different desires. Gorgias' desire to teach rhetoric as a technique that helps students acquire power because they are able to persuade and manipulate others necessarily conflicts with his innate desire to do good. All desires that depart from the good cause of internal conflict. Socrates knows this, and relies on the internal conflict in the elenchus. As Kahn puts it: "It is the function of the elenchus to bring our desire for the good to consciousness … the contradictor must end by contradicting himself, and be out of tune his whole life, because his conscious pursuits will never be in harmony with his deepest desire," that is the desire for the good (Kahn 1996). In the case of Gorgias, it does not take much for him to admit that if a student does not know that is just, good, and noble, then Gorgias would teach him, that is, he would commit to doing the good. As such, Plato portrays Gorgias with a certain level of respect as a gentleman who is easily abashed and sensitive to the moral appeal.

As a consequence, those who understand the elenchus as a formal and logical endeavor misunderstand the reason for its effectiveness and purpose. The Socratic elenchus seeks to question personal commitments and desires, and bring out any kind of inconsistencies. The awareness of such inconsistencies is not merely intellectual but, more often than not, causes an emotional response that may lead, as in the case of Gorgias, to a reordering of desires. In this way, the "psycho-therapeutic" workings of the elenchus become apparent (Kahn 1996). Socrates provokes his interlocutors to think about their strongly held opinions and desires in light of their deepest held desire for the good, which in some characters is more hidden and burdened by competing desires than in others. He invites teachers—even today—to prod the souls of their students in a moral way. Furthermore, he invites teachers to prod their own soul, starting out with the question about whether or not one has a moral responsibility for one's students.

23.3 The Case of Polus: Conventional Shame Rehabilitated

Polus steps in where Gorgias leaves off. Polus is a young man from Sicily who is portrayed with a “coltish” impatience (*Gorg*. 463e3). He comes across as haphazard and shortsighted in his answers and Socrates understands him as someone who is more practiced in rhetoric than in dialectic (*Gorg*. 448e2-3). He is presented as Gorgias’ adamant defender and his confused opinions may in part be attributed to the kind of teaching that neglects dialectic in favor of techniques or skills. In this way, the dialogue does not so much condemn Gorgias as a person as it condemns the kind of teaching that he was known for.

The exchange between Socrates and Polus is important for two reasons. Firstly, Socrates uses the conversation, as we have seen already, to introduce the claim that human beings have an innate desire for the good. The premise continues to play a constitutive role in the discussion (cf. *Gorg*. 499e6-9). Secondly, the conversation introduces the theme of the relationship between nature (φύσις) and convention (νόμος). Polus proposes, in line with the sophists at the time, that nature, which as a pre-given order sets the standards for human behavior, and convention, which refers to the norms and customs of a community, are in tension with one another. If convention is artificial and unreflective of the natural order of things, then the emotion of shame as a result of a discrepancy between one’s own opinions and the conventions of the polity is artificial as well. The question then becomes whether shame can be an emotion that is somehow genuine in that it contributes to a person becoming good.

Polus disqualifies the moral value of shame as follows. Gorgias, on his account, was too ashamed to admit that a teacher of rhetoric would not teach his students about the good, noble and just. He sought to preserve his reputation in accordance with what other people say and think but, according to Polus, these social norms are not reflective of natural standards. Rather, nature dictates that one should pursue power. Likewise, as the conversation between Socrates and Polus turns toward the question of justice, Polus argues that according to conventional opinion it is more shameful to commit than to suffer injustice but that, in fact, suffering injustice is worse according to nature. In his argument, nature and convention are in opposition to one another and what is shameful according to the convention, namely committing injustice, does not reflect the genuine standards of human behavior, which dictate that suffering injustice is worse.

Moreover, Polus continues, the people themselves fundamentally do not believe in conventional morality. Underneath the veneer of conventional opinion there exists the admiration for those who commit injustice but get away with it, such as tyrants and orators (*Gorg*. 466b5-c3). This is a “truth” that most people are ashamed to admit, and it takes a more bold or authentic person to openly profess it. According to Polus’ reasoning, shame is a social phenomenon that restricts people from saying how things really are. He considers it to be an artificial emotion with a tenuous relation to truth and genuine morality. What is conventionally regarded as noble or praiseworthy is not the same as what is good according to nature, and what is

conventionally regarded as shameful is not the same as what is bad according to nature. According to Socrates, Polus apparently holds "that noble and good are not the same, nor evil and shameful" (*Gorg*. 474c10-d1).

Socrates' response is to restore the moral value of shame when premised on the natural order of things. He emphatically connects what is truly shameful with what is bad, harmful, or evil according to nature: "all that is bad [according to nature] I call shameful" (*Gorg*. 463d5). Injustice, being bad, is therefore *naturally* a reason for shame. In support of the claim that injustice is bad, and hence shameful, Socrates develops what we may call an anthropological argument; committing injustice is fundamentally bad for a man given the nature of the human soul. The nature of the soul dictates that certain things are good for it and bring it in a good condition, whereas other things are bad for it. Just as health is the standard for the well-functioning human body, so is virtue—in particular justice—the natural standard for the well-functioning human soul. Committing injustice damages the soul as it feeds into desires that run counter to the desire for the good. The soul is made bad, that is, malfunctioning on account of it. Socrates presents injustice as the worst vice on account of corrupting the entire soul and doing the greatest harm. Doing the greatest harm, it is also the most shameful of vices (*Gorg*. 477c3-9). What is shameful are those things that prevent the soul from flourishing, given its nature. Damaging one's soul by committing injustice is both the greatest evil and the most shameful (*Gorg*. 477e6).

Socrates, in this way, rehabilitates conventional shame on the condition that conventions are rooted in the natural order of things. The conventional opinion of the Athenians that committing an injustice is more shameful than suffering injustice is shown to reflect what is actually shameful given what human nature is meant to be. Returning to the argument about rhetoric, it follows that those who seek to help people who commit injustice by means of teaching them rhetorical skills act against nature as they aggrevate rather than ameliorate the disorder in the soul (*Gorg*. 479b9-c1; cf. 472e7-9). Rhetoric has no use in supporting or promoting injustice. As an art, it serves the good in terms of justice, just as medicine serves the good in terms of health.

While Socrates' argumentation is systematic, his questioning seems relatively unsuccessful in provoking shame and reordering Polus' desires. Polus proves to be quite dull and stubborn of character. He needs to be pushed to sense any kind of apprehension about the inconsistencies in his reasoning (*Gorg*. 466e3) and about the shamelessness of his remarks (*Gorg*. 469a2). Polus is preaching tyranny out of a youthful admiration for power. Power, of course, is seductive, and absolute power of the tyrant the most seductive of all. Socrates, however, juxtapositions the lure of power with the question about the good. Is power really power if one loses sight of the good? According to Socrates, the answer is no, because chasing power at the expense of the good fundamentally causes a chasm in the self. Committing injustice damages the soul, and the desire for power as a means to get away with injustice is in direct opposition to the deepest desire in the human soul that is for doing the good. Committing injustice is by nature something to be ashamed of as it leaves the soul in a worse condition. Contrary to Polus' argument, communal

understandings that define committing injustice as morally worse than suffering injustice are *good* conventions because they benefit the soul.

23.4 The Case of Callicles: Shame and the Reordering of Desires

Socrates' argument about the relationship between nature and convention finds enhanced support in the exchange with Callicles. Callicles is Socrates' most formidable opponent in terms of his intelligence, eloquence, and political ambition. He is described as having recently entered the political arena (*Gorg*. 515a1-2), and he encourages Socrates to do the same. Indeed, at different moments in the dialogue, Callicles displays a care for Socrates, which seems reciprocated. This is one reason why, I would argue, Socrates is not without hope with regard to Callicles' character. Callicles allows Socrates to develop his argument and goes along with it, whether or not disingenuously, allowing the conversation to take up the largest part of the dialogue. Socrates explicitly and repeatedly addresses Callicles during the narration of the myth at the end of the dialogue. Most importantly, Callicles is a man of honor, who might be saved by his desire to excel (*Gorg*. 485c2, 494e7, 511b5), were it not—as Socrates points out—for his desire for power which pulls his soul away from the pursuit of truth (*Gorg*. 513c8). Still, Socrates expresses the hope that repeated conversations may turn Callicles around and that "if haply we come to examine these same questions more than once, and better, you will believe" (*Gorg*. 513c10-d2).

Like Polus, Callicles rejects conventional morality and argues that it is artificial. Conventional morality causes people to refrain from indulging in their desires, which Callicles rejects as he develops a hedonist argument that defines the good exclusively in terms of pleasure. He calls temperate people "simpletons" (*Gorg*. 491d6), and conventions "mere stuff and nonsense" (*Gorg*. 492c10). According to Callicles, the truly virtuous and strong man dares to ignore conventional morality and acts according to nature, which dictates that one's desires be as strong as possible without restraining them (*Gorg*. 491e10-2a1). Genuine virtue and happiness consist in being able to satisfy one's desires to the utmost and indiscriminately. As Callicles spells it out: "luxury and licentiousness and liberty, if they have the support of force, are virtue and happiness" (*Gorg*. 492c5-7).

Socrates, however, shows that Callicles himself is not impervious to conventional opinion, and somehow actually considers the restraint of desire as part of the good life. He shrewdly mentions the life of the catamite, the sexually submissive partner in homosexual relationships (*Gorg*. 494e5). Is not the life of the catamite "awful, shameful, and wretched?" (*Gorg*. 494e5-6). Callicles replies furiously: "Are you not ashamed, Socrates, to lead the discussion into such topics?" (*Gorg*. 494e7). The situation puts Callicles in a bind. Either he admits that some pleasures are better than others, or he concedes that he understands the pleasures of the catamite as good as any other. The experience of shame and indignation prepares Callicles to admit that,

indeed, some pleasures are better than others (*Gorg*. 499b8-9), which logically causes Callicles to retract the hedonist argument.

This opens up the way for Socrates to assert the meaning of the good as a standard over and above the pleasures, which leads the discussion to virtue and, in particular, the virtue of temperance. Socrates reiterates what he had stated in his conversation with Polus, namely, that human beings do a thing for the sake of the good: "Because, you know, Polus and I, if you recollect, decided that everything we do should be for the sake of the good. Do you agree with us in this view—that the good is the end of all our actions, and it is for its sake that all other things should be done, and not for theirs? (*Gorg*. 499e6-9). Callicles agrees. But what is the good that people seek? When it comes to the pleasures, what is good for the soul? Socrates proposes that just as the good of the body is health, so the good of the soul is virtue. The good pleasures are those that produce virtue (*Gorg*. 499d8-10, 507a2 ff.), whereas thoughtless, licentious, unjust, and unholy desires must be rejected (*Gorg*. 505b2-4, 507d1-2). Temperance implies that the emotions are moderate and that there is harmony between the rational and emotional part of the soul.

The temperate soul is ordered and well-proportioned. It presupposes "a certain regularity and order" (*Gorg*. 504b3-4, 506e1-2). Indeed, virtue arrives "by an order or rightness or art that is apportioned to each" (*Gorg*. 506d9-10), and: "it is a certain order proper to each existent thing that by its advent in each makes it good" (*Gorg*. 506e2-4). The argument that temperance involves order and harmony of the soul is supported by what we may call the cosmological argument. Socrates connects the order of the soul with the natural order that pervades the universe and everything in it, and this cosmological order sets the norm for what is good in the world, the community, and the human soul:

> "heaven and earth and gods and men are held together by communion and friendship, by orderliness, temperance, and justice; and that is the reason, my friend, why they call the whole of this world by the name of order (κόσμος), not disorder or dissoluteness." (*Gorg*. 507e10-8a5, cf. 508a)

Human flourishing means a life, and a soul, that subjects itself to the natural and pre-given order, which dictates harmony and proportional equality. It means that the individual is both in harmony with himself and with the whole.

What is morally shameful is what goes against the cosmological order. Callicles' shame about claiming that all pleasures should be pursued indiscriminately, hence including the pleasure of the catamite, is justified as a good emotion not only in terms of what is good for the soul (the anthropological argument) but also what is good for the whole and for the soul in relationship to the whole (the cosmological argument). The unlimited indulgence of desire goes against the principles of order, proportion, and harmony, which set the standard and dictate a restraint of desire. Callicles' experience of the emotion of shame is thus an emotion that helps him reorder his desires in line not only with his desire for the good but also with the good of the whole.

Socrates reiterates to Callicles that the conventions of the polity are sound when they reflect the natural order of things. As he tells Callicles, Gorgias' opinion that a

teacher of rhetoric need not concern himself with justice, and Polus' opinion that it is worse to suffer injustice than to commit injustice were justifiably shameful:

> "what you supposed Polus to be conceding from shame *is after all true*—that to do wrong is worse, in the same degree as it is more shameful, than to suffer it, and that whoever means to be the right sort of rhetorician must *really* be just and well-informed of the ways of justice, which again Polus said that Gorgias was only shamed into admitting." (*Gorg*. 508c1-7)

Likewise, the pleasure of the catamite was seen as morally shameful according to Athenian convention, and the presence of the Athenian audience seems to play a role in Callicles' experience of shame, next to his own internal apprehension about this pleasure. As with Gorgias and Polus, we see the two kinds of shame at work.

In the case of Callicles, there are specific political implications at stake. Whereas Gorgias and Polus influenced the young by offering a particular kind of education, Callicles—as a member of the Athenian polity—influenced the decision-making of the city directly. Socrates' final argument, however, moves all three interlocutors away from involvement in the polis as long as they cannot give consistent answers to questions about justice and the good life (*Gorg*. 427e2). Indeed, he proposes that it is *shameful* to embark on politics, that is, it is shameful to give in to the desire for power without practicing virtue first (*Gorg*. 527d2 ff.).

It is not clear from the dialogue whether Callicles is ashamed enough to abandon his political ambitions for the cultivation of virtue. The education of desire, we may say, is an uncertain endeavor. Assuming that Callicles has developed qualms about pursuing his political career, we may readdress the question raised by Rawls, who argued that shame is a negative emotion because it causes people to withdraw from participating in the public sphere. Interestingly enough, Socrates would agree with Rawls, but argue that it is a good thing if people withdraw from the political arena on account of shame caused by holding divergent and inconsistent opinions and desires. Rawls, Socrates might say, fails to pay attention to the content of people's opinions about the good life and, in particular, to the question of whether people understand the nature of reality well enough to understand justice and the good, and to reorder their desires accordingly. Shame in the *Gorgias* is presented as a valid emotional response of people who are questioned about their conception of the good and about their desires, and whose souls are found to lack harmony. As such, shame, having moral value, also has political value in the sense that it keeps inconsistent views and disordered desires out of politics. Whereas according to Rawls the emotion of shame obstructs rational politics, according to Socrates, the emotion of shame actually promotes rational politics.

Nussbaum's argument about shame comes closer to Socrates' in the sense that she specifically focuses on the relationship between shame and moral development. Whereas she argues that in children the emotion of shame is undesirable because a child is not developed enough to respond to shame in a constructive way, she also contemplates a good kind of shame in adults. Her definition of the good kind of shame has both a cognitive and an emotional component. Cognitively, on Nussbaum's account, shame results from the experience of a discrepancy between one's character and the ideals of the polity, such as equality. The confrontation with

people living in poor conditions may shame others into feeling greedy, materialistic, and out of line with principles of equality. This kind of shame is beneficial, according to Nussbaum, because it makes people less narcissistic. Emotionally, the good kind of shame results on account of empathy that springs from the recognition of a common humanity and vulnerability. Empathy provokes shame in feeling oneself above others such as the poor. Nussbaum argues that this kind of shame is good because it invites people to make amends, i.e., to repair conditions that undermine equality and to reintegrate the poor into society (Nussbaum 2004).

There is much to be said about Nussbaum's understanding of the good kind of shame in comparison with the kind of shame that is provoked in Plato's *Gorgias*. In fact, there is a substantive overlap in that both Nussbaum and Socrates understand the materialistic life of unlimited pursuit of pleasure to be justifiably shameful. The main point to notice is that, as we have seen, Socrates values and uses conventional shame on the condition that the norm applied reflects the natural order of things. He provides an argument from nature, whereas Nussbaum's argument does not question its assumptions such as whether equality is a good political norm and whether shame provoked by empathy is always a proper response. Socrates' argument about the moral value of shame is fundamentally more persuasive because he reasons from an understanding of human flourishing, in terms of virtue, and communal flourishing, in terms of the conception of the universe as an ordered whole.

23.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I sought to show how Socrates in Plato's *Gorgias* presents shame as a fundamentally human emotion that plays a role in helping individuals to reevaluate their desires. Socrates postulates that all human beings have an innate desire for the good, which means that any kind of opinion or desire that departs from the good causes a contradiction in the soul. Such a contradiction causes a feeling of shame when brought to awareness by means of questioning. Socrates relies on the arousal of shame in his questioning, knowing that emotions play an important role in persuasion (cf. Moss 2005) and in moral education. Living in harmony with one's self is of paramount importance. Socrates claims that he would "rather choose to have my lyre, or some chorus that I might provide for the public, out of tune and discordant, or to have any number of people disagreeing with me and contradicting me, than that I should have internal discord and contradiction in my own single self" (*Gorg*. 481b9-c2). Likewise, he warns Callicles about the stakes of their conversation and suggests that Callicles must either prove that doing wrong and getting away with it is *good*, or live in eternal contradiction with himself; in the latter case "there will be no agreement between you, Callicles, and Callicles, but you will be in discord with him all your life" (*Gorg*. 482b6-7). Internal discord is to be avoided at all costs, which means that the emotion of shame as the result of an awareness of internal discord is an important emotion.

Furthermore, as I have shown in this chapter, Socrates rehabilitates the value of conventional shame in the face of the sophistic argument that convention is disingenuous and in opposition to nature. Nature dictates the standards of human flourishing which, according to Socrates, revolve around virtue. He shows that the virtue of temperance is pivotal to a good life. Living a temperate life means not only being in harmony with one's self as the emotions cooperate with reason, it also means living in harmony with the whole. The natural standards for human development are argued to be in harmony with the standards that provide order and proportion to the cosmos and everything in it.

As such, the dialogue helps us to reevaluate the moral value of shame, also in the classroom. Some have argued that shame plays a beneficial role when students display "antisocial tendencies, lack of respect for others, unrealistic self-appraisal, megalomania, and various types of personality disorders" (Corey 2018). This seems to me valid but perhaps not specifically Socratic. What a teacher may shame a student for by means of questioning is any kind of desire for what is unjust, bad, or ignoble. As we also learn from the *Gorgias*, there is no guarantee that this kind of risk-taking pays off. However, when it comes to the question whether or not shame plays a role in the endeavor of caring for the souls of students, based on the Socratic dialectic depicted in the *Gorgias* one would have to answer in the affirmative.

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