



Piper's question and ours: a role for adversity in group-centred views of non-agentive shame

Basil Vassilicos¹

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Abstract

This paper aims to contribute to ‘group-centred views’ of non-agentive shame (victim shame, oppression shame), by linking them to an ‘anepistemic’ model of the experience and impact of human failing. One of the most vexing aspects of those group-centred views remains how susceptibility to such shame ought to be understood. This contribution focuses on how a basic familiarity with adversity, in everyday life, may open individuals up to these forms of shame. If, per group-centred views, non-agentive shame is importantly driven by participation in social practices with others, a better understanding of the impact of adversity on individuals’ lives may offer a way of explaining how embodied experience instils in individuals a need for such participation. The upshot is an understanding of the individual’s susceptibility to non-agentive shame, which affords it the same legitimacy as more conventional notions of shame.

Keywords Shame · Adversity · Oppression · Violence · Participation

The approaches to shame phenomena developed by authors such as Calhoun (2004) and Maibom (2010) deserve attention for how they formulate a more comprehensive analysis of such an emotion. This occurs via a provocative focus on how social bonds and public commitments underlie an individual’s feelings of shame, which is to say, what an individual is liable to ‘see as’ shameful. A core feature of these “group-centered views” (GCV’s) of shame (Maibom 2010) thereby lies in the reduced prominence given to the autonomous selection of and assent to particular

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✉ Basil Vassilicos
basil.vassilicos@mic.ul.ie

¹ Department of Philosophy, Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Rd., Limerick V94VN26, Ireland

norms and aims when analyzing how shame can be a self-evaluative emotion that tracks a person's failings and shortcomings. On this understanding, what is notable about this group-centered strategy is what they allow for as legitimate forms of shame. By diminishing the role of individual agency or beliefs in experiences of shame, they make equal room for exceptional, non-agentive forms of shame, like oppression shame and victim and persecution shame (genocide survivors, victims of physical abuse and discrimination), alongside more conventional examples of shame (the remorseful wrongdoer or the unsuccessful athlete).

In this paper, the aim will be to expand upon this group-centered strategy towards shame, and non-agentive shame in particular, by indicating how it may be conjoined with a certain understanding of the experience and effects of failure. Specifically, the main goal will be to explore whether a more fluid notion of human failing can address one of the most objectionable implications of GCV's: namely, their apparent deferral of the question of a person's susceptibility to non-agentive shame—what it is in a person that allows such shame to be felt as a personally appropriate experience, if this is not to be attributed to an individual's own agency and beliefs. On this contention, it is no easy thing for GCV's to say why non-agentive shame shows something about oneself that is troubling and difficult to ignore, and why it is not merely a merely contingent, socially imposed or socially constructed emotional state like hiding boredom or displaying unfeigned enthusiasm. For all that, it will be argued, this concern need not constitute a wholesale rejection of GCV's of shame; there is appeal to their emphasis on individuals' inclusion in the social order (Maibom) and participation in social and moral practices (Calhoun) as a crucial touchstone if not foundation for human emotional life. The contribution to GCV's of shame sought here will thus be to amend the conceptions of an individual's susceptibility to non-agentive shame relied upon by GCV's with a notion of human failing drawn from Sartre. What follows is a sketch of the appeal and challenge of accounts like Calhoun's and Maibom's, a close examination of non-agentive shame and an important critique of the GCV approach to it, and an elaboration of what Sartre's phenomenology of resistance and failure may offer in support of GCV's.

1 The appeal and challenge of GCV's of non-agentive shame

The appeal of GCV's extends beyond either their focus on the centrality of an audience in shame or their examination of the function of shame in social contexts. More importantly, they seem appealing because they can provide a convincing model for dealing with, and indeed embracing, the heteronomy of the emotion of shame.¹ This heteronomy has to do with the fact that shame seems to have two different sets of instigating conditions. On the one hand, it is the individual's defect or shortcoming as determined by a norm or standard that appears to instill shame. On the other, shame may be seen to come about because of the disapproval of others, regardless of

¹ Williams (1993, 77–78). Williams was not arguing for a necessary heteronomy of shame per se, but was rather exploring whether shame need not always be heteronomous. Cf. Hutchinson (2008, 143–144).

the norms to which one might ascribe. Thus, in some cases, a person can be inconsolable in their shame at having failed to achieve an aim they had long been working toward; it matters not whether anyone else is around to reinforce the shortcoming. By contrast, as has also been noted by Wollheim among others, in private one may have no qualms about things that one would never dare do in public.²

To account for these heteronomous sets of circumstances for shame, both Calhoun and Maibom have taken up the argument that shame has to do with a recognition of the social order in which individuals participate. Shame then becomes a matter of affirming one's inclusion in a particular community and its practices, rather than being about concealing the individual's deficiencies vis-à-vis the aims or standards one might have chosen (or not) for oneself. This is one place where GCV's of shame seem to offer a particularly useful, if not innovative, understanding of shame. Shame can be accounted for not simply as an impulse to hide or withdraw oneself. It equally concerns a need to show oneself, namely, to show oneself as fully integrated in the social order (Maibom) or within a social or moral practice (Calhoun).³ By thereby taking the heteronomy of shame as a "positive feature" of the emotion (Maibom), GCV's of shame do not shy away from the complex relations between an individual's emotions and the basic forms of social life. They clear a path for understanding how something as personal as an emotion and something as communal as social norms can exhibit the closest of ties. This would seem particularly useful in cases of non-agentive shame; GCV's would provide a crucial perspective on how shame may come about irrespective of what an individual does or believes (e.g. shame that is 'non-agentive').

The upshot of GCV's is thus that socially monitored failings and defects (Maibom) or participation and integration in social-moral practices (Calhoun)—regardless of an individual's intentions and beliefs—are chiefly responsible for feelings of shame in general, and for non-agentive shame in particular. For all their promise, however, there may be some aspects of these GCV's with which it is hard to reconcile. In the first place, if, according to GCV's, the trigger for something like the stigma felt in victim shame is an external adjudication of certain social norms, irrespective of a person's consent, it is tempting to conclude that GCV's make shame into the product of a contingent, culturally relative set of circumstances. This would undermine, or at least greatly increase the difficulty of, a unified philosophical or psychological account of shame, although a GCV with an evolutionary perspective like Maibom's seems little troubled by this sort of concern. Second, and more profoundly, if shame depends very little or not at all on any kind of agency, then it becomes quite difficult to understand the particular sense of self that an emotion like shame involves or targets.⁴ When the norms underpinning the self-evaluations in shame are publicly or socially adjudicated norms per Maibom and Calhoun, from which individuals can quite easily distinguish themselves (for instance in the privacy of one's home, as GCV's concede from the start), how should the moral status

² Wollheim (1999, 159).

³ For a contrasting view, cf. Elster (2004, 152).

⁴ Wollheim (1999, 150).

and legitimacy, let alone the phenomenology, of such shame be understood? For an individual to be susceptible to such evaluations and the shameful shortcomings they oversee, mustn't those evaluations seem to be fitting to the individual herself? Mustn't those evaluations satisfy conditions for the individual such that shame can be such a profoundly authoritative and deeply painful experience, and not just an alternative opinion about oneself?

In one sense, then, Maibom's and Calhoun's GCV's do something interesting in respect of an individual's susceptibility to non-agentive shame. They locate the grounds for that susceptibility 'outside' the individual, in that person's exposure to communities and the beliefs, norms, and social order those communities embody, and this move allows them to explore the social, participatory basis of non-agentive shame and perhaps other emotions as well. In another respect, however, the questions just posed point to something crucial that GCV's may still fail to capture about non-agentive shame and one's susceptibility to it; that from the individual's perspective, it is not simply imposed socially or contingently, from 'outside' oneself.⁵ Both Maibom and Calhoun may be seen to discount such concerns in their own ways.⁶ Nonetheless, insofar as both their GCV's would attribute the same phenomenological features to non-agentive shame as to other forms of shame, there may be an important reason why it is insufficient to table any question of the subjectively felt appropriateness of shame feelings. Namely, there is widespread agreement by philosophers and psychologists of different stripes that shame involves a strong judgement about oneself, which is to say, a conviction that something about oneself needs to be redressed.⁷ If all shame thus necessarily involves an evaluative feeling about oneself, as Calhoun and Maibom also maintain, then it is not easy to see how social norms that may be merely conventionally determined and externally applied to an individual could be the primary source of such a strong evaluative feeling about oneself. The norms in relation to which one is made to feel shame do not merely reflect the social order or moral practice in which one is embedded; they seem to concern everything one has ever identified with, the 'whole self.'⁸ They somehow fit the individual, even if she has not intentionally chosen them. In other words, framed more phenomenologically, there appears to be nothing like unfair shame. The difficulty for GCV's is then the following; how to understand, despite appearances to the contrary, that from the perspective of the person undergoing it there remains something legitimate about victim shame, oppression shame, and the like? Even once it is granted that no one should ever have to undergo these types of shame, might there

⁵ For a related concern, cf. Wollheim's objection to the social constructivist's deferral of the question of feeling in emotions (1999, 253–254).

⁶ In anticipation of such a worry, Maibom has argued that appropriateness need not figure as an essential feature of shame, as long as the functional reality of social norms in shame has been shown to take precedence over any more abstract or universal set of normative conditions for shame (2010, 588–589). Likewise, Calhoun claims that interpretations of social norms according to which an oppressed person feels shamed may have that power to shame only by way of their "sheer conventionality" (2004, 143).

⁷ Smilansky (2007, 13), Williams (2002, 116) and Gilbert (2004, 19).

⁸ Orth et al. (2006, 1610).

be something nonetheless significantly and insuperably human, if not importantly ethical, about such forms of shame?

2 Heterology, not just heteronomy

This worry, concerning an individual's personal susceptibility to shame, constitutes a formidable challenge to GCV's. Its consequences, if it is left unanswered, threaten to undermine their very promise highlighted above. If such susceptibility cannot be allowed for, or if it is simply regarded as a non-issue, then it seems GCV's cannot afford non-agentive shame the same legitimacy and authenticity granted to more conventional forms of shame. To be sure, this problem of one's susceptibility to something like victim shame or oppression shame is one that Calhoun, for one, is aware of from the outset. However, to understand the manner in which a GCV like Calhoun's would have to succeed in meeting this challenge—henceforth our focus in this discussion—we need to look in more detail at the sorts of shame they highlight, and a prominent critique of them.

By non-agentive shame, we mean to denote roughly two sorts of shame phenomena: victim shame and oppression shame. Victim shame may be defined as the experience of a burdensome stigma as a result of being subjected to physical or psychological abuse; oppression shame as the shame felt as a result of persecution and discrimination against a person's identity or agency. While each these types of shame may exhibit certain differences with the other, both may be analyzed in terms of a heterological structure or dichotomy that is distinct from the heteronomy of shame noted earlier.⁹ On the one hand—and perhaps distinct from more conventionally thematized forms of shame—there seems to be the fact that there is nothing that justifies this shame, especially from the point of view of the individual undergoing it.¹⁰ There seems to be no reason for it, and indeed in both individuals and the communities in which they find themselves there may even be a strong belief that one 'should never' feel such shame.¹¹ For instance, in a case Calhoun discusses in detail, that of a shame due to a person's being incorrectly accused of fraudulently passing for a race she does not belong to, it cannot be forgotten that the person in question, the philosopher and artist Adrian Piper, refers to hers as a "groundless shame."¹² She remained convinced that she had nothing to blame herself for as she progressively recognized her feelings with regard to her professor's insensitive remark. Analogously, after having been the victim of a violent sexual assault, Susan Brison reports that "in spite of my conviction that I had done nothing wrong, I felt

⁹ For a comparable description of shame, cf. Lynd's description of the "incongruity" of shame feelings (1963, 42).

¹⁰ Calhoun (2004, 143).

¹¹ I am grateful to Alba Montes Sánchez for this insight. One question here, beyond our scope, is how particular this feature is to non-agentive shame. One also says to the unsuccessful marathoner or the profligate snooker player that they should feel no shame and be proud just for having competed. We also 'protest' in their cases, in other words, at the implication of shame at their failure.

¹² Piper (1996, 76).

ashamed.”¹³ For victims of violence and abuse, such a feeling can even go so far as to instigate a paradoxical situation in which one feels ashamed of one’s shame, due to the fact that one feels that members of the surrounding community will not comprehend the experience of shame that goes along with victimization.¹⁴ This may be one reason why from a therapeutic point of view it seems critical never to intimate that victims have brought their shame on themselves, even if in some fora in Western society the victimized and the oppressed are failed too often in this respect (e.g. within legal systems).

On the other hand, there clearly seems to be something “recalcitrant” about emotions like victim shame and oppression shame.¹⁵ This would suggest that these forms of non-agentive shame seem justified, appropriate or fitting to the individuals undergoing them, perhaps no less justified and appropriate than shame in more conventional cases. In the first place, this recalcitrance is indicated by the reality of the effects of this emotion. Despite the fact many may protest that such shame should never occur (one must take pride in oneself) or that individuals may be uncertain about the causes of such shame and unwilling to disclose it, it seems unlikely the shame is made up. It is hard to imagine that the effects of the negative self-evaluation disclosed in such emotions could be so profound and devastating for a person’s life, as in rape trauma syndrome, if this were otherwise.¹⁶ Furthermore, non-agentive shame seems recalcitrant in the sense that it involves feelings about oneself that are not easily dispelled or overcome. As one victim puts it, they are like “a transparent stone that could never be broken open and never be dissolved (...) lodged in the centre of [one’s] soul.”¹⁷ In both victim shame and oppression shame, one is likely to return to the emotion again and again, if not be fixated by it.¹⁸ Piper, in her response to the accusation of ‘passing for white’, likewise specifies that the shame she felt was not simply groundless, but pointed to something real about herself as a source of concern. She does not just feel herself put down or put in her place by her professor, but “[felt] both unjustly accused or harassed, and also remorseful and shameful at having been the sort of person who could have provoked the accusation.”¹⁹ There is an important parallel here with cases of victim shame; the harm or violation visited upon one may seem unjust or senseless, but the shame one feels—with its corresponding self-evaluation—does not.²⁰ This is seen in the way such shame is difficult for a person to rationalize or alleviate, even if victims remain convinced that

¹³ Brison (1993, 6).

¹⁴ Lanning (2009, 403) and Goodman and Epstein (2008, 103).

¹⁵ Maibom (2010) and D’Arms and Jacobson (2003).

¹⁶ Jenner (2004, 244).

¹⁷ Du Toit (2009, 81), citing Raine (1998).

¹⁸ Cf. Silfver (2007, 179) and Fanon (1986, 116).

¹⁹ Piper (1996, 77).

²⁰ Cf. Gilbert (2004, 10). One finding that might contravene this description is Tangney and Dearing’s research on the correlation between shame and a kind of anger or venting directed at the shaming other. However, in the research they present, there is little attempt to distinguish between shame and humiliation, and in our view the ‘anger’ effects they observe may be accounted for by circumstances of humiliation (2002, 96–97). On the distinction between shame and humiliation, see below.

their feelings are abnormal and that others would not undergo them. In this respect caregivers treating someone who has been sexually assaulted must be careful not simply to dismiss a person's sense of shame.²¹ Among other reasons, any indication that a victim's shame is not well-founded can undermine a caregiver's attempts to empathize with victims and to validate their emotions as normal.²²

Non-agentive shame thus seems characterized by a certain 'heterological' kind of feeling about oneself which goes in two directions at once.²³ A person feels bad about themselves as a result of violence, abuse, or oppression but cannot point to any clear sense of failure on their own part and searches in vain to blame themselves—the shame seems to come to a person as if from some outside, despite oneself: despite what one believes or knows, and despite what one has done. All the same, a person feels bad about themselves as a result of violence, abuse, or oppression and this feeling seems so deep-seated and hurtful that little seems able to remove it or prevent it from resurfacing anywhere and everywhere in one's life. Describing such emotions in this way, we can clarify better what Calhoun is after. Calhoun, we recall, aims to describe our basic vulnerability to non-agentive shame vis-a-vis a susceptibility to self-evaluation by others. And in so doing, she aims to show the non-abnormality, not to mention the (ethical) legitimacy, of non-agentive shame. What is distinctive about her position is that she does not adopt a conventional attitude towards shame in general, and towards non-agentive shame in particular. Shame for her involves neither a proneness to shame only before oneself nor a proneness to shame only before others. Instead, her suggestion is that what makes us prone to feeling these kinds of shame is how individuals care deeply about their own lives with others, such that living with others means wanting to "take others seriously—to give their opinions and evaluations of oneself 'weight.'"²⁴ Calhoun holds the same to be the case in instances of non-agentive shame as well; one can be prone to feeling bad about oneself, to negatively evaluating oneself, in relation to others around one, and deeply care about and be affected by that feeling, even when there can be no question of a person's failure, moral or otherwise, and perhaps even when it may be difficult to identify any concrete 'others' who are in fact shaming us.

Yet how might this concern for living with others, for integrating oneself in communities and their social practices, as Calhoun stresses, suffice to constitute a susceptibility to non-agentive shame—especially in light of the particular features we have just highlighted? The heterology of victim shame and oppression shame indicates that the evaluation felt in shame occurs despite oneself and beyond one's control, and is at the same time deeply disconcerting, even disruptive in one's life. This heterology thus seems to show that any susceptibility to non-agentive shame requires that two distinct conditions be met in order for a negative evaluation to trigger such shame. On the one hand, an individual must be susceptible in the sense of one's

²¹ Petersen (2003, 116). Cf. also Amar and Burgess (2009, 69 ff.).

²² Hazelwood and Burgess (2009, 91). According to Petersen (2003, 115–116), these approaches are vital to the healing process for victims of abuse and violence.

²³ For a related account, cf. Thomasen (2015, 11ff).

²⁴ Calhoun (2004, 141, 138).

openness to self-evaluation when being oppressed or victimized; this is what makes the evaluation of oneself seem imposing and unavoidable, despite oneself or even despite what (some) others around one believe. On the other, an individual must be susceptible in the sense of a proneness to entering into a dolorific or agonal relation to oneself, which comes to be felt in the shame; this is what makes the evaluation of oneself so hurtful, cutting and troubling. With this distinction in place, we can see that the issue of “tak[ing] others seriously” and “giv[ing] their opinions and evaluations of oneself ‘weight’”²⁵—and of what it makes possible in terms of shame—is more complex than it at first seemed. If it is indeed even possible to take others’ evaluations seriously without agreeing with them, this may indeed satisfy the one, ‘apertural’ condition of susceptibility to shame, namely, that of one’s openness to what others think. But it does not go without saying that it satisfies the other, ‘agonal’ condition; that of a hurtful, transfixing self-relation in the shame.

This is in fact the route explored by Zahavi (2014) in his critical assessment of Calhoun.²⁶ To be clear, Zahavi’s skepticism is directed first and foremost at the (moral) taxonomy of non-agentive shame, which then has ramifications for Calhoun’s attempt to accommodate it. In his view, what seems clear about phenomena of non-agentive shame is that they are undeniably social emotions. He agrees with Calhoun that oppression shame evinces a recognition of the power, if not importance, of other’s evaluations and opinions in one’s lives. That is, they show a certain susceptibility on the part of individuals, in that those evaluations are external, unavoidable, and imposing. Deploying a Sartrean conceptual framework, Zahavi argues that such emotions involve an awareness of another’s gaze, either directly or indirectly, and more importantly, an awareness of the other’s power over oneself—the power to subjugate, the power to abuse, the power to violate.

On the other hand, Zahavi has doubts about how much non-agentive shame shares with other more classical examples of shame: for instance, like that of Sophocles’s Ajax, who might have felt a deep, unbearable pain at the realization of what he had become through his ridiculous act. This hesitation fits within his wider concern to establish finer grained distinctions between shame and other so-called self-conscious emotions such as embarrassment, shyness, and humiliation. One criterion for Zahavi in this regard is the scope in which one is brought to look at oneself and undergo an evaluation in these emotions; is the evaluation enduring or short term? Is it painful and serious, or rather light? According to Zahavi, what distinguishes shame from other emotions is that the evaluation it involves is a particularly painful one, due to how there has been triggered an “overpowering” shift in perspective on oneself, a “thrusting of oneself in the spotlight.”²⁷ This shift cannot be individually or autonomously accomplished, but neither can it be entirely foreign to an individual and their view of themselves. As such, what makes the evaluation of oneself in shame ‘agonal,’ i.e. hurtful, is that there has to be “acceptance of the other’s

²⁵ Calhoun (2004, 141, 138).

²⁶ Cf. also Sánchez (2015) for a related critique.

²⁷ Zahavi (2014, 222).

evaluation.”²⁸ In other words, to the two conditions of susceptibility to shame we have just described, Zahavi may be seen to add a third that would mediate between them; that of an underlying joint or collective agreement on or form of sharing of certain “standards,” of at least some “part of the evaluation” to which one is subjected.²⁹

In cases of non-agentive shame, by contrast, the contingency or externality of, for instance, an oppressive evaluation of oneself by another would seem to debar any such shift in perspective or “global decrease in self-esteem.”³⁰ In other words, such emotions are questionable as legitimate forms of shame due to their very apparent ‘groundlessness’—the fact that an oppressed or victimized person may not accept the interpreted norms or values involved in the self-evaluation. Piper, for instance, struggles but does not agree with her professor’s judgment of her behavior. This distance or discontinuity in value beliefs or moral understanding between oppressor and oppressed, or between a victim and an unsympathetic or biased community, would entail that such emotions may reflect only an imposed, perhaps humiliating evaluation (by others), but not a self-related and thus agonal one.³¹ Such lack of agreement thus precludes according to Zahavi the evaluation from bearing on one’s self-esteem or on one’s ‘whole self,’ as is seen in other forms of shame with their “global decrease in self-esteem.”³² The implications of Zahavi’s account, perhaps indicating a Schelerian concern with inauthentic emotions, are serious. Not only would Calhoun be mistaken in proposing that anything like giving weight to others’ opinions, albeit without agreement, can generate anything resembling true shame—it cannot, because it does not meet the condition of “acceptance” or sharing argued by Zahavi as essential to the phenomenology of shame. More significantly still, there would be something confused about any attempt, as with Calhoun’s or Maibom’s GCV’s, that would put non-agentive shame on equal footing with other forms of shame. This is insofar as non-agentive shame might not be a form of shame at all in Zahavi’s view, but concerns another emotion entirely (humiliation).

Zahavi’s discussion of Calhoun, and more generally of non-agentive shame, is carefully considered, but one may have reservations nonetheless. Two sorts in particular are worth considering. In the first place, there may be problems with the use of Sartre from which Zahavi derives the requirement that there be a form of “acceptance” of others’ beliefs or evaluations. Sartre clearly states that “shame is by nature recognition [...] that I *am* as the Other sees me” and that “through my shame itself [...] I affirm a profound unity of consciousnesses, [...] since I accept and want that

²⁸ Zahavi (2014, 225). Cf. also Zahavi (2014, 213): “Shame makes me aware of not being in control and of having my foundation outside myself. The other’s gaze confers a truth upon me that I do not master, and over which I am, in that moment, powerless (....) Thus, to feel shame, according to Sartre, is to recognize and accept the other’s evaluation, if ever so fleetingly. It is to identify with the object that the other looks at and judges.”

²⁹ Zahavi (2014, 226–227). On this point, Zahavi’s position seems to align with Kekes, who insists that “it is essential that we ourselves should accept the standard [we fall short of], otherwise we would not feel badly about falling short of it” (1988, 283). For a critical discussion of this position, which anticipates Calhoun’s, cf. Buss (1999, 528–529).

³⁰ Zahavi (2014, 228).

³¹ Cf. Zahavi’s examples of the first aid giver and the niqab abstainer (2014, 227).

³² Zahavi (2014, 228).

others confer upon me a being which I recognize.”³³ Nonetheless, it is not certain that what Sartre refers to in these and similar passages can be correlated with Zahavi’s examples of “respect” or “acceptance of an assessment” or evaluation,³⁴ all of which seem to hinge upon a notion of accord or correspondence. Against such a reading, one may point to how, in the same passages highlighted by Zahavi’s analysis, Sartre also insists that in the self-relation shown in shame one cannot overcome the “unpredictability” and “uneasy indetermination” of “the being which I am for” the shaming other.³⁵ Moreover, Sartre stresses the shamed individual’s radical separation from and passivity towards another who elicits shame through their gaze.³⁶ Sartre’s emphasis in those passages thus throws up concerns regarding the epistemological and phenomenological character of what and how one is thus ‘accepting’ in his account of shame and raise the question whether such ‘accepting’ is not a consequence, rather than condition, of the pain felt in shame. It coheres, more generally, with Sartre’s attempt to understand intersubjectivity not on the basis of some underlying form of sharing, such as empathy, but on the basis of a more direct experience of otherness.

Second, apart from exegetical issues, there are some risks associated with Zahavi’s suggestion that oppression shame and victim shame may have more to do with the experience of being humiliated or demeaned than with any form of shame proper. On Zahavi’s view, we recall, shame proper seems unlikely in cases of non-agentive shame, for want of ‘acceptance’ of one’s oppression or respect of one’s oppressor’s views. The implication is that the sense of shame Piper described may have more to do with being humiliated or demeaned than anything else.³⁷ Moreover, though Zahavi refers to victim shame only in passing, one may wonder whether he can avoid his requirement of ‘acceptance’ from having similarly unpalatable implications—the insinuation of an inauthentic emotion and a deflation of its effects—in those cases as well. One risk here of Zahavi’s suggestion is a sort of insensitivity to the oppressed and the victimized themselves. The linkage of shame with victimization and oppression is well-documented and in the case of the latter has a long history, for instance as has been shown by Fanon.³⁸ Hence, while our colloquial and folk understandings of the emotions and their relations may be in need of critique and clarification, there may be something unpalatable about a philosophical analysis which deems it “[not] very likely” or “implausible” that the oppressed and the victimized would truly feel shame if they succeeded in rejecting the perspective that shames them, for instance if they were “thoroughly secular” or if they had “thoroughly” liberated themselves from oppressive world views.³⁹ In such a position we can discern the trace of ideals of autonomy in accounts of shame that Calhoun and

³³ Sartre (1998, 222, 262, trans. changed).

³⁴ Zahavi (2014, 227–228).

³⁵ Cf. also Sartre (1998, 245): “[Shame] reveals me as a being which is my being without being for me.”

³⁶ Sartre (1998, 262–263).

³⁷ Zahavi (2014, 227).

³⁸ Fanon (1986, 213–216).

³⁹ Zahavi (2014, 226–227).

other GCV's have sought to critique. Calhoun in this respect reminds us to question who is speaking for whom in such a position, and in the name of what.

A further risk inherent in Zahavi's objections to Calhoun is more phenomenological in tenor, and has to do with the very distinction between humiliation and shame on which he insists. Zahavi has a point in drawing attention to how oppression may result in a feeling of humiliation, the effects of which may be as profound as those of shame.⁴⁰ Despite his suggestion to the contrary, however, recognizing the role of humiliation in a person's experience of oppression may not yet go far enough to account for why such persons may also feel shame. Shame and humiliation evince important links, yet one particular feature "when they come apart"⁴¹ is the object with which we are concerned in each. A key facet of being humiliated is that one is concerned with the situation or "position" in which one finds oneself, a situation which is not just populated by but organized around a (potential or actual) humiliating other;⁴² in humiliation I am made very much aware of being put in a demeaning or debasing situation which seems very much out of sync with my own sense of self-esteem or self-worth. This means that although humiliation and shame can both be described as self-conscious emotions, the way the self is involved in each is different. In humiliation, the world of others and its contingencies is very much my concern; hence my anger and resentment at any others I may see as instigating the humiliation, and my sense of injustice and frustration at having to undergo it.⁴³ In other words, the humiliating situation is very much the focus or object of my attention; my attention is world-directed and not directed at myself, and this is shown by the fact that the humiliation is something that can be fled, eradicated, or even forgiven.⁴⁴ Humiliation thus seems a candidate for being classified as what Cropanzano et al. describe as an "outward-focused emotion."⁴⁵ This is not so with shame; there, it is not simply one's relation to the world that is out of joint and that might offer recourse, if not rectification. Rather, in shame, the emotion seems more "inward-focused."⁴⁶ What concerns one most, what contaminates every relation, is the self, not just as trigger for the emotion, but as the irresistible object to which

⁴⁰ Zahavi (2014, 226–227).

⁴¹ Zahavi (2014, 226–227).

⁴² Gilbert (2004, 10).

⁴³ On this analysis of the distinction between humiliation and shame, one may take issue with Thomassen's analysis of shame (2015). Thomassen's account, especially with its focus on violence as a response of feeling that one is losing control over one's identity, may be more apt for describing humiliation, insofar as she focuses on a 'competition' between how one sees oneself and how others do (2015, 13). If our analyses is correct, however, descriptors such as 'competition' and 'tension' may not yet suffice for describing shame; as we have tried to show, even in non-agentive shame with its heterology there is not just a competing version of oneself that one is confronted with, and over which one may attempt to regain power. The shameful self is painful not because one has lost control or power over one's identity (Calhoun's specter of weakness once more) but because how it seems to fit me, to inexorably turn me towards a truth about myself, whatever my convictions and my self-conception, from which I cannot turn away.

⁴⁴ Though she does not distinguish shame and humiliation, Lynd intimates that there may be a difference of intensity between the two, where the latter is much more about an exposure of oneself (1963, 29).

⁴⁵ Cropanzano et al (2011, 58).

⁴⁶ Cropanzano et al (2011, 58).

one's ill-feeling returns again and again. As those undergoing non-agentive shame attest, this happens not only in certain shame-inducing situations, but also irrespective of any situation.⁴⁷

This distinction between shame and humiliation thereby raises a difficulty of understanding how an emotion with the one sort of focus, i.e. in humiliation, should go over into or be exchanged for a focus appropriate to the other emotion. To put more of a point on the issue; how should it be that one could pass from feeling humiliated, and being fixated on the situation out of joint with one's sense of self-esteem, to feeling ashamed, and being fixated on oneself? Zahavi posits, as does Gilbert before him, a process of 'contamination' by which the humiliating position one is put in by oppression or victimization infects one's sense of self.⁴⁸ One has not managed to insulate one's sense of self, as it were: that is, to keep oneself from feeling "soiled and burdened" by the denigrating position within the humiliating situation. The problem with this reasoning, while plausible enough, is that it repeats just the sort of mistake Calhoun undertook to avoid in the first place.⁴⁹ It puts the victimized and the oppressed who might feel shame in an enfeebled position of having "fail[ed] to sustain their own positive self-evaluation," perhaps because "they lack strength of mind" or because "they succumb to others' opinions and abandon their own views of themselves," or some similar explanation.⁵⁰ Put in the terms of our analysis of the heterology of non-agentive shame above, Zahavi very much emphasizes the groundlessness of oppression shame and victim shame, but cannot account for their recalcitrance, except by imputing some sort of weakness or deficiency to the victimized and the oppressed.

This is where our consideration of Zahavi's critiques of GCV's like Calhoun's comes full circle. Even if we concede, as does Calhoun, that in some cases people may be prone to being overly influenced or even hurt in some sense by others' views, it seems reductive to think that weakness, deficiency, or immaturity are the only explanations for susceptibility to non-agentive shame. As Calhoun puts the question, on what basis should we think that there is something wrong with Piper, especially as she seems "perfectly capable of sustaining her confidence in her own worth no matter how insultingly she is treated?"⁵¹ And if there is nothing wrong with her, and if there is something 'right' about Piper's shame, what could that be? Or again with victims of abuse or violence; is their shame solely derivative of some deeper problem they have with their self-worth, some damage or weakness in themselves, or might it be product of something that is "natural" (Calhoun), indeed essential

⁴⁷ Fanon, for instance, describes this as an "infernal circle" dominating one's life: "I am the slave not of the idea that others have of me but of my own appearance" (1986, 116). For victims of rape, Du Toit calls this "the falling away of a relatively dependable, predictable world capable of being transformed into conformity with her projects and intentions" (2009, 94).

⁴⁸ Zahavi (2014, 227). Cf. Gilbert (2004, 11).

⁴⁹ On this point, Calhoun critiques Bartky's understanding of gender shame. Cf. Bartky (1990, 83–99).

⁵⁰ Calhoun (2004, 136–137). Cf. also Calhoun (2004, 136): "No rational, mature person who firmly rejects her subordinate social status would feel shame in the face of sexist, racist, homophobic or classist expressions of contempt."

⁵¹ Calhoun (2004, 137).

to all subjects and crucial for their ethical lives? This is our suspicion; there may be another sets of considerations relevant to what Calhoun is after, i.e. an account of “what it might mean to take others seriously,” but not from a position of weakness, damage, or immaturity. This is no easy task; how should Piper’s sense of self-esteem and maturity be understood as compatible with a susceptibility to non-agentive shame, and as not merely being the indifferent autonomy of Calhoun’s “moral pioneer”? To meet this challenge, we wish to explore a phenomenological understanding of individuals’ basic need for social participation that makes them susceptible to non-agentive shame, and this in both senses of the susceptibility referred to above: that is, both the apertural and the agonal aspects, without the strong demand for ‘acceptance,’ as some sort of belief-based accord or consent, which is imposed by Zahavi. This basic need for social participation is on our view tied up with an account of human failing, which is an ‘agentive’ consideration that GCV’s like Calhoun’s make little room for to begin with. Thus, perhaps what we will point to will suffice neither Calhoun nor Zahavi: for the former remaining a mere “psychological explanation” and not a robust quality of a mature ethical agent, and for the latter a mere nuance in Sartre’s position that does little to alleviate his concerns. At the very least we hope to point to a complication and if not an opening in Sartre’s understanding of shame, which may allow us to make some inroads towards the puzzling susceptibility to non-agentive shame that Calhoun and other GCV’s have been after.

3 Failure (an)epistemic

It should come as no surprise that in the literature on shame Sartre’s name comes up as a matter of course. Less well known, however, is the fact that apart from his so-called ontological account of shame, which is generally read as being morally or normatively neutral and which is mainly seen as pertaining to discussions of the problem of ‘other minds,’ Sartre can also offer philosophical accounts of shame a quite rich account of human failing. Our claim is that developing those Sartrean insights can go some ways towards attenuating some of the difficulties that we have just shown Calhoun’s GCV of non-agentive shame incurs.

To make sense of a Sartrean contribution to the question of susceptibility to non-agentive shame, the first question is whether Sartre offers a phenomenological account of human failing that is congenial to a diminishment of the role of agency in shame phenomena. Here the focus shall be upon what we might think of as the uncertainty of failure, which highlights the rather unconventional approach Sartre adopts towards the experience of adversity and failure, in contrast to some more well-known models. Such an account will then point us in the direction of why non-agentive shame seems to be so authoritative and hurtful. What the Sartrean perspective may offer is a way of understanding how an individual’s susceptibility to such shame need not be explained by appeal to a unconscious process of internalization of social norms (Maibom), but rather in terms of a subjective need to overcome and remedy the uncertain and dissatisfying self-awareness that seems to arise from encounters with adversity and failing.

In order to situate what Sartre has to say about human failing, it will first prove useful to clarify two sorts of questions about human failing that his account may be seen to concern. A first question is how human beings become aware of or perceive that they are failing. This question does not merely concern how an individual becomes aware of aiming at a certain objective, but also how one becomes aware of not reaching, or not yet reaching, to some greater or less extent, that goal. For instance, one influential example, also within the psychology of shame and guilt, is Lewis's 'attributive-SRG' ("standards, rules or goals") framework.⁵² According to this framework, there are two main components for being able to perceive failure.⁵³ On the one hand, it requires that if there is to be an experience of failure in a non-trivial sense (as opposed to a late train or a fallen tree frustrating one's plans), the failure has to be perceived as inherently having to do with oneself. In Lewis's terms, this involves an "internal" attribution of the failing to oneself, whereby the connection between oneself and the failing is provided by the recognition of a striving or effort, and not just a willing, to reach a certain goal. Only someone fully cognizant of their endeavoring to realize an objective could arrive at a sense of failure. On the other hand, Lewis's framework requires that failure can only be perceived when there is knowledge of a standard or criterion against which the goal-oriented behavior can be appraised; such knowledge enables the correlation or comparison by which one can determine whether, and to what extent, one's efforts or striving are failing.⁵⁴

A second question is that of the meaning of failure: how much impact it has on one's life, how seriously or lightly one takes it, what one takes the failure to say about oneself and how one thereby feels about it. The notion here is that the significance of failure ought to be conceived as scalar in nature (in contrast with the liminal or threshold-breaking act of a transgression). The more significant the object of an individual's striving, the more an individual may suffer in failing to reach it, whereas minor 'objects' only result in minor senses of fault and failing. Such a concern can be seen in the psychotherapeutic view, chiefly credited to Nathanson, that the experience of failure should under normal conditions entail a reduction of the desire or an attenuation of the intentionality that motivated the failed behavior.⁵⁵

⁵² Lewis (2010, 742).

⁵³ Cf. Orth et al (2006, 1609): "In contrast to guilt, the key aspect of shame is that the individual perceives failure of the self in meeting important social standards (and not only moral but also competence and aesthetic standards)."

⁵⁴ A further important component of this model is the question of how to explain one's failures, that is, of the so-called causal or 'dispositional attribution' for one's failure. This sense of attribution is to be distinguished from the self-attribution just mentioned, insofar as here it is a question of exploring reasons; once there is awareness that the failure or success is my own, there is the question of what causal or situational factors it may be put down to, and what it is about oneself or one's milieu that contributed to the failure. One influential example of this perspective is Weiner's, which isolates different modalities that affect how causal attributions are made. These include explanatory factors such as internality and externality (locus), controllability, stability (stability and effort), globality (Weiner 2006, 8–9, 2010, 31, 34).

⁵⁵ Where shame for the frustrated act ensues from the process "wish/plan/affect/action/affect" (Nathanson 1992, 160).

There are many more questions about human failing that can and have been raised in philosophy and the human sciences, as well as questions about their relations. For our current purposes, we simply wish to ask about these two levels with which Sartrean account of human failing intervenes. We aim to show that Sartre raises some issues especially in terms of perceiving failure and the impact of such experiences. Sartre's approach constitutes neither a refutation nor a frontal attack on accounts such as Lewis's, but it does present some complications in terms of both how individuals experience failure and what impact those experiences have.

Consideration of Sartre's alternative must begin with the observation that, for Sartre, failing is a constant factor in human experience.⁵⁶ Not only human weaknesses, but also constraints, obstacles, and hindrances surface throughout everyday life, no matter where one looks. By these are meant all the limitations, physical or otherwise, that circumstance imposes upon human beings. These include those with which persons are born or develop or those they inherit, either materially, culturally, or socially (such as physical and mental disabilities, prejudices and biases, educations, means, backgrounds, ...). There is, however, nothing inherently pessimistic about this claim; to maintain as much is only to insist upon the embodied nature of human life. That is to say, failure and adversity are two sides of the same coin for Sartre; failing is nothing other than a way of encountering a form of resistance. Crucially, however, Sartre emphasizes the manner in which this resistance is encountered, which entails that one never experiences the failure of one's efforts per se, but only the qualities of the things that lead one's act to frustration.⁵⁷

In Sartre's model, we encounter adversity and resistance, not 'in' our selves or 'in' our bodies, but rather through the situation in which we pursue our practical intentions (the "instrumental complex"). This resistance makes itself felt as the qualities of the things dealt with, in the heaviness of doors, the dullness of knives, the hardness of stones, and the like.⁵⁸ There are two key premises here. In the first place, a sensation of effort could never occur at the most basic or natural level of practical intentionality without interfering with its non-reflective character, which is to say, with how in practical life the primary objects of one's intentions are things to be done and states of affairs with which to be concerned.⁵⁹ Positing that there

⁵⁶ Sartre (1998, 324–325): "Bachelard rightly reproaches phenomenology for not sufficiently taking into account what he calls the "coefficient of adversity" in objects. (...) But we must understand that the instrumentality is primary: it is in relation to an original instrumental complex that things reveal their resistance and their adversity."

⁵⁷ Sartre (1998, 324): "We never have any sensation of our effort (...) We perceive the resistance of things. What I perceive when I want to lift this glass to my mouth is not my effort but the heaviness of the glass—that is, its resistance to entering into an instrumental complex which I have made appear in the world."

⁵⁸ Sartre (2004a, 330): "It is at this level that the matter to be worked, as passive resistance, makes itself a negation of man in so far as man negates the existing state of affairs; fatigue is being in so far as it is distinct from knowledge and from praxis, in so far as its inert capacity can be reduced only through an expenditure of energy."

⁵⁹ Sartre (2004a, 85): "Resistance and, consequently, negative forces can exist only within a movement which is determined in accordance with the future, that is to say, in accordance with a certain form of integration. If the end to be attained were not fixed from the beginning, how could one even conceive of a restraint?"

would be such sensation of effort within or accompanying practical intentions would thus presuppose that one acquire feedback or data on the fly pertaining to the degree of personal investment in and fulfillment of a particular intentional behavior. Yet, as Sartre would be quick to point out, any such feedback loop would require an inwardly-directed or reflective objectification of one's own intentional behavior, and would thus contradict the nature of practical intentions in the first place, namely, to be directed at the world. Just as the body according to Sartre is lived and not known, so too are intentions a matter of self-awareness, but not self-knowledge.⁶⁰

Second, an important facet of Sartre's notion of intentionality, widely accepted today, is that intentions ought not to be confused with what they intend; intentions are just the make-up of acts of conversing, walking, giving, etc. This means we ought to be careful not to ascribe any experiential qualities to intentions 'themselves', apart from whichever act they are constituting. In other words, intentions do not appear themselves and do not add to the properties of what they intend,⁶¹ and this insight was a key motivation for Sartre to distinguish between non-reflective (world-directed) and reflective (inwardly or self-directed) sorts of intentions in the first place.⁶² In a similar fashion for Sartre, in relation to phenomenal properties our intentions are simply 'nothing.' Insofar as we are aware of them,⁶³ they are apprehended as being directed wholly '*dehors*,' entirely directed with the world and the situation. To claim otherwise would be to posit a process of cognition underlying even the most basic forms of intentionality. Accordingly, intentions have no phenomenal properties which they could lend to such an experience of failure, as if we could somehow sense our intentions being resisted, or sense an intention struggling or making an effort to reach fulfilment. It is only when they are objectified, for instance under the form of the will, that intentions come to seem to possess any phenomenal properties at all.

On Sartre's arguments, then, we can say that "there is no inertia" to our intentions that would have to be sustained by effort.⁶⁴ Parallel to this, we do not experience resistance 'in' our lived bodies. Resistance is met in and at the world. There is an interesting link here between this Sartrean insight and Merleau-Ponty's interest in the so-called 'lived body' (*le corps propre*).⁶⁵ The character of the lived body as

⁶⁰ Cf. Sartre (1992, 82): "We are therefore in the untenable situation that nothing comes from the outside to break up our efforts so long as they are experienced in freedom, and yet these efforts have their destiny outside of themselves" (trans. changed).

⁶¹ Cf. Sartre (1960, 49): "When I run after a streetcar, when I look at the time, when I am absorbed in contemplating a portrait, there is no I. There is consciousness of the streetcar-having-to-be-overtaken, etc., and non-positional consciousness of consciousness. In fact, I am then plunged into the world of objects; it is they which constitute the unity of my consciousness: it is they which present themselves with values, with attractive and repellant qualities—but me, I have disappeared."

⁶² The notion here echoes an earlier finding by Husserl; while all intentionality is embodied or "bound to a body," these intentions have no sensuous appearance or localization within the body. In other words, there is something artificial about the idea that a calculating intention would be in my head or a touching intention would be in my finger ["my finger is touching the table"] (Husserl 1989, 160–161).

⁶³ And this is minimally so according to Sartre: hence the notion of 'irreflective intentions.'

⁶⁴ Sartre (1998, 61): "There is no inertia in consciousness."

⁶⁵ Cf. Merleau-Ponty (2012, 74).

enmeshed or intertwined with the world—in its ‘non-canonical’ reality as a thing among things, as much part of the situation as it is ‘mine’—may be demonstrated in how practical intentions encounter resistance vis-à-vis the qualities of the world, in the things confronted, the situations tackled, etc. While exercising and struggling to reach one’s goal, it is not one’s own body that appears per se. Rather, the body—these arms, these legs—appears almost indistinguishably from this stone floor, as tied up with its hardness, its warmth, and so on. It is the floor, not simply my arm or my body, that seems too unstable, too painful for me to carry out my intention, and it is only in a reflective attitude that I may switch attention to perceiving ‘arm,’ ‘torso,’ and so on, and their properties.⁶⁶

Because an intention aims at realizing the possible or attaining a value solely by means of a given object or situation, any resistance to the possible or the valued can be perceived only via the phenomenal properties of some state of affairs with which one is practically engaged.⁶⁷ However, all this is not to say that effort is a mere figment or phantasy. If and when we do reflect on ourselves—‘objectify’ our own intentions, in Sartre’s terms—then there indeed can be a sense in which we would be aware of making an effort. But then, in this reflective mode of thought, to which one can shift at any given moment, the access I have to my own intentions has changed. In Sartre’s terms, the access to one’s intentions becomes “suspect.” My intentionality has been modified into something else, whose qualities are not quite the same and whose reliability as a source of information about oneself is easily called into question.⁶⁸

In a discussion with a different sort of focus, it would be worthwhile to work out how Sartre’s phenomenological critique of the notion of ‘effort’ dovetails with his more well-known critiques of personal identity and epistemological models of

⁶⁶ Importantly for Sartre, however, this way of encountering resistance does not only hold true for practical intentions to be realized through one’s body. The same character of resistance is evinced in ‘purely’ mental acts as well. For instance, both sugar cubes and paintings can serve as a basis for imagining the Alhambra palace in Granada; neither ‘analogon’ or material ground of the image makes the imaginative intention less spontaneous than the other. Nonetheless, it is still possible to say from Sartre’s perspective that the sugar cube may put up some resistance to the imaginative act, and that the act will only be achieved with difficulty, if at all. How would such resistance, and concomitantly, the failure of the imaginative act, be experienced? Precisely as a perceptual experience of the qualities of the sugar cube, its inner shaded whiteness, its crystalline structure, and so on. Cf. Sartre (2004b, 26, 28): “The matter of the portrait itself solicits the spectator to effect the synthesis, because the painter has given it a perfect resemblance to the subject. The matter of the imitation is a human body. It is rigid, it resists. The imitator is small, stout, brunette; a woman, she imitates a man. The result is that the imitation is approximate.”

⁶⁷ This explains Sartre’s insistence on the strong link between instrumentality and resistance. Such instrumentality has a double significance for any experience of resistance; on the one hand, there can be no resistance without ‘projecting/intending of an end,’ and on the other, there can be no resistance other than what appears as the ‘as/to’ of that end, namely the instrumental qualities of that means. Cf. note 21 above.

⁶⁸ Sartre (1960, 48). In this regard, our understanding of effort according to Sartre differs from Peckitt’s (2010), for whom the experience of pain would constitute an important challenge to the Sartrean thesis. On our view, Peckitt too readily assimilates pain with effort, and the pain felt within one’s own body with the way actions may appear to be painful.

consciousness.⁶⁹ Presently, however, it will suffice to flesh out the implications of such a critique for a phenomenological account of failure. If a sense of effort can only be a reflective reconstruction of intentional experience, and if resistance and adversity can only be experienced in terms of the qualities of the objects and the situations through which intentional aims are posited, then this means in the experience of failure an individual never concretely perceives their own limitations, but only meets with the things of the world, which despite their rich qualities do not really tell individuals anything new about themselves.⁷⁰ In contrast to how one might be tempted to think, there is nothing particularly informative, and thus nothing particularly rewarding or personally enriching about the confrontation with failure and adversity. Rather, the experience of failure for Sartre is intrinsically linked to a disconcerting kind of uncertainty regarding one's own limitations, about which nothing is ever complete or settled.

For this reason, we have suggested that Sartre's approach ought be described as an epistemic model of failure. Phrased in a technical Sartrean vocabulary, such a model entails that, to the 'failure' of the "being-in-itself" of the situation truly to impose (instead of merely presenting) a form of limitation or adversity upon an individual, there corresponds a failure of the "for-itself" or consciousness truly to integrate such a limitation. However, if one were to try to put this notion of failure more colloquially, it might be said that to a certain extent we have a sense of failing to fail. In light of the challenges and difficulties one faces, the foundering of one's intentional aims never seems abject enough, the capitulation of one's endeavors never feeble enough. This does not mean that individuals can go through life oblivious to failure; the world abounds with indicators and information as to whether one has attained one's object (e.g. in terms of Lewis's "SRG's") or not. At the same time, however, Sartre raises questions about the extent to which one is able to attribute failure to one's 'self,' that is, to limitations and faults that one has perceived as playing a role in the foundering of one's intentions. Once again, resistance and adversity, and the failure they may occasion, are encountered in the world, in terms of how the world appears, and not within ourselves.

This element of uncertainty that Sartre introduces in the perception of failure also has ramifications for the meaning or impact of failure. The point here is not that there is an inherently bright side to one's failings. It is rather that when we are forced to reflect upon and objectify our failings, such shortcomings do not seem to easily correlate with the limitations we presume to be imposed upon us. The experience

⁶⁹ That is, how Sartre would account for the (non)experience of effort as a passive quality of the ego within the framework of analysis of Sartre (1960). It would moreover be worthwhile to contrast this Sartrean standpoint on failing with Heidegger's view of a similar phenomenon, which comes down (for Heidegger) to a confrontation with a form of understanding or 'primordial cognition' that underlies all comportment or intention: "When we merely stare at something, our just-having-it-before-us lies before us as a failure to understand it any more. This grasping which is free of the 'as,' is a privation of the kind of seeing in which one merely understands. It is not more primordial than that kind of seeing, but is derived from it" (Heidegger 1962, 190).

⁷⁰ Sartre (1998, 488–489): "Thus, the world by coefficients of adversity reveals to me the way in which I stand in relation to the ends which I assign myself, so that I can never know if it is giving me information about myself or about it".

of failure may lead, in other words, to a sense of discrepancy when individuals may be expected identify with failings, as in cases of shame. A person may feel bad not simply because they have failed, as it were, 'too much' in striving for a particular goal, but may also be haunted by a sense of not having failed 'enough,' due to the poor quality of the self-knowledge or information about the self that is gained through adversity and failure. This is precisely the question with which individuals are confronted again and again in pursuing their goals; at an immediate level of intentional experience, one can never be sure of the degree and the nature to which the self's limitations are being made apparent, because on Sartre's view such limitations can be perceived or experienced only vis-a-vis the adverse characteristics of one's environs.

4 Susceptibility to non-agentive shame as a need for social integration

The key finding via Sartre has been that the experience of failing is more about an experience of adversity than anything else. We experience adversity not in terms of our efforts or limitations, but in terms of the physical and social properties of one's situation. And what we learn about ourselves in the process of undergoing adversity is correspondingly little—hence an uncertainty we harbor about our own finitude, as a result of this anepistemic notion of human failing.

Too little has been made of this Sartrean perspective on human failing—for instance, how it both informs and is informed by an analysis of embodied experience. Moreover, too little attention has been given to how such an experience of failing, bringing with it a kind of uncertainty about oneself, may constitute a susceptibility to shame in general, and to non-agentive shame in particular. We have seen that in order to account for this susceptibility—for how others' evaluations can reach the core of one's being despite oneself—something like what Buss describes as a "missing ingredient" has to be postulated.⁷¹ This would be something that makes "the content of shame experience" more than an alternative and contingent opinion about or view of oneself; it would be something that makes that shame content—the negative evaluation—both painful and authoritative, and thus fitting to how an individual is able view him or herself, no matter how inconsistent that evaluation may be with that person's world views or their prior beliefs about themselves. Yet from whence is this 'missing ingredient' to be drawn—in particular with respect to non-agentive shame—if it can be understood neither as a weakness on the individual's part, as Calhoun warns, nor as a implicit form of acceptance or agreement, as Zahavi insists? To phrase the question in more Sartrean terms, if shame is something one feels "*because of the fact (...) that I need the mediation of the other in order to be what I am,*"⁷² how should this need for mediation by the other be understood to arise?

⁷¹ Buss (1999, 527).

⁷² Sartre (1998, 384, emphasis added).

By focusing attention on the role and impact of adversity on individuals' lives in Sartre's account of embodied existence, we can avoid postulating any abstract notion of vulnerability or passivity through which individuals would be exposed to social life and its norms in general, and the shaming gaze of the other in particular. There are in other words experiential underpinnings, rooted in each individual's intentional interaction with their situation, for why one needs to "acknowledge" that one is as others see her or him.⁷³ These are the uncertainty and lack of self-knowledge as to one's own finitude, arising from experiences of adversity, which instill in individuals the need to be evaluated by others.⁷⁴ Others must take the measure of our finitude, in lieu of any individual achievement of self-understanding to be reached through the experience of failure. Such a need is born out in Sartre's example of an individual perceiving himself to be inherently disadvantaged. What Sartre makes clear in that example is that such an individual should like to "measure [his] inferiority," to perceive just where and how it enters his life by limiting him, through its economy, to certain possibilities rather than others. However, for all of his efforts to do so, for instance by (over-) ambitiously attempting to realize great accomplishments, these only remain unjustified and "unsteady" approximations futilely attempting "to render more noticeable this inferiority which we claim to flee," and hence in the end only refer him back to his incertitude as to his own limitations and failings.⁷⁵

There is no reason to see Piper as a failure; she was raised to embrace and take pride in the "history, wisdom, connectedness, and moral solidarity of [her] family and community," and we have no reason to think that she did not "always identif[y] [her]self as black."⁷⁶ In terms of understanding her susceptibility to being shamed, in this case a shame for not being black enough or for posturing as black, it would be wrong then to say that this susceptibility stems from how she is not black enough. In light of her self-understanding, Piper thus has grounds to reject the professor's judgment. All the same, Piper's goal of embracing and identifying with her heritage and community, of not passing, has not been one free of adversity and difficulty. It has been beset by obstacles in a variety of ways. Some have been imposed by her own body, that is, through being endowed with a body that she could only live and not know to be not "visibly black."⁷⁷ Other obstacles have been imposed by her society with its history of racism, and some even by her community, for instance in being subjected to 'the Suffering test' to which community members submitted each other as a condition of belonging.⁷⁸ These are forms of adversity through which she has been tested time and again—to prove herself true to her heritage and community,

⁷³ In this respect we are going beyond related accounts of Sartre that posit such a need for evaluation as "coming naturally to us" (Buss 1999, 529) or the product of an undesirable if inexplicable tension between "identity and self-conception" (Thomassen 2015, 13), while at the same time establishing a link with Calhoun's central claim that shame stems from the practices of social life (2004, 145).

⁷⁴ For an interesting related account, cf. Mui (2005).

⁷⁵ Sartre (1998, 473–474).

⁷⁶ Piper (1996, 85, 79).

⁷⁷ Piper (1996, 76).

⁷⁸ Piper (1996, 78–79).

to prove that she belongs, to prove that she is not betraying them by taking the easy route of passing.

Piper's story thus has much to do with a confrontation with limits, and her endeavor to deal with them. Piper has experienced adversity in certain definite ways, where on our proposal each and every one leaves her with a question or uncertainty about herself, namely, regarding how much such adversity has to do with herself—not with what she failed to be, but with what she is, as a kind of “anti-ideal”—and how much it has to do with the world in which she finds herself.⁷⁹ This uncertainty may make us feel threatened by others. As Piper points out, we may see in others an “attack” on our “conception” of ourselves, of our own make-up as “physical or psychological properties,” and this is where she claims racism may come from.⁸⁰ On the other hand, the anepistemic experience of adversity and failing equally makes us need others and make us open to their judgements; it makes us need to participate in communities and practices with others and to heed their evaluations when we do so, even when we would disagree with them—precisely because others can always see us in ways we cannot see ourselves. This is a way of taking others seriously, of conjoining one's life with theirs in practices and communities that does not only come down to some form of respect or acceptance. This is because what matters is not what one shares with those others, but precisely what one does not, and can never share with them. It is only through such participation in others' lives, and theirs in ours, that we can grasp what we become throughout our lives and endeavors, that we can gain an understanding of what we are and what we are not. As Calhoun puts it, in terms similar to Sartre's, “that I fancy myself to be one kind of person or another does not give me an identity as that kind of person [...] Who I am morally is who I am interpretable and identifiable by others as being.”⁸¹

The Sartrean account of adversity and failing, correlative to a need for social evaluation irrespective of “epistemic weight,” thus seems to cohere well with Calhoun's account of susceptibility to non-agentive shame as involving a need to take part in a social-moral practice with others. There are certain advantages to conjoining Sartre's and Calhoun's account of susceptibility to non-agentive shame in this way. In the first place, the emphasis on self-uncertainty can accommodate what we have analyzed as the heterological features of non-agentive shame, namely its qualities as an emotion which seems both groundless and recalcitrant. From our perspective, both of these qualities are linked with what we have described as the anepistemic experience of adversity and failing; because we do not know ourselves as well as we would like to, and because others may know us in ways we cannot grasp, their evaluations

⁷⁹ Cf. the study by Lindsay-Hartz et al (1995), reported by Gilbert, on the connection between falling short and shame, in which “participants [when ashamed] talked about being who they did not want to be. That is, they experienced themselves as embodying an anti-ideal, rather than simply not being who they wanted to be” (2004, 19).

⁸⁰ Piper (1996, 78).

⁸¹ Calhoun (2004, 145), On Calhoun's position on how emotions are disconnected from knowledge or belief, cf. Calhoun (2003, 246–247). This notion of a desire for social integration animating or underlying shame is also not far removed from Maibom's GCV, which locates in “proto-shame” a similar need for individuals to be cleansed and thereby (re-)integrated into the social group (2010).

may seem both groundless, because we cannot fathom them intimately for ourselves, and yet still be fixating, dominating, because others may reveal aspects of who we are that we cannot see precisely by and for ourselves.

Second, this account can be seen to accommodate both the conditions of susceptibility to shame highlighted earlier, namely how the shaming evaluation must be felt to be both authoritative and deeply painful. The apertural condition of the shame is satisfied due to how I cannot know myself as others are able to; in Sartre's terms, others can take the 'measure of my finitude' in a manner that is inaccessible to me, precisely because of the uncertainty that comes of adversity. We look to others for answers about ourselves, answers that we can trust despite ourselves and despite our self-experience. This is what another person's gaze does according to Sartre; it furnishes me with a being which I, in my self-uncertainty, cannot contest. Only others can say something about my limitations, what Piper calls "my being wrong," which I cannot ignore, even if I 'know' little about them or disagree with them. At the same time, this account satisfies the agonal condition as well. The painful self-relation involved in shame comes in part, because it is painful to be confronted with one's limitations, limitations of what one is and what one can be, even if one's own knowledge of them is poor.⁸² Yet not only this: the pain of the shame also comes from a confrontation with the uncertainty of our own limitations. This is something Brison points to in her account as well. In her shame after her assault, it was less painful for her to blame herself than for her to contemplate the uncertainty of living as a vulnerable woman in the world; that is, she had a sense of herself as liable to be attacked and also a sense of herself that seemed wholly incongruous with her prior experience, something "she could hardly believe herself."⁸³

What we have reached is thus a way of deploying a Sartrean account of non-agentive shame, while avoiding both horns of the dilemma arrived at by Zahavi: that of imposing some sort of acceptance criterion, or of imputing non-agentive shame to a misunderstood form of humiliation. Furthermore, the emphasis on the nature and impact of adversity may permit Calhoun's GCV, for one, to parse a human need for social integration and social evaluation, underlying susceptibility to non-agentive shame, in terms of the very fact that individuals engage the world through practical, embodied intentions.⁸⁴ This is useful not only because we can then point to the everyday, highly contextual, and social-communal origins of non-agentive shame, in each person's everyday experience and in each person's unique trajectory of dealing with adversity and participating in communities and projects with others. In addition, it is useful because it situates such shame with respect to a basic sense

⁸² Cf. Sartre (1998, 222): "Shame is an immediate shudder which runs through me from head to foot without any discursive preparation. In addition the comparison is impossible; I am unable to bring about any relation between what I am in the intimacy of the For-Itself, without distance, without recoil, without perspective, and this unjustifiable being-in-itself which I am for the Other." On shame as experience of the "limited self," cf. also Sartre (1998, 286).

⁸³ Brison (1993, 13, 6).

⁸⁴ In this way, our account allows for a reading of Sartre that goes beyond the 'actually present witness' model of shame for which he has been criticized most notably by Taylor (1985, 58). As well, it may shed more light on the social relevance of Sartre's earlier, phenomenological work.

of one's own body, namely, as a body through which one realizes goals, projects, intentions, etc. Rather than anchoring the awareness that makes one susceptible to non-agentive shame in some sort of blind or implicit acceptance of or assent to a set of norms that regulate feeling ashamed before others, the susceptibility is linked to an individual's own sense of being a free body encountering adversity in the world, about which individuals develop an uncertainty as to their own limitations, powers, efforts, etc.⁸⁵ Such anchoring would then enable us to see how even when certain triggers of shame—like violence, racism, and persecution—are wholly illegitimate and ought to be combatted, the experienced shame, the endured shame, the consequential shame, is not. Given the participatory and embodied character of all human life, there is no simple sense in which one could say 'one should not feel shame.'

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⁸⁵ One contrast here would be Buss's account, in which an individual's sense of freedom could only be indicative of a kind of indifference to or negation of the social ties underlying shame (1999, 527).

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