Shame, Admiration, and Self-Esteem

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Murdoch University, 2006.
Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Bibliography.
This thesis is an exploration of the shame that inheres in not being able to self-admire. I call this incapacity to admire oneself ontological shame, and I argue that it is the source of the masquerades, concealments and negative emotions that surround the pursuit and defence of a self-esteem founded on an impoverished form of pride. I argue that there is a radical asymmetry between our admiration and esteem for others and how we evaluate our own sense of self-worth. Where admiration at its highest pitch is the wonderful *agape* experience of apprehending preciousness in others, our own sense of self-worth is limited to experiences of pride and other forms of self-affirmation; none of which allow us the joy of seeing ourselves as wonders in the world. Because we can admire and want to be admired, not being able to self-admire amounts to a limitation of a sort which carries with it a primordial resentment against life itself. It is largely how we respond to our ontological limitation and to our resentment that determines the positive or negative manner in which we interact with others, and whether or not we are likely to have an envious or humble disposition.

In the first three chapters I lay the groundwork for the main argument of the thesis by highlighting the difficulties self-esteem theorists have in agreeing upon the value of ‘high’ self-esteem, introduce the relation between self-esteem and shame, argue for a distinction between self-esteem and public esteem, and provide an account of the gift-exchange nature of admiration which explains why we cannot self-admire. In the central chapters I focus on shame; on acts of concealment that can be either appropriate covering for, or deceitful denial of our ontological limitation; how self-worth is created through a reconciliation to shame, and why the ‘self-act dissociation’ theories of guilt fail to capture the shame attached to ‘being guilty’ of a wrongdoing. In Chapters Seven
and Eight I examine envy, first in how it can be disguised as moral resentment; how it differs to admiration in its role in emulation, and finally how as a disposition it stands in stark contrast to humility. It is in humility that we grasp the benefits associated with our own incapacity to self-admire through our need to interact and exchange gifts with others.
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I dedicate this thesis to my wife, Jacqueline, whose patience and understanding has been wonderful, and to my four children who had to make a greater sacrifice of their ‘fun-time with daddy’ than either they, or I, wanted.
Introduction

This thesis is an exploration of the shame that inheres in not being able to self-admire. I call this incapacity to admire oneself ontological shame, and I argue that it is the source of the masquerades, concealments and negative emotions that surround the pursuit and defence of a self-worth founded on a truncated and isolated form of self-esteem. I argue that there is a radical asymmetry between our admiration and esteem for others, and how we evaluate our own sense of self-worth. Where admiration at its highest pitch is the wonderful *agape* experience of apprehending preciousness in others, our own sense of self-worth is limited to experiences of pride and other forms of self-affirmation, none of which allow us the joy of seeing ourselves as wonders in the world. Because we can admire and want to be admired, not being able to self-admire amounts to a limitation of a sort which carries with it a primordial resentment against life itself. It is largely how we respond to our ontological limitation and to our resentment that determines the positive or negative manner in which we interact with others, and whether or not we become prone to an envious or humble disposition.

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admiration in its role in emulation, and finally how as a disposition it stands in stark contrast to humility. It is in humility that we grasp the benefits associated with our own incapacity to self-admire, and the pleasures associated with our need to interact and exchange gifts with others.

I draw upon insights from social psychology, philosophy and practical theology to piece together a fresh perspective on shame, admiration and self-esteem. I argue that in social psychology, an emphasis on self-esteem has created a prism through which emotional states such as anger, shame, resentment, guilt and admiration are viewed, so that these emotions often become distorted and consequently lose much of their explanatory power. I think the same prismatic effect has occurred in philosophy and the concepts of shame, self-esteem and guilt, and emotions like pride, resentment, envy and humility have been shaped by and often subsumed under an overriding interest in one or another moral system. While I recognise that these emotions and reactive attitudes do have a moral dimension, I think a better understanding of them and their moral worth will come if we do not become enmeshed in philosophical debates over the competing values of different moral systems. I consider these systems merely supplement the wrong of exposing others to their shame with rules and principles about justice, injury, harm, etc.

This is a very large claim and I do not attempt to support it directly by addressing the ways in which different understandings of these emotions embed different (and conflicting) understandings of moral worth. Rather I proceed by shifting the focus of attention to the deep source of shame in our ontological condition. My aim is to show that once we recognise the force of ontological shame in our emotional psychology we are better placed to grasp the nature and function of related emotions and reactive attitudes, like pride, admiration, self-esteem, resentment, envy, guilt. This understanding, in its turn, allows us to assess the value and difficulties of these emotions in our lives. Instead of beginning with an (implicit) understanding of moral
value and exploring shame and related emotions within this schema (and thereby raise questions about the validity of the schema itself), I work from the opposite direction, as it were, beginning with our ontological condition of shame to show how these emotions contribute to our ongoing daily struggles with this condition.

In order to unpack the central role of shame in our emotional lives, I begin, in Chapter One, with what may seem to be its antithesis: self-esteem. In the field of social psychology, the attainment of self-esteem has been predominantly presented as an unmitigated good and integral to a fulfilling and flourishing life. As one author puts it, “[t]he widespread conviction that self-esteem deficits lie at the heart of countless dysfunctional behaviors has catapulted the quest for self-esteem into something of a modern day search for the holy grail”. But this view of self-esteem has now become contentious, and a debate is taking place in psychology over whether high self-esteem is as valuable as has been generally thought, and whether it is high or low self-esteem which is the major contributor to anti-social behaviour.

Recently, in separate articles, two groups of social psychologists have challenged the prevailing view that low self-esteem is a major cause of aggression and violence. They claim that rather than low self-esteem being the problem it is a ‘pre-occupation with self’, ‘ego-threats’, and the pursuit of high self-esteem which contributes significantly to violence. These researchers bring to our attention problems with high self-esteem which they claim can be traced to “the heavily positive connotations that self-esteem has acquired in recent American thought [which] is partly a result of bias and a wishful thinking that simply refuses to acknowledge the darker side.” I consider two forms of psychic disorder, narcissism and perfectionism to explore this possibility. Narcissists, on almost every account I have read, are preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, and brilliance, crave the admiration of others and experience chronic feelings of envy. The perfectionist imposes strict standards upon herself “in part
because it is so vitally important that she place herself beyond the dreaded reproaches of others.⁴ Neither disorder seems easily or straightforwardly attributable to either low or faked self-esteem and this points up potential problems with theories that refuse to see what has been called the ‘dark side of self-esteem’.⁵

Where social psychology exhibits a primary interest in self-esteem and how to raise or improve it, philosophical interest is more to do with the relation between self-esteem and shame. Of particular interest is John Deigh’s disagreement with the account of self-worth and shame provided by John Rawls.⁶ Deigh contends that the Rawlsian account presents a “dubious conception of shame” because it does not account for acts of concealment typical of the shame response, and it involves a too narrow conception of self-worth.⁷ Shame can strike, according to Deigh, where there are no specific life plans, goals, ideals or commitments at issue, all of the things Rawls considers necessary for self-esteem. Deigh has a different and more encompassing conception of self-worth, so that what is revealed in shame is a more fundamental sense of worth than the one derived from one own life plans and abilities.

The broader conception of self-worth impacts upon how we conceive of shame and its relation to self-esteem. We should conceive of shame, says Deigh, “not as a reaction to a loss, but as a reaction to a threat to one’s sense of worth. . . the threat of something being exposed in a way that makes one appear to have less worth than one has.”⁸ This accounts for why a person experiencing shame wants to cover up and to hide. The Rawlsian account of self-esteem cannot account for this natural urge to cover up and hide and is therefore, in Deigh’s view, a defective theory of self-worth. The connection between shame and concealment is important, and I take up this issue in some detail in Chapter Four. Deigh’s disagreement over what counts as a source of self-worth introduces us to the idea that self-esteem, as presented by Rawls (and many others) is not all there is to self-worth and this is an idea I begin to explore in this opening chapter and flesh out in Chapter Five.
In more general terms, self-esteem theories suffer because, as Chris Mruk points out, “there does seem to be an impasse in reaching consensus on just what self-esteem is”, and we have “accumulated enough definitions of self-esteem to reach the point of redundancy.”

I suggest that this definitional maze and other problems with contemporary theories of self-esteem, have come about primarily because of a failure to recognise the asymmetry between self-regard and how we regard others. What we call self-esteem is a different phenomenon to esteeming others. It is a mistake to apply the term ‘esteem’ to ourselves as if it implies the same ‘estimation’ we employ in our esteem and honour for others. This is to say that we are attempting to import into our own self-estimate all that the term esteem denotes when it describes a high degree of approval, honour and veneration for others and this is to have a faulty conception of self-esteem. This is particularly evident where self-esteem is thought to be the context for the entire therapeutic enterprise, so that alternative forms of self-worth are subsumed under the concept of self-esteem rather than being acknowledged as independent and equally valuable contributors to an overall sense of self-worth. We need to find a new way of understanding the motivations behind the need for self-approval, one which can account more adequately for the many fine grained differences in this human need that current theories of self-esteem struggle to explain.

In Chapter Two, I begin to re-evaluate the concept of self-esteem by distinguishing it from what I consider to be other sources of self-worth. I explain the sense of self-worth derived from being valued and esteemed by others. Where it is discussed in contemporary self-esteem theories, the esteem of others is most commonly subsumed under the concept of self-esteem rather than treated as an independent source of self-worth. To distinguish the desire for self-esteem from the desire for esteem from others, it is useful to return to the early modern period (roughly dating from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century) where the esteem of others was often considered not just one among many competing desires, but the most potent of them. On this view, the esteem of others has its own distinctive set or motivations and sources of pride. It is an
important and understated source of self-worth. Some writers of the time thought that no person was capable of being actuated by any other motive.

A review of writings on what has been called the ‘approbative desire’ is used to highlight the view that the highest distinction we seek is to be admired. It is the desire to be admired and not just respected or approved of that lies at the sore of self-worth and it is here that we begin to grasp the shame of not being able to self-admire or self-gratify our desire for admiration. In addition we begin to see how ‘esteem’ can be sought either through acts worthy of the admiration of others or through provoking others to envy. These insights enable us to see that in the contemporary context it is only when the esteem of others is understood as independent of self-esteem and an equally important component of self-worth, that we can begin to answer, for example, the sort of puzzle the psychologist Kernberg sees in the narcissistic personality - the “curious apparent contradiction between a very inflated concept of themselves and an inordinate need for tribute from others.” This curious contradiction, can be explained, I will suggest, as the outworking of the two distinct desires under examination in this chapter – those of self-esteem and the esteem of others.

The issue of pride receives far less attention in contemporary self-esteem theories than it did in these earlier accounts of glory and approbation. As pride plays a central role in our emotional life, I propose we understand it as having two distinct forms: one that is associated with self-esteem and one that is associated with a more encompassing notion of self-worth. The former, which I call pride-in-self-esteem has distinctive traces of a crude and primitive egoism; the latter form is founded on several different components of self-worth, including self-respect. It is what I call the pride-of-self-worth which forms the greater part of the forms of self-affirmation associated with a robust sense of self-worth. It will take us a few more chapters to explore and develop a context for self-respect, and to analyse the other components of self-worth, but it suffices in Chapter Two, to establish the difference between a pride tied to the attainment of self-esteem
and the pride that can draw upon many more sources of self-worth, particularly the self-affirmation that comes from being admired and esteemed by others.

In order to track deeper into the sources of esteem and pride, in Chapter Three I explore the nature of admiration with the key objective of arguing that it is impossible to self-admire, at least in the highest way in which we admire others. This has major ramifications for us, primarily in terms of shame. As beings who desire to be admired, and who are capable of experiencing admiration, there is a deep shame attached to our incapacity to self-admire. I call this ontological shame. I examine and explain different levels of admiration. I propose there are four levels or degrees of admiration – sneaking, approving, confirming and finally high admiration. This contrast enables us to see how the highest admiration is a special, even wondrous intersubjective process of gift-exchange with others. In support of this claim I utilise the ideas of theologians Benjamin Warfield and John Milbank, to develop a concept of admiration at this highest pitch as the *agape* experience of something precious in another and that the reception of this preciousness requires a return-of-gift.

The clearest evidence that admiration of or for oneself is not possible comes through an understanding of the gift-exchange nature of high order admiration. A key feature of high order admiration is that in gift-exchange there will be a sense of indebtedness imposed upon the receiver of the gift to return-gift in some appropriate way. This I consider crucial to an understanding of why we are liberal in our praise when in admiration at this highest *agape* level, for such praise is the most natural way to discharge the debt we have incurred in being privy to some other display of preciousness in another. I argue that we cannot be both a gift-bearer and a gift-recipient to ourselves. We cannot impart a gift to ourselves and then expect a return-gift. Moreover, because genuine esteem is based on sustained admiration, and one can only admire others and not oneself, self-esteem will differ markedly from esteem for others. Our sense of self-worth can never be assured because it cannot be founded on the same
agape experience of admiration one can have for others. Self-esteem, therefore, is permanently contingent upon forms of self-affirmation, chiefly pride; and the sort of pride we can have in ourselves ultimately depends upon our attitude toward not being capable of self-admiration at this highest pitch.

I conclude Chapter Three by claiming that our incapacity to self-admire reveals a fundamental disgrace or what I call ontological shame. Shame resides in the asymmetry between admiration for others and our incapacity to self-admire. As beings who can admire and who possess a desire to be admired, to be incapable of self-admiration admits of a shame that has major ramifications for our sense of self-worth and for all the emotions that cluster around self-worth.

Chapters Four to Six are the heart of the thesis and constitute a block of writings on both the ‘feelings’ or affects of shame and the source of these feelings, ontological shame. In Chapter Four, I take up issues related to the characteristic association of acts of concealment with shame and our ambivalence about how much and how little we want or ought to conceal. My aim is to show that many diverse phenomena related to concealment can be plausibly explained in terms of our difficulties in coming to grips with ontological shame, that is, the fact that we cannot self-admire. A review of different perspectives on concealment reveals that much of our everyday experience involves a cover-for ontological shame in the recognisable forms of artful speech, reticence, and tactful consideration of others. But acts of concealment are not always an appropriate cover-for ontological shame, they can very often be a cover-up of this deepest shame, and this covering-up and disownership of feelings of shame lies at the root of negative emotions like anger, envy and bitter resentment.

A worrisome feature of our use of concealment is that we refuse to allow the reality of ontological shame to come to terms with failure. The contemporary ‘cult of success’ as
William Desmond calls it, engenders a pathological response to ontological shame. “We gloss over and disguise forms of failure not amenable to this idea of success.”13 This calls for a ‘giving up’ of an ‘untenable way of being’. I will claim that this untenable way of being is, in fact, living under the pretence of self-admiration, of having not reconciled ourselves to ontological shame so that acts of concealment cover-up and attempt to disguise our incapacity to self-admire. The consequences that flow from the refusal to accept this limitation can be seen in the negative emotions that damage relations, thwart the creativeness of human interaction and lead to psychic disorder.

I introduce the idea that shame is a pluriform phenomenon. This is to say that ontological shame has a variety of manifestations which can be labelled in the following way: acute shame, chronic shame, anticipatory shame, bypassed shame and blameworthy-shame. An understanding the various forms in which ontological shame is manifest, allows us to account for acts of concealment that are sometimes appropriate and necessary so that the most debilitating effects of acute shame are avoided, and to recognise when covering up shame and suppressing it amounts to disguise, deceit, and the refusal to take responsibility.

In Chapter Five, the preliminary discussions on the connections between shame and the sense of self-worth introduced in Chapter One are taken up and expanded. My aim here is to use some problems with Deigh’s description of shame to show that what we hope to hide in shame is not the appearance of having less worth than we have but our incapacity to self-admire. To resolve the difficulties with Deigh’s account, I turn attention to the debate over what constitutes self-worth. Here we are confronted with further disagreements among various philosophers over what is meant by the terms self-esteem and self-respect. Are they synonymous, and how are they related to self-worth? I propose that self-worth needs to be rethought in light of an understanding of our human incapacity to self-admire; that everything associated with a reconciliation to and a covering for ontological shame will contribute to self-worth. I therefore divide self-
worth into its different components, describe the role each plays in establishing self-worth, and how each is differently related to ontological shame and to the manifest affects of the shame experience. I suggest that there are four different components or aspects of self-worth: self-esteem, self-respect, public esteem and worth-to-others as an admirer. The latter component is rarely discussed in philosophical literature, so I will explain this notion in some detail.

Much of the sense of worthlessness, meaninglessness and dyspepsia associated with chronic shame, I will claim, can be attributed to an inability or unwillingness to admire others and the subsequent impoverishment of this important, but often neglected form of self-affirmation. Recognising the different components to self-worth allows us to distinguish the confidence and pride of an egoist from confidence and pride in a healthy sense of self-worth. The confidence of the egoist is permanently contingent upon maintaining, even in the face of disconfirmation from others, pride-in-self-esteem, and therefore her confidence and pride fall and rise together. The pride-of-self-worth is the greater part of the self-affirmation of self-worth that comes from being of worth to others as an admirer and a person’s own self-respect.

Self-respect has two main features. It requires a person retain a susceptibility to feelings of shame when such feelings are appropriate, and it requires of a person that she defend, typically with moral resentment, actions that are disrespectful of her. The significance of the role of self-respect to maintain a person’s susceptibility to certain sorts of shame, while defending against other more debilitating forms of shame, illustrates, I argue, that acts of concealment are primarily actions designed to cover exposures of ontological shame rather than to protect self-worth.

In Chapter Six, I complete the block of work specifically related to shame by presenting an account of guilt which differs substantially from standard accounts. It is common in both social psychology and in moral philosophy to view shame and guilt as distinct
emotions. The general idea in both disciplines is that shame involves a focus on one’s
unworthy self, whereas guilt involves a focus on one’s wrongful act. This is referred to
in psychology as the ‘differential focus’ theory, and in philosophy as the ‘self-act
dissociation’.

My argument is that a specific act for which one feels responsible does not give rise to
distinct ‘feelings’ of guilt, but to a feeling of being guilty, and specifically of being
guilty of an act or omission that has exposed another to her ontological shame. This
feeling-of-being-guilty is what I call blameworthy-shame. A person may or may not
accept the blameworthy-shame that inheres in the feeling-of-being-guilty. Where she
does ‘own’ blameworthy-shame and pleads her guilt, it can be said that her confession
of guilt acts as an appropriate cover-for her shame. The covering provided by guilt is
necessary, for as Stephen Pattison reminds us,

[i]n the immediacy of the shame experience, the functioning social self is lost.14

Some confessions of guilt, however, are a concealment of what ought to be, but is not,
fully felt and acknowledged as shame. Such admissions of guilt are a cover-up of
ontological shame. They therefore lack the impetus necessary for remorse. I argue that it
is remorse rather than guilt which has a reparative urge, so that where guilt is confessed
without ownership of blameworthy-shame, there is no remorse and no desire to atone.
Because a show of remorse testifies to the shaming effect a wrongdoing has had on a
victim, the reparative urge can be understood as wanting to address (re-cover) the
exposure of ontological shame which the victim has undergone.

A wrongdoing over which we can feel blameworthy-shame is anything that brings about
an exposure of our human incapacity to self-admire. Any event, positive or negative,
can confirm the fact we cannot self-admire. When we are pleased with ourselves, the
incapacity to self-admire is revealed as merely a limitation that deprives us of seeing
ourselves as a wonder in the world. We are restricted to feelings of pride and other
forms of self-affirmation in valuing ourselves. When we are not pleased with ourselves, and particularly where we know we have done wrong, our incapacity to self-admire means we are unable to effect any adequate covering or protection for the shame that arises. In shame we are exposed as insubstantial, as worthless. This means we can feel the shame of being guilty for as little as thinking negatively about another or glancing enviously at her, for issuing an insult or for physically harming another.

While a confession of guilt for wrongdoing can effect a covering for blameworthy-shame and save one from the scorn and contempt of others, such a confession does not work where it is one’s own failures at issue; where there have been missed opportunities and moral capitulations. The feelings associated with these missed opportunities and moral capitulations are the feelings of being guilty of a wrongdoing to oneself. The shame of such failures remains uncovered because a public admission of guilt is ineffectual and ‘parading’ one’s private shame is seen as lacking in sensitivity to the contagious character of exposed shame. The shame of such failures ought to be kept to oneself. This inability to cover blameworthy-shame with a plea of guilt accounts, I suggest, for an uneasy anxiety, leaving one perplexed and agitated, and often results in the onset and persistence of despondent moods.

I conclude Chapter Six with a final remark about the reliance in difference-in-focus theory on supposedly different ‘attributions’ found in shame and guilt. I argue that these ‘attributions’ don’t hold good and that interpreting shame and guilt on this basis is bound to fail because, as Robert C. Roberts says, both shame and guilt are global self-assessments. In light of the data the protagonists of the difference-in-focus theory themselves present, it is difficult to conclude anything other than that the theory is not tenable. It does not capture the key differences between shame and guilt and consequently it fails to account for the real value of both guilt and shame in our ongoing, daily struggles with ontological shame.
In Chapter Seven, I explore the nature of envy and resentment, showing that they are best understood as having a common source in a primordial resentment against our incapacity to self-admire: our ontological shame. Both envy and resentment include an ill-will or displeasure of another, but it is often argued that unlike the ill-will of resentment, the ill-will of envy cannot be morally justified.\textsuperscript{16} I argue that this account fails to understand that the distinction is not so clear and that moral resentment and envy have similarities based on a common source.

I argue that primordial resentment has two distinct manifestations, one in envy, the other in moral or proper resentment. This means that there is, in fact, resentment in envy but that it is nothing more than an unrefined resentment against ontological shame. We can distinguish the two forms which primordial resentment can take, firstly through noting that in envy but not in moral resentment there is an accompanying covetousness. Second, that resentment over matters of pride and esteem differs from resentment over matters of self-respect. Envy includes both a covetousness and ill will or displeasure toward another. In resentment proper there need not be any covetousness. What is coveted most in envy is an increase in esteem or what possession of some particular good provides for its possessor, and the displeasure of another is brought about because this other is considered to be justified in feeling the pride the envious person wants for herself. The covetousness in envy is related to matters of esteem, or as Gabriele Taylor puts it, what is coveted most in envy is an increase in self-esteem. “[I]t is this which is here the coveted good to be achieved at all cost.”\textsuperscript{17} Where resentment is esteem-focused anything that threatens a person’s pride will be cause for anger and indignation, and this is an unjustifiable and often destructive taking up of primordial resentment. By contrast, moral resentment is related to matters of respect. It is respect-focused resentment, and can be justified and appropriate because it is a defence against needless and disrespectful exposures of ontological shame.
This is to say that primordial resentment can be nurtured in envy where the central concern is one’s self-esteem or it can be utilised in moral resentment where it supports both respect-for-others and self-respect. In short, envy, in its most basic form, the form to which we are all subject, is tied to matters of esteem, and resentment to concerns over disrespect. And it is not only in envy that the distinction between esteem- and respect-focused resentment can help us explain negative reactions. It provides us with an explanation of the common response of anger in the egoist. It is because every disconfirmation of the self-esteem the egoist believes she has amounts in her mistaken view, to an act of disrespect for her. She feels entitled to express her resentment in anger because she has interpreted another’s failure to esteem her as a failure to pay her respect.

Until now I have primarily focused on the negative effects of ontological shame. In the final chapter I will suggest that there are also significant benefits in being incapable of self-admiration. More specifically this ontological limit lies at the root of a disposition of humility that encourage gift-exchange between persons on which human fellowship depends. In order to explain this dynamic, in the first part of Chapter Eight I provide a contrast by way of an account of spiteful envy. While spiteful envy emerges when the shame of common envy is suppressed, humility develops when ontological shame is not resented and instead is taken up as the impetus to look beyond ourselves for our sources of wonder in the world. The humble person is able to enter gift-exchange more readily because she has reined in primordial resentment and this leaves her open to future gift-exchange. The way in which humility bears or shows ontological shame is not as a shame that one must resent but as a shame that one should treat as essential to human fellowship.

Humility brings integrity to self-worth because it includes reconciliation to ontological shame. It has, so I argue, four recognisable features: not thinking so highly of oneself that one is drawn into believing self-admiration is possible; not putting one’s pride on
display to provoke others to envy; an overcoming or reluctance to draw from primordial resentment; and an obvious disclosure of ontological shame. Within these features of humility it becomes clear why a proper pride and humility can co-exist, and why humility’s face of shame requires a show of modesty to avoid ontological shame being fully exposed.

A humble disposition, I argue, is marked by an empathetic understanding of the human vulnerability to shame and in particular our susceptibility to the shame that arises in episodic bouts of envy. A disposition to see everything through the ‘optics of envy’, by contrast, is marked by a desire to exploit whatever opportunities there are for provoking envy in others. The envious person relishes the prospect of inducing this sort of shame in others by provoking them to envy, for she sees such provocation as the means to gain esteem in another’s eyes.

Humility is not easily admired because it carries with it a clear disclosure of ontological shame and most importantly a reluctance to draw upon primordial resentment. It is this reluctance to draw upon primordial resentment, even when moral resentment is justified, that accounts for the widely different perspectives taken on humility. For some it is a virtue, for others it is ‘inverted pride’ and self-deprecating in the extreme. There are positives to such a ‘reining in’ of resentment and there are negatives. Humility is alert to the tendency in self-respect to be overzealous in protecting one’s self-worth and to treat every instance of disconfirmation of self-esteem as an issue of disrespect. The humble person’s tendency to rein in her resentment has the positive implication that she will ‘find the best in others’, and this attitude prepares her for entering into admiration as gift-exchange. Where self-respect can be overly zealous in defending self-worth, humility can overlook matters of disrespect where respect-focused-resentment is justified and appropriate. Both self-respect and humility, therefore, are required for an integrated sense of self-worth.
In summary: alongside the negative implications of our being constituted in shame we are beings who are capable of turning this shameful fact to our advantage. There are compensations of some magnitude in being incapable of self-admiration; pride is one and participation in gift-exchange is another. The impetus for much of what we accomplish, achieve, and succeed in doing resides, I argue, in our incapacity to view ourselves as wonders in the world. Without this limitation we would not be driven to accomplish the sorts of things we think admirable and cover-for our inherent shame, or the things that others can admire because it brings them joy. We are beings capable of great deeds, of ingenuity, and of creative brilliance, and from this “harvest of human genius” human dignity emerges in a way that would not be possible if we were beings capable of self-admiration.
ENDNOTES

3 Baumeister, Smart, and Boden. 1999, p. 273.
5 Baumeister, Smart, and Boden. 1999, p. 273.
8 Ibid.
Chapter One: The Pursuit of Self-esteem

American Culture has provided a fertile and problematic ground for self-esteem with its ethos of individualism, personal worth, and happiness.

Victor Gecas

In this opening chapter I explore the inadequacies of self-esteem theories in accounting for either anti-social behaviour or for dysfunctional personality types like the narcissist and perfectionist. The commonly employed terms ‘high’ and ‘low’ self-esteem do not capture the distinction theorists are attempting to make between a sense of self-worth that is robust and healthy, and a self-worth that is impoverished and leads to poor intersubjective relations and violence. One aspect common to self-esteem, high or low, is the human vulnerability to shame, and it is through a grasp of our experiences of shame that an understanding of self-worth can begin to emerge. This understanding of self-worth as essentially connected to shame will assist us to extricate our thinking from the straitjacket of self-esteem theories that subsume all forms of self-worth under the concept of self-esteem.

But it is to the prominence of self-esteem that we must first turn. In the field of social psychology, the attainment of self-esteem has been largely presented as an unmitigated good and integral to a fulfilling life. Particularly in North America, there is enormous faith being expressed in how self-esteem will transform individuals and society. From “a young age, parents teachers, and popular culture teach us that feeling good about oneself is a high priority.”

Today thousands of self-help books, child rearing guides, and television shows hail the benefits of increasing self-esteem. The self-esteem movement, based on the assumption that high self-esteem leads to positive outcomes, aims to raise children's self-esteem to combat social problems, such as academic achievement, high dropout rates, crime, teenage pregnancy, eating disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, and interpersonal aggression.

The attainment of high self-esteem holds out the promise of a better world, both for the individual in pursuit of it and for society at large. As William Swann puts it “high self-
-esteem has become a part of the American dream”. Such grand expectations did not always figure in theories of self-esteem. The earlier ideas of the 1950's and 60's often carried disclaimers about what could and could not be included in a proper or authentic self-esteem. Some forty years ago, for example, Morris Rosenberg wrote:

High self-esteem expresses the feeling that one is "good enough". The individual simply feels that he is a person of worth, he respects himself for what he is, but does not stand in awe of himself nor expect others to stand in awe of him. He does not necessarily consider himself superior to others . . . Low self-esteem, on the other hand, implies self-rejection, self-dissatisfaction, self contempt. The individual lacks respect for the self he observes. The picture is disagreeable, and he wishes it were otherwise.

However about the same time Stanley Coopersmith writes that “[s]elf esteem indicates the extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful and worthy. In short, self-esteem is a personal judgement of worthiness that is expressed in the attitude the individual holds toward himself”. Already in this latter definition the disclaimers Rosenberg placed on a proper high self-esteem – that it not include a sense of superiority or standing in awe of oneself – have been largely concealed or overlooked and replaced with thoughts about competence and the self-ascription of personal worthiness. This shift is subtle but significant. The shift toward competence and worthiness has laid the groundwork, I would suggest, for what has now become, in contemporary North American society, the active pursuit of self-esteem. It is no longer something one ‘simply feels’, it has a cognitive component that necessitates thinking about how one can attain such a satisfying affective state. High self-esteem, therefore, is to be desired, pursued, attained and retained to the best of one’s ability. Rosenberg was not the first to understand our natural susceptibility to thinking too highly of ourselves. His views still hold sway today among those determined to maintain some qualified idea of proper high self-esteem, but increasingly over recent years, the concept of an authentic or healthy self-esteem has come under scrutiny. The “desire to prove to oneself and to others that one is wonderful and worthy, not worthless”, according to social psychologists Crocker, Lee and Park has become the goal in a pursuit of self-esteem. “Because it feels good to conclude that one is worthy
and wonderful, and it feels bad to conclude that one is not, acceptable performances in domains of contingency often feels compelling - the pursuit of self-esteem captures attention, provides motivation, and impacts emotions. Almost anything can be accepted as ‘a domain’ in which a person invests time and effort so that:

[s]elf-worth or self-esteem is contingent on satisfying standards of worth and value. Some people stake their self-worth on being beautiful or thin, others on being morally virtuous, others on accumulating wealth or professional success, and so on. Consequently, feelings of self-worth and self-esteem depend on perceived success or failure in those domains on which self-worth is contingent.

As many of these domains of competence require external validation, persons whose self esteem depends upon recognisable achievements or accomplishments “are more easily and frequently captured by the question of whether they are wonderful or worthless and, hence more susceptible to the pursuit of self-esteem.” What this amounts to, for the authors, is that the pursuit of self-esteem is typically attended by threats in domains on which self-worth is staked and “is characterised by self-centred preoccupations with one’s worth and value, intense emotional responses to success and failure, and emotional and behavioural dysregulation”. It can also hinder a person’s “ability to maintain mutually caring, supportive relationships with others, and may ultimately contribute to interpersonal violence, aggression and intergroup conflict. Hence, the pursuit of self-esteem can ultimately cause harm, misfortune, and destruction”.

While I think this account of the negative outcomes associated with the pursuit of self-esteem seems justifiable in some, perhaps many cases of self-esteem, I also think that there is value in a healthy self-esteem which ought to be desired and developed. But in this chapter I will focus on some of the major difficulties facing self-esteem theories so that there can be no illusion as to how difficult the task will be to argue for just such a healthy self-esteem.
Regarding the argument, Crocker, Lee and Park make, there are two main points that need to be noted. Firstly, in pursuing or striving for high self-esteem, a person is liable to become preoccupied with herself and this, we must note is precisely what Rosenberg claimed as a disqualifier for proper high self-esteem. And second, pursuing high self-esteem may contribute to violence.

In a recent article, academic social psychologists, Roy Baumeister, Laura Smart, and Joseph M. Boden, challenge the prevailing view that low self-esteem is a major cause of aggression and violence.¹⁴ Their research has suggested that, in fact it is high self-esteem combined with ‘ego threats’ which are more likely to lead to violence. They argue that because much of the research is premised on low self-esteem causing violence, offenders described as egotistical and arrogant are simply not seen as possessing a certain type of high self-esteem. In such research, where terms like egoists or narcissists are used to describe violent offenders, there is no acknowledgment that these terms typically describe people with an inflated high opinion of themselves. The authors provide examples where conclusions expected to be arrived at determine the sort of questions to be asked. The underlying premise is that “people with low self-esteem turn violent as a way of gaining esteem.”¹⁵ Working from this premise, various studies of people with records of violence asked questions which were framed in such a way as to elicit a response in accord with what was expected to be concluded - that low self-esteem is a cause of violence. For example, in one study, a mother who committed child abuse was asked, “Would you like your child to grow up to be like you?” It is hardly surprising that the mother would answer in the negative. This answer is then taken to be proof of the mother's low self-esteem. But, ask the authors, how else could she have answered and kept face? Would a person of high self-esteem have answered differently?¹⁶ Baumeister, Smart and Boden, propose that it is not people with low self-esteem who are most prone to violence, but those who are arrogant, conceited, egotistical, narcissistic, or otherwise enamoured with themselves. These people are prone to violence because they react poorly to criticism in general and when confronted
with an unfavourable judgement from others will often react to erase the threat by affirming their superiority.\(^\text{17}\)

The question to be asked, of course, is whether arrogance, conceit and egoism can be accurately portrayed as characteristic of high self-esteem. If the Rosenberg disclaimer is upheld, then simply by definition none of these disagreeable character traits can be construed as features of high self-esteem. But as Baumeister, Smart and Boden point out, while the term self-esteem has positive connotations, it also has “ample synonyms, the connotations of which are more mixed, including pride, egoism, arrogance, honor, conceitedness, narcissism, and a sense of superiority, which share the fundamental meaning of favourable self-evaluation”.\(^\text{18}\) The authors justify their argument by reminding us that “if one remains with the simple, literal definition of self-esteem as a favourable appraisal of oneself, then arrogant narcissists and conceited, egotistical bullies do indeed have high self-esteem”.\(^\text{19}\)

The authors have brought to our attention problems which they claim can be traced to “the heavily positive connotations that self-esteem has acquired in recent American thought [which] is partly a result of biased and a wishful thinking that simply refuses to acknowledge the darker side”.\(^\text{20}\) In stipulating that only positive and desirable consequences will result from attaining high self-esteem, problems surface in a number of related areas, particularly with self-esteem measurement standards. The authors suggest that because these standards are designed with the assumption that high self-esteem indicates healthy adjustment and good adaptation to life, they will necessarily fail to predict aggression. In their view, “self-esteem should be a relatively value-neutral construct referring to a positive evaluation of self, so an effective and valid scale would identify the arrogant, conceited narcissist just as well as the person who holds an unbiased appreciation of his or her own well-recognised good qualities”.\(^\text{21}\) As indication of the seriousness with which theories of low self-esteem have failed to account for increased violence, the authors cite a number of studies on rape, domestic-violence and
terrorism in which low self-esteem is rarely present – at least in its most easily recognisable forms.22

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, according to Baumeister and colleagues, “when white men had the highest self-esteem, they were apparently the most violent group . . . Historians believe that rapes of White women by Black men were quite rare, whereas the reverse was relatively common”.23 Likewise the majority of interracial murders involved White men killing Blacks, a pattern that is still well documented into the 1920s. These patterns have been reversed in recent decades as Black self-esteem has risen relative to White self-esteem.24 His point is that "the shifting patterns on both sides [White and Black] repeatedly link higher or rising self-esteem with increasing criminal violence toward the other.25

To leave no doubt as to their perspective on the relationship between excessive self-esteem and violence, Baumeister, Smart and Boden put things as bluntly as possible:

If low self-esteem were really the cause of violence, then it would be therapeutically prudent to make every effort to convince rapists, murderers, wife beaters professional hit men, tyrants, torturers, and others that they are superior beings. From our reading of the empirical literature, however, these people are often violent precisely because they already believe themselves to be superior beings. It would therefore be more effective to direct therapeutic efforts elsewhere (e.g., cultivating self-control) and, if any modifications to self-appraisals were to be attempted, then perhaps it would be better to try instilling modesty and humility26

As the authors put it, a more subtle line of reasoning might propose that the superficially favourable self-views of conceited and other violent individuals are actually defensive reactions designed to conceal unfavourable self-appraisals. Possibly these are defensive versions of high self-esteem, underneath which lies a hidden but truly low self-esteem. "Perhaps some people who regard themselves unfavourably become self-assertive and violent as a result, possibly by way of compensating for this sense of inferiority".27 This perspective shifts the argument away from whether disagreeably high self-opinions can be construed as components of high self-esteem, to whether these disagreeable self-views are actually a cover for low self-esteem. So, is it
possible that violence is related to low self-esteem which is concealed beneath a veneer of high self-esteem? For Baumeister the answer is clear; "the crucial distinction" being made, is between people who admit to having low self-esteem and those whose (putative) low self-esteem is concealed by a veneer of high self-esteem. Insofar as only the latter group are violent, then the decisive factor would be the veneer of high self-esteem. The favourable self-appraisal would thus still be the cause of violence, even if it did exist with some hidden, unfavourable self-appraisal.28

It is a threat to self-esteem that engenders self-doubts so that if violence is a means of evading such doubts and affirming the favourable view of self . . . it is possible that the aggressors did suffer doubts momentarily and some might propose that the doubts were the impetus for the violence. If one can refer to these self-doubts as self-esteem, then perhaps a watered down version of the low self-esteem theory might be upheld overall.29

Baumeister, Smart and Boden, however, do not believe this version of events. They are firmly convinced that violence is related strongly to individuals and groups who have a exceedingly high opinion of themselves. Research does seem to show that there is a poor correlation between violence and people with low self-esteem. "depressed, self-deprecating, insecure, and shy people are under-represented among criminals."30 Yet the possibility of a veneer of high self-esteem covering an actual state of low self-esteem cannot be written off so long as there is confusion and ambivalence over what precisely the term self-esteem is meant to explain. One possible explanation is provided by Nathanel Branden; “To the extent that men lack self-esteem, they feel driven to fake it to create the illusion of self-esteem”, and in doing so, they condemn themselves “to chronic psychological fraud – moved by the desperate sense that to face the universe without self-esteem is to stand naked, disarmed, delivered to destruction.”31
Baumeister, Smart and Boden may therefore be understating the lack of connection between low self-esteem and violence, so we shall turn to another possibility provided by Gordon Allport. “Let egoism with its conscious accompaniment of self-esteem be admitted as an initial principle of life,” he says:

let it be admitted that in spite of all the alterations that egoism may undergo in the course of development, there frequently remains at the core of self-consciousness a strong element of self-seeking and vanity, which likewise may be traced in many, perhaps most, of an individual’s sentiments and traits. The task of the psychology of personality is to characterise all the innumerable and variable contexts in which the element of self-esteem occurs, including those where it is no longer a crude factor, but is drastically altered and transformed, as well as those where its operation is as yet unsocialised and primitive. Whatever the ultimate character of the principle, its cruder forms of expression result in extraordinary strategies of conduct. It alone is responsible for a great super-structure of masquerade built up in every life. All in the interests of self-esteem one may cover one’s true emotions, put on a front, and at a considerable cost avoid exposing one’s weaknesses. The persona that develops protects one from unwelcome narcissistic wounds . . . What is even more spectacular, likewise in the interest of self-esteem, is the capacity men have for deceiving themselves.32

Perhaps it is in order to pause for a moment to reflect on whether the sort of person being presented here - the one prone to violence because of a rampant egoism - is an accurate reflection of the person in pursuit of high self-esteem. Surely, it could be said, that to take the worse case scenario for high self-esteem, that is, where in fact self-esteem has become something other than what we’ve come to accept to be, is to muddy the waters. The ordinary person must benefit from high self-esteem so long as she understands there are limits to just how far she can esteem herself. The argument would continue that a distinction has to be made between authentic and pseudo self-esteem.33 The idea, here, is that what may appear to be a form of high self-esteem is in fact counterfeit. The person is aware only of a desperate desire to feel confident and in control and “since self-esteem is a fundamental need of man’s consciousness, since it is a need that cannot be bypassed, men who fail to achieve self-esteem, or who fail to a significant degree, strive to fake it.”34 Pseudo self-esteem is “an irrational pretence at self-value, is a non-rational, self-protective device to diminish anxiety and to provide a spurious sense of security”35
What type of personality might represent this kind of faked or pseudo high self-esteem, and will the faking reveal both a desperate need to feel confident and an irrational pretence at self value? I will provide an account of two personality types – the narcissist and the perfectionist - to highlight the inadequacies of many of the current ideas on self-esteem that associate high self-esteem with healthy psyches and low self-esteem with unhealthy psyches. Narcissists are preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love, and with chronic feelings of envy for those whom they perceive as being more successful than they are. Self esteem is almost invariably very fragile; the person may be preoccupied with how well he or she is doing and how well he or she is regarded by others. This often takes the form of an almost exhibitionist need for constant attention and admiration.\textsuperscript{36}

Donald Capps describes the narcissistic personality as having an exaggerated or grandiose sense of self-importance: as having a remarkable absence of interest in or empathy for other persons; as eager to obtain admiration and approval from others, as entertaining fantasies of unrealistic goals; as lacking emotional depth, and unwilling or unable to understand the complex emotions of other people; as angry and resentful, but often concealing such resentment beneath depressive moods; as deficient in genuine feelings of sadness and compassion; as cold and indifferent; icy and unresponsive; as manipulative, exploitative, and unprincipled; as having strong feelings of insecurity and inferiority; alternating, but in no predictable pattern, with feelings of greatness and omnipotent fantasies; and as lacking enthusiasm and joy in the pursuit of goals, but reflecting instead, a driven, pleasureless approach to goals fuelled by an insatiable ambition.\textsuperscript{37}

It can be seen from these descriptions of the narcissist that the questions I posed about pseudo self-esteem and irrational pretence are close to vacuous. The multitude of emotional states and characteristic traits described as a part of the narcissistic personality simply overwhelm any schema constructed in such reductive terms. If only a certain type of favourable self-view is admitted into the self-esteem schema, and every negative, disagreeable and destructive emotion and character trait is automatically excluded, then much of importance about how we human beings estimate our own value is excluded from evaluation.\textsuperscript{38} Supposedly, these negative and other-destructive emotions and character traits are clear evidence of low self-esteem. This is the flip-side of debates over high self-esteem. The person with an exaggerated or grandiose sense of self-importance is not just faking it because of a ‘desperate need to feel confident’ but is...
actually suffering from low self-esteem. The problem is not the inappropriateness of such a level of self-importance, but the fact that the person holding such beliefs is caught in the trap of low self-esteem which supposedly compels her to found her confidence in such exaggerated forms. This widespread conviction that “self-esteem ‘deficits’ lie at the heart of countless dysfunctional behaviors has catapulted the quest for self-esteem into something of a modern day search for the holy grail.”

One group of people who seem to share some of the same features as the narcissist are those whom we label perfectionists. When we hear the phrases, ‘fantasies of unrealistic goals’ and ‘fuelled by an insatiable ambition’, the person seeking perfection comes readily to mind. Many of us would consider the pursuit of perfection, say in excelling in a certain way, a sign of a healthy self-esteem. The person or group who seek to attain to the high ideals they set for themselves strikes us, I think, as indicative of a self-belief and self-confidence typical of high self-esteem. Yet, from another perspective the quest for perfection can be seen as leading to an attitude of mind that creates great difficulties for self-acceptance. In fact, one clinical psychotherapist, Raymond Bergner, has included perfectionism as a type of pathological self-criticism.

Unlike the ordinary, well adjusted person who understands and acts within the limitations imposed by time, and who chooses the sorts of activities which suit her abilities, the perfectionist employs standards of adequacy that repeatedly doom her to failure. So, is the perfectionist a person of high self-esteem because she sets her goals high, or is she a person of low self-esteem because she is constantly self-critical, to the point of being self-abusive? There are two possible ways of estimating success in attempting to attain high self-esteem. One is by adopting the ideal as a guiding star by which to navigate one’s way through moral dilemmas and crises. Personal failures and recognised shortcomings do not deflect our attention away from being guided by the ideal. But secondly, as perfectionists themselves do, we can also adopt an ideal as a personal standard of adequacy, by which we measure, and not just estimate, our precise
current status.⁴² The perfectionist is constantly measuring her precise position in relation to the highest standards she has set for herself and can never reach the point where fulfilment, satisfaction, rest and enjoyment reside.

If self-esteem is a form of perfectionism, then either of these paths of idealism is open to us. As a standard of adequacy, seeking high self-esteem must involve thinking high self-esteem is possible. As a navigating ideal, high self-esteem becomes something by which we can assess our success and monitor our progress without castigating ourselves for every failure and shortcoming. It is this sort of idealised self-esteem that suits the Rosenberg theory of ‘not thinking too highly of oneself’. Adopted as a standard of adequacy, however, high self-esteem is not only thought to be possible but necessary for personal wellbeing. This approach also underlies the negative outcomes illustrated by Crocker, Lee and Park, in the pursuit of self-esteem.

A definition that Bergner thinks possible for the word "perfect" is "to be beyond criticism or reproach".⁴³ This seems to be a strong motive behind seeking perfection, for if a person can attain perfection, then all grounds for criticism will have been removed or annulled. The perfectionist imposes standards upon herself that demand the investment of all her energy, "in part because it is so vitally important that she place herself beyond the dreaded reproaches of others".⁴⁴ Because the standards are impossibly high, the perfectionist invariably fails to meet these self-imposed demands with the result that she feels exposed, endangered and humiliated. The perfectionist has double standards; those that apply to the person herself and those that apply to others. Others have their standards, the perfectionist says, and I accept those standards for others, but I have to live and judge myself by higher, more rigorous standards. The declaration here, is that "ordinary standards may suffice for ordinary people, but they are not good enough for the likes of me."⁴⁵ I deserve better than that which can come from simply adhering to ordinary standards. As Bergner points out in his suggestions for therapeutic solutions for perfectionists with double standards, these highest of the
high standards cannot be easily relinquished. The perfectionist is resistant to relinquishing these standards because to do so would amount to settling for mediocrity and abandoning the quest for personal excellence.\textsuperscript{46}

What is striking about perfectionists, as Bergner portrays them, is the tension in “striving strenuously for a success that never comes”.\textsuperscript{47} Perfectionists who castigate themselves for failures to meet their own demanding standards, are often making, in Bergner’s view the implicit claim that: “I am somebody for whom perfection is a possibility . . . There are also claims to specialness and superiority inherent in being a critic whose standards are so exalted and refined that all is found wanting . . . Superior standards are the marks of superior persons, and to adjure such standards would render them ordinary and commonplace.”\textsuperscript{48}

One type of perfectionist is the 'morally upright' person who when lapsing into an unacceptable moment of immorality, then attacks herself because this is part and parcel of being morally perfect, that is, to be severe on oneself. To be moral - truly moral, in such eyes, is to be much harder on oneself than on anyone else.\textsuperscript{49} A variation on this moral uprightness can be found in the person who thinks that to ease off on her self-criticism will lead to her getting 'a big head'. The concern here is that positive self-appraisals will lead to arrogance and conceit. In short it is the fear of becoming egotistical. The moral perfectionist thinks that any waverling on this point means accepting a form of self-approval which has become infused with thoughts that “everything about me is wonderful”. One recommendation Bergner makes in these cases is to ask the person attempting to attain a state of perfect (and unrealistic) moral rectitude to consider a world in which there is never any acknowledgment or praise for the good work or admirable characteristics of others. The results would impact upon others in feelings of demoralisation and futility. "Thus, the argument goes, it is actually damaging to persons, including ourselves, to withhold such reinforcing consequences as praise, acknowledgment and affirmation".\textsuperscript{50} A different type of perfectionism can be
found among those who adopt defensive and self-protective postures to avoid
disappointment. Some people are afraid to see themselves as bright or capable or
attractive to others, because in the process their hopes of being admired and loved
would be raised and “in the bargain they would be setting themselves up and exposing
themselves to the dangers of bitter hurt and disappointment. Far better, they conclude,
to think little of oneself, expect little, and thus both avoid the pain of disappointment
and even create the possibility of pleasant surprises.” 51

I think there is much to reflect upon in Bergner’s account of moral rectitude. Firstly,
what exactly is under threat of exposure? Bitter hurt and disappointment, he says. I
agree that the hurt in these situations can be bitter, but why? And how is it exposed?
What is there to be bitter about? Not succeeding or simply being exposed? In later
chapters we shall have good reason to return to these questions and to attempt to answer
them from a perspective not trammelled by the many presumptions evident in self-
esteem theories. Because we are all subject to setting standards that we suspect are
beyond our reach, but which we are determined to reach, oftentimes at no small
personal cost, the problems and possible solutions to perfectionism are relevant to all of
us, even to those who consider themselves well-adjusted. When we lapse into the
single-minded pursuit of objectives borne out of such high-minded idealism we become
susceptible to turning on ourselves when there is failure to reach these objectives.
Momentary bouts of negative self-criticism which must be expected when such failure
occurs, can be easily converted into self-denigration if we do not release our thoughts
from the lure of perfectionism. The lure resides in believing that an ideal is a standard
that we need to attain rather than being a guiding star by which we can navigate through
life.

The higher the standard of personal adequacy, therefore, and the greater the hold it has
on a person, the more certain it is that failure will ensue. It is as if the perfectionist
knows deep down that her endeavour to meet the requirements of an ideal will fail and
this failure will confirm her own status as a worthless being. It is as if the perfectionist is trapped between adopting the self-enhancement strategy which will involve taking risk, and the self-protective strategy that will insure she not be exposed to the possible ridicule of others and her own severe self-criticism.\textsuperscript{52}

The perfectionist in the various guises outlined above represents a person who is in pursuit of high self-esteem, so what does this tell us of ‘high’ self-esteem and what function it is thought to serve? There is the view that self-esteem is a calling toward growth, motivating a person to strive for excellence, for mastery. On this account, high self-esteem is an achievement and of great benefit and low self-esteem is signified by lack of growth and motivation. It is possible, however, to argue that the association of violence and high self-esteem includes another important factor besides the ‘threatened egotism’ that Baumeister highlights. There is the association of violence with the experience of shame. In the following chapters dealing specifically with shame, I shall analyse this association and put some flesh on Michael Lewis's view that recent data supports “the belief that shame may underlie much of the violence we witness.”\textsuperscript{53} In relation to self-esteem, “[s]hame, can make the ordinary high self-esteem person feel terrible about himself and bring to the fore, even if only temporarily, the discomfort, confusion, avoidance and depression associated with low self-esteem people.”\textsuperscript{54} In short: shame is common to both high and low self-esteem. As we proceed through the following analysis, I hope to show that, in fact, no matter what level or degree of self-esteem a person has, she remains vulnerable to shaming experiences. Shame unravels the ‘high/low’ self-esteem distinction and it is in understanding shame that we can get a better grip on the relation of self-esteem to a sense of self-worth.

It is this relation between self-esteem and shame that attracts the interest of philosophers. John Rawls, for example claims that self-esteem is a primary good and is lost (momentarily) when a person experiences shame.\textsuperscript{55} John Deigh takes issue with this account of self-esteem because he considers shame can occur in circumstances outside
and unrelated to the Rawlsian characterisation of self-esteem. The importance of this philosophical debate at this juncture relates to how self-esteem, seen as a primary good and yet incomplete in its account of the full range of human emotions, can distort our understanding of emotional experiences like shame. Deigh calls into question the “central idea that shame signifies loss of self-esteem” because it involves what he considers a “dubious conception of shame.” He provides several examples where, in his opinion, shame arises without any loss of self-esteem, and occasions when self-esteem can be lost or diminished without a person experiencing shame. He gives examples of each type to illustrate that something is wrong with the Rawlsian account both of the grounds for self-esteem and over what type of event that shame can strike.

We need not go into each of the examples Deigh provides to understand the point of his argument. Two examples will suffice. Firstly, there is the case of a young girl, attending school for the first time who is brought to shame because of her surname. A young French girl with the name Mme. Peterat, is for the first time confronted with the ridiculous connotation of her name, which can be translated into English as Miss Fartwell. In the story, the young girl “guileless and helpless - had never until that moment suspected that there might be something laughable in her name; on her first day at school its ridicule came upon her as a sudden revelation; she bowed her head, like some sluggish waterweed, to the jeers that flowed over her; she turned red, she turned pale; she wept.” For Deigh, here is an instance of shame that does not require any failure to attain a particular end. It is a shame, whose cause, he says “lies outside its subject's self-conception.” The second example, is of the Mashpee Indian, Earl Mills, who in his own words tells us that as a kid, he couldn't have cared less about his Indian background. He never participated in any of the tribal ceremonies, he didn't know how to dance and would not be caught dead in regalia. He and his friends made fun of those who did participate in these activities. One evening, during his time in the army, he was asked to join some other Indians in a dance. Without warning he is suddenly struck with shame. The point Deigh makes is that shame can strike, and strike powerfully, where
there are no specific life plans, goals, ideals or commitments at issue. What is evident here, in Deigh’s view, is that Mills has experienced shame without having embraced his Indian heritage, and this suggests that “despite the aims and ideals around which a man organizes his life, circumstances may arise that make him, because of an identity he has that is independent of those aims and ideals, liable to experience shame”.60

One objection to this view might be that such feelings of shame - that which was experienced by the Mlle. Peterat and by Earl Mills - are cases of irrational shame and of no use if we want to unearth the real causes of shame. Deigh’s response is to claim that we need to examine emotional experiences that take place in response to sensory stimuli unmediated by rational thought as well as experiences the occurrence of which we explain by reference to rational thought.61 I agree with Deigh when he says that we have no justifiable reason to privilege rational experiences of an emotion for the purposes of conceptual inquiry. Rational or not, both these cases are easily recognisable instances of shame. What is most important is that we examine why we humans are liable or vulnerable to shame not how we must learn to be rational about when and where shame should arise. Deigh puts the matter this way; "Since we are capable of bringing our emotions under rational control, we may regard our feeling a specific emotion as incompatible with our moral principles and so to try to make ourselves no longer liable to it. Alternatively, we may regard this emotion as essential to our humanity and so revise our principle”.62

We are introduced here to the connection between self-worth and shame in a way that is absent in most self-esteem theories. Both Rawls and Deigh are saying that an understanding of shame is essential for an understanding of the kind of worth we have as human beings. It is to the disagreement these two philosophers have over what constitutes self-worth that I now turn. Deigh calls the Rawlsian characterisation of self-esteem the ‘auteur theory of worth’, by which he means it is a conception of human worth based on our capacity to be the authors of our own actions. The auteur theory of
worth is that which a person does with his life, how well he directs it, determines his worth. On this theory, we attribute different degrees of worth to someone depending on how valuable we deem the kind of life he lives and how successful we think he has been living it or how suitable we think he is for it.  

In contrast, Deigh asks us to compare this self-authoring sense of worth with “attributions of worth made because of one's class, culture or essential nature.” The salient feature here, he says, is that one's status, and so one's worth, is fixed independently of one's conduct . . . Consequently, the dynamics of the sense of worth that comes from knowing the worth that goes with one's status or essential nature, that is, the understanding we give to augmentations and diminishments in that sense, are altogether different from those of the sense of worth the auteur theory recognises.  

For Deigh this means that we should conceive of shame, “not as a reaction to a loss, but as a reaction to a threat to one's sense of worth.” The threat of shame is the threat of something being exposed that makes one appear to have less worth than one has. This accounts for why the person experiencing shame wants to cover up and to hide. The auteur theory cannot account for this natural urge to cover up and we should reject, says Deigh, “any characterisation of an emotion that misrepresents, [or cannot account for] its natural expression.”  

Deigh is arguing that what is revealed in shame is a more fundamental sense of worth than the one derived from one’s own life plans and abilities. The things deemed essential to self-esteem from the auteur perspective are not sufficiently important to motivate a person to cover up and conceal. They merely lead to a blow or to a shock. In the recognition that the natural expression of shame is to cover up and conceal, or as Deigh puts it “shame motivates acts of concealment”, we begin to grasp something of a world of personal worth and meaning that presently lies outside the concept of ‘high’ self-esteem. Deigh’s point about shame revealing more to us, and about us, than can be accounted for in the auteur theory comes as a possible release valve. Self-esteem
theories have tended to place an analysis of the most meaningful emotions in a straightjacket and have moulded many of them to fit a particular schema already skewed toward the ‘positive connotations’ inherent in the theories.\textsuperscript{68}

Shame cannot simply be explained in terms of a loss of or blow to self-esteem; but what of the notion that shame reveals a more fundamental sense of worth which deserves to be protected? Gabriele Taylor associates shame with self-respect, “we can characterise self-respect by reference to shame. If someone has self-respect then under certain specifiable conditions he will be feeling shame. A person has no self-respect if he regards no circumstances as shame-producing.”\textsuperscript{69} This is an important observation that later in the thesis will become crucial to our understanding of a difference between firstly, self-respect and self-esteem and most importantly, between self-esteem and self-worth.\textsuperscript{70}

It will have been noted that I have not, aside from the Rosenberg quote early in this chapter, provided a ‘working model’ definition of self-esteem. It may be objected that had I accepted a more fine-grained definition, many of the problems outlined would be adequately dealt with. The reason I have not provided any particular definition, or constructed one of my own, is because the field, as Chris Mruk claims, has “accumulated enough definitions of self-esteem to reach the point of redundancy”.\textsuperscript{71} Mruk elaborates on what Neil J. Smelser has termed the definitional maze of self-esteem by asking his undergraduate students to write a succinct definition of self-esteem. “The typical class sees the point almost immediately: what seems so familiar and commonsensical at the beginning soon shows itself to be difficult as soon as the students try to capture it in words. Also, the diversity of definitions tends to be impressive. It is as though there are as many ways to define self-esteem as there are people trying to do so!”\textsuperscript{72}
The definitional maze has become something of an impenetrable thicket, and the main reason we cannot find our way out into a clearing is, I believe, because we overlook and ignore the radical asymmetry between self-regard and how we regard others. What we call self-esteem is a different phenomenon to esteeming others. It is a mistake to apply the term esteem to ourselves as if it implies the same ‘estimation’ we employ in esteeming others. We often fail to acknowledge this fundamental asymmetry between self-estimates and appraisals of others and throughout the thesis I will attempt to show the different aspects of this asymmetry. At best, we can but ‘estimate’ our own standing. We cannot view ourselves in the same light as we can view others. We can pass judgement on them and hold others in esteem without difficulty, but self-estimations rely heavily on feelings of pride and our justification for pride can be seriously misplaced. This is to say that we are attempting to import into our own self-estimate all that the term “esteem” denotes when it describes a high degree of approval or even honour, for others. An esteemed person is raised above the rank of other human beings, and this elitist feature of esteeming a person is not appropriate when we apply it to ourselves. The reasons behind this asymmetry will become clearer in subsequent discussions in this dissertation. For the moment, the fact that the very people considered conceited and arrogant are considered to have esteemed themselves beyond what is acceptable is an indication that esteeming oneself is a concept that needs to be distinguished in some way from the general idea of esteem as it applies to our admiration of others. This asymmetry between self and other regard, accounts for why, in spite of ample experimental data collected from thousands of studies of self-esteem, we find that these studies “have tended to be inconclusive, often demonstrating effects that are weak, nonexistent, or sometimes contradictory.”

If psychologists cannot reach consensus on the nature of self-esteem, or why humans need it, how they are to achieve it, whether it does or does not contribute to better mental health, or why and how it motivates, then I suspect that neither can the lay person. I think it can be safely said, that in spite of massive efforts over the past 40 or so
years, there has been little headway in explaining to human beings any of these reasons for pursuing self-esteem. A new approach is needed, and the starting point ought to be the feature of the narcissistic personality that is most obvious and so often considered a problem: the desire for the admiration and esteem of others. Narcissists "live on an interpersonal stage with exhibitionistic behaviour and demands for attention and admiration but respond to threats to self-esteem with feelings of rage, defiance, shame and humiliation". In the accounts of narcissism, reference is constantly made to this desire for admiration and esteem, which begs the question: why isn’t this so-called excessive need for admiration taken as a key component in understanding the dynamics of self-esteem? And even more importantly, why, if the narcissist experiences ‘feelings of greatness’ is she unable to self-gratify her own ‘exhibitionist need for admiration’?

In self-critical perfectionism, there is an unyielding ambivalence about being admired. It begins with the problem, as perfectionists see it, of others being ordinary human beings so that admiration coming from this source cannot count for much. The only admiration worth having is one’s own, but this seems impossible to achieve because one has set such exceptionally high standards for oneself. So while the admiration of a being who has reached perfection is the only admiration worth having, such a state of affairs just never comes about. The ambivalence becomes intractable when the admiration sought is constantly thwarted by personal failure – hence the severe self-criticism. The narcissist is working with the idea that there can be no greater proof that one has achieved high self-esteem or an ideal state of being than by being able to self-admire. For the narcissist such a state of being is not only possible but there are many times when she thinks she has actually reached it. For the perfectionist, entrapped in self-criticism, this state of being is, however desirable, not nearly as important as avoiding the shame that comes from not being in this state. She is a realist, so to speak, about the possibility of self-admiration. For her, at a deep level, perfection in this positive sense of a grand and pleasurable self-esteem is not possible, but what is possible, and what she must achieve, is to remove herself from ‘dreaded reproaches of others’. If
perfectionists are perfect in this sense, “then they succeed in achieving a position of safety, a position from which no one can find them wanting. When they are imperfect, in contrast, they feel extremely vulnerable, endangered, and hyper-concerned that others will attack and devastate them.”

To be able to self-admire, then, would be the perfect solution to the perennial problem of being exposed in shame. But for the perfectionist this is one notion she cannot bring herself to believe. Her goal of perfection, then, includes a realistic appraisal of the possibility of self-admiration. She believes that such a state of being cannot be attained. This accounts for the fear of egoism so prevalent among perfectionists, who in resisting the allure of thinking highly of themselves, have, in their own minds, acted appropriately. However much she might fail to raise herself above the dreaded reproaches of others, the perfectionist assures herself that her rejection of the possibility of self-admiration is the cornerstone of her attempts to be perfect. She senses a shame inherent in this impossibility to self-admire, and it is this shame that she can and must avoid at all cost. What can and must be perfected, then, is all that pertains to the outbreaks of this inherent or inborn shame. Her perfection will come, so she thinks, from never permitting herself any feelings of pride, even over having resisted egoism. Her self-criticism, then, becomes uncompromising in the extreme for she cannot even congratulate herself on her success in resisting egoism.

Pride can offset shame. As I will explain in subsequent chapters, I do not mean by this that feelings of pride can displace occurrent feelings of shame; rather being able to accept one’s feelings of pride enables one to withstand the most devastating effects of shame which, given our nature, we cannot hope to avoid. Being susceptible to shame is in fact indispensable to the development of self-worth, and so too is a healthy pride. To be unable or unwilling to enjoy one’s pride is to condemn oneself to a life of chronic shame and this in turn impacts upon self-worth and the form which self-esteem takes in a sense of self-worth. An endless deprivation of appropriate pride, is likely, in the
absence of understanding and support from others, to leave the perfectionist with a resentful defiance against the impossibility of self-admiration. I would suggest that much of the frustration that the moral perfectionist is reported to experience may be put down to the fact that as conscientious and vigilant as she is to avoid what she sees as the shame of egoism, which is, very often, merely appropriate pride, she feels constrained by her intuitive grasp of the impropriety of thinking self-admiration a possibility. As I shall argue in later chapters, particularly Chapter Seven, there is a primordial resentment against our incapacity to self-admire, and it is this which the perfectionist, along with all of us to varying degrees, find difficult to accept without feeling that such a crucial limitation, impacting as it does on self-esteem, borders on being unfair and unjust.

For the narcissist, an impending onset of shame has to be displaced by aggression against another person or living being because it is necessary for her to conceal the falsehood residing beneath the pretence of extreme self-assurance. It is not a matter, as some self-esteem theorists would have it, of there being low self-esteem covered by a veneer of high self-esteem, but rather it is a false belief in the possibility of self-admiration concealed beneath the pretence that one has already attained this exalted state. In reality, the narcissist bullies her way toward self-admiration by demanding the attention of others. If they will not admire me, she says, then I have no need of them. I will self-admire and ‘kill two birds with one stone’. I will enjoy my own status as a person of esteemed importance and I will dismiss the opinion of others as being of no importance or consequence. This is not entirely satisfying because the narcissist cannot dismiss the value she places on receiving confirmation of her importance from others. In fact she continually seeks it. This thrusts the narcissist into an uncomfortable uncertainty about what to expect from others, for she knows that every person who can confirm her worth can also disconfirm it, and this disconfirmation will expose her fraudulent pretence. Only the opinions of others that confirm the narcissist’s sense of
importance can be permitted to stand. Any opinion or judgement that disconfirms or invalidates her pretence will be met by rejection or aggression.

For the narcissist, the ability to self-admire would satisfy her own sense of inflated self-worth and she could altogether disregard the opinion of others. This is to say that where the perfectionist is acutely aware of her vulnerability to shame, so much so she frames her standards of adequacy in terms of it, the narcissist has concealed her vulnerability to shame with such conscious effort that when it is about to be revealed, she must switch from mental effort to physical effort to maintain the secret, and this she does through acting aggressively.

To conclude this opening chapter, I will summarise the key points that have been raised. In the most general sense I want to signal at the outset the urgent need to extricate our thinking about our emotional psychology from the straitjacket of self-esteem theories. Earlier in this chapter I quoted Rosenberg’s original view of high self-esteem. I shall end with another statement from him, made several years later. In the later statement Rosenberg observed that defensiveness often accompanies self-esteem, so that information that threatens self-esteem is not acknowledged; if it is seen, it does not register; if registered, it is misinterpreted; if correctly interpreted, it is ignored; if remembered, its significance is rationalised.77 The self-esteem motive, he says, is powerful and ubiquitous, protects a person by providing a distorted view of the self. “Only a motive of enormous power could explain the wide range of devices marshalled by individuals in defence of self-esteem”.78 To this, Victor Gecas responds with a valid question, “But are these devices and distortions in the service of a good cause? Is self-esteem an unequivocal good? In spite of Rosenberg’s disclaimers about conceit and arrogance, contempt for others, etc, I am sceptical,” says Gecas, that this is the case, “especially in American society. . . High self-esteem could also be associated with negative qualities, such as those mentioned by Rosenberg (e.g., arrogance, conceit, overweening pride, and contempt).”79
In conclusion, it must be stated that we require a paradigmatic shift from ideas that consign to us vacuous labels such as high and low self-esteem to ideas that incorporate self-approval into a far more comprehensive view of how human beings live with both pride and humility, with confidence and uncertainty, and all the while being vulnerable to bouts of shame. We need to find a new way of understanding the motivations behind the need for self-esteem, one which can account more adequately for why self-esteem is valuable, and why some of us are susceptible to exaggerated self-importance and others to a lack of self-belief and vitality. The self-esteem controversy and puzzle in social psychology appears beset with conceptual difficulties that impact upon the reliability of empirical data. In this opening chapter there are indications that much of the work on self-esteem carried out in social psychology suffers from a lack of conceptual clarity and that this has led to various controversies over the value of high self-esteem. The thought trends in social psychology have had a powerful influence in popular culture. There appears to be loose talk about a loose concept of high self-esteem, that ultimately becomes empty as it sweeps all manner of distinctive emotions into its compass in an undifferentiated mass that both defines and is defined by positive psychic development.
ENDNOTES


3 Ibid. p. 271.


9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., p. 283.

11 Ibid., p. 276.

12 Ibid., p. 273.

13 Among those in disagreement with Crocker and colleagues are Dubois and Flay, who claim that, “high self-esteem, or at least the avoidance of low self-esteem, is an important factor in contributing to health and well-being . . . and the pursuit of self-esteem, when directed toward adaptive ends, can be instrumental in promoting long term outcomes that are of value to both individuals and society.” David L.Dubois and Brian R. Flay. 2004. “The Healthy pursuit of self-esteem: comment on and alternative to the Crocker and Park (2004) formulation”, Psychological Bulletin, Vol.130. No. 3, p. 415-16.

14 Baumeister, Smart and Boden. 1999, pp 240-279.

15 Ibid., p. 242.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., p. 245.

18 Ibid., p. 241.

19 Ibid., p. 273.

20 Ibid., p. 273.

21 Baumeister, Smart and Boden. 1999, p. 253.

22 Ibid. Baumeister quotes various studies that lend support to this view.

23 Ibid., pp. 273, 274.

24 Ibid., p. 255.

I've quoted Allport at some length because throughout this thesis we shall have reason to return to his ideas of ‘extraordinary strategies of conduct’ and ‘the great superstructure of masquerade’.

Branden 2001, pp. 143-144.

Ibid., p. 143.

Ibid.


Swann 1996, has suggested that in the formation of self-esteem there are ‘conflicting motives’. There is “the desire for positive evaluations and the desire for self-verification”. The main emphasis of his theory is on those who are trapped in low self-esteem, for “[among people with negative self-views (low self-esteem)], a desire for praise competes with a desire for self-confirmation.” p. 55.

Ibid., p 5. A humourous account of how low self-esteem is seen as the real culprit in immoral and inappropriate actions, is provided by Swann. “When Pee Wee Herman was arrested for masturbating in a movie theatre a few years ago, Jesuit scholar William O’Malley observed that “masturbation isn’t the problem, its low self-esteem”. If O’Malley is correct, says Swann, “many more of us have low self-esteem than anyone ever imagined.” p. 5. I presume Swann is alluding to masturbation per se rather than specifically in a theatre.

While it may be possible to distinguish say an ‘obsessive’ from a ‘healthy’ perfectionism (where a person strives to do the very best she can), I am interested primarily in the link between self-criticism and perfection and self-critical perfectionism as a psychic disorder, and how this has relevance to theories of high self-esteem.

This has its philosophical equivalent in the notion of self-respect, which we will examine in later chapters, particularly Chapters Five, Six and Eight.


Alongside Baumeister, Smart, Boden 1999, and Crocker, Lee and Park 2004, Victor Gecas, 2001, is another who is concerned about the way self-esteem is conceptualised as an unequivocal good. “It would be nice”, says Gecas, “if self-esteem consisted of this admirable mix of self-respect and humility . . . But I am sceptical that this is the case, especially in American society.” p. 89. Christopher Mruk 1995, believes “[i]t is often difficult to know exactly what about self-esteem a researcher is researching or what a finding has actually found”, p. 26. This can hardly be conducive to any conceptual clarity regarding any of the emotions closely associated with self-esteem.


When Gershen Kaufman, claims that shame is felt “as an inner torment, a sickness of the soul”, and “it is the affect of indignity, of defeat, or transgression, of inferiority, and of alienation”, we can begin to see the very different values attributed to or associated with shame. Gershen Kaufman. 1985. Shame, the Power of Caring. Rochester, Shenkm Books, ix-x. Is shame a necessary part of self-respect or is it debilitating and self-defeating? This is a key issue I explore in Chapters Four to Six.


Agnes Heller speaks of an ‘inborn shame’ that cannot be escaped. The Power of Shame. 1988, p. 16.


Ibid., p. 56.

Gecas 2001, p. 89.
Chapter Two: The Love of Esteem and Pride.

The desire for the esteem and admiration of other people, when for qualities and talents which
are the natural and proper objects of esteem and admiration, is the real love of true glory – a
passion which, if not the best passion of human nature, is certainly one of the best.

Adam Smith

Beyond a certain level of satisfaction of material needs, our need for the esteem of others is
more important than anything else, except perhaps our need for self-esteem; and their
withholding of esteem can be intensely painful.

Jon Elster

In the opening chapter it was suggested that John Deigh’s idea of self-worth was better
equipped than the Rawlsian characterisation of self-esteem to account for the natural
expression of shame. The Rawlsian characterisation, or what Deigh calls the auteur
theory of self-esteem, is a self-authoring sense of worth constructed around a person’s
life plans and abilities. We are asked by Deigh to contrast this self-authoring sense of
worth with circumstances where “a person’s status, and so her sense of worth, is fixed
independently of her conduct … the dynamics of which comes from knowing the worth
that goes with one's status or essential nature [and] these are altogether different from
those of the sense of worth the auteur theory recognises.”³ Deigh is arguing that what is
revealed in shame is a more fundamental sense of worth than the one derived from
one’s own life plans and abilities. The things deemed essential to self-esteem from the
auteur perspective are not sufficiently important to motivate a person to cover up and
conceal, and as these defensive responses are the hallmarks of shame, the theory simply
fails to explain the sense of worth that makes one liable to shame.

This essential relation between a person’s sense of worth and her vulnerability to shame
is taken up in detail in later chapters. In this chapter I shall expand upon Deigh’s claim
that a person’s sense of self-worth goes much deeper than the self-authoring
characterisation of self-esteem offered by Rawls. I shall claim that there are four
components of a person’s sense of self-worth; these are her self-esteem, the esteem received from others, self-respect, and being of worth to others. As self-esteem theories typically subsume both self-respect and the esteem of others under the more general notion of self-esteem it will be necessary to demonstrate their distinctive importance to a person’s sense of self-worth. The first task, therefore, is to establish a clear distinction between the two types of esteem available to an individual. While the auteur theory recognises self-esteem, there is also, as I shall show in this chapter, the esteem of others which contributes significantly to a person’s sense of self-worth. Both self-esteem and the esteem of others contribute to a person’s sense of self-worth. The central theme of this chapter is that human beings have a potent desire to be esteemed and admired by others and that this desire is distinct from the desire of self-esteem.

One noticeable feature of most self-esteem theories is how little regard is paid to the desire which individuals have for the esteem and admiration of others. The emphasis in most self-esteem theories is on the individual’s own self-judgement and how she is driven or motivated to think well of herself, irrespective of the opinion of others. Self-esteem is typically presented as the desirable culmination of self-sufficiency. There is a passing reference to how the opinion and judgement of others impacts upon a person’s own self-esteem, but little or no analysis of the esteem of others and the role it plays in a person’s overall sense of importance and self-worth. Where the esteem of others is taken up for analysis it is most commonly subsumed under the concept of self-esteem rather than treated as an independent desire. The esteem of others, on this account, simply contributes to a person’s self-esteem. The problem with this approach is that sometimes the desire for the esteem of others proves to be the stronger of the two impulses and can lead to a dissociation from self-esteem by accepting accolades, for example, while knowing one is unworthy of them. Conversely there are times when a person feels compelled to act in ways conducive to the sense of self-worth she gains from self-esteem which result in her not only failing to gain the esteem of others, but in attracting their disapproval. It is where disapprobation threatens a person’s sense of
self-worth that the notion of self-esteem as a contributor to self-worth comes to prominence. Much of value can be lost if we fail to distinguish the two desires. Where self-esteem is viewed as the totality of self-worth, the importance of receiving the esteem of others is treated merely as a means of bolstering self-esteem rather than an independent desire, the gratification of which contributes significantly to a person’s overall sense of self-worth. Understanding the desire for esteem from others allows us to move beyond the idea common among social psychologists, that self-esteem is “the context for the entire therapeutic enterprise”. I shall, therefore, proceed in this chapter on the basis that there are two distinct desires, each of which have their own forms of gratification and that self-esteem is not the only, nor even perhaps the most potent source of self-worth available to individuals. The purpose of this chapter is to draw attention to the significance we attach to gaining the favourable judgement of ourselves from others. To distinguish the desire for esteem from others from self-esteem it is necessary to understand the concept of self-esteem merely as one of several ways in which self-conscious beings can take pleasure in thoughts about themselves and affirm their own worth. Self-esteem, as I shall present it, is the favourable thoughts a person has about herself, independently or without reference to, the opinion or judgement of others. Understood in this way, a person’s self-worth is constituted in both self-esteem and the pleasurable feelings derived from being esteemed and admired by others. I shall, therefore refer to the term self-worth to capture much of what self-esteem theorists mean in their use of the term self-esteem. The crucial point to be grasped in this chapter is that the desire to be well thought of by others is not just a subspecies of self-esteem but has its own distinctive set or motivations and sources of pride.

As indicated, the distinction between the two desires becomes most clearly evident when a person is pulled in different directions, and can only hope to satisfy one of the desires. There are cases where a person may be esteemed and admired by others but still lack self esteem, however loosely such a concept is framed. One example is easily recognisable: an aging movie star is applauded and receives the esteem she longs for
from others but deep down she is resentful over getting old and her sense of self-worth is not nearly as robust as would be expected given the esteem in which she is held by others. While it is possible to say that her self-esteem would be lower without the admiration of others, it is unlikely that more applause or congratulations would raise her level of self-esteem. Her sense of self-worth remains fragile because she is struggling with her own self-esteem, or her own judgement of her worth.\textsuperscript{6}

Conversely, in a time of war and fervent patriotism, a conscientious objector may well have a robust sense of self-esteem but she is unlikely to receive the esteem and expressed admiration of others in the community. In fact it is almost certain that the objector will be an object of their disapprobation. To maintain a sense of self-worth, therefore, the objector must rely on self-esteem and on self-respect. The relevant question is: does the objector still desire to be admired by others, knowing that her actions are counter to the prevailing ethos of her community? Surely all hope in attaining this sort of recognition would be lost given that the objector’s action is counter to the prevailing community standards and expectations. The fact that the objector fails to receive the esteem of others may not erase the desire to be seen as worthy of their admiration. A person who has self-esteem usually would still very much like to be approved of and esteemed by others; the desire for the esteem of others does not cease to operate in a person’s psyche simply because it is not likely to be easily satisfied. It can even be argued that because the two desires for esteem each possess their own tenacity, when one is not satisfied, or seems unlikely to be, there is an increased urgency about gratifying the other.

Because current self-esteem theorists have been inattentive to the role that the esteem and admiration of others plays in a person’s sense of self-worth, it is important to return to an earlier period in Western thought where the desire for esteem was considered not just one among many competing desires, but the most potent of them.\textsuperscript{7} To assist in our understanding of the ideas of this earlier period, I shall turn to Arthur O. Lovejoy, who
in a series of lectures in 1941 presented an account of the “ideas widely current in the
seventeenth and eighteenth centuries about a certain group of human motives or desires,
about their social consequences, and about their implications for the appraisal of human
nature.” It is typical of the literature of the period under review that ideas like the 'love
of praise' or the 'love of esteem' were in common use and that this way of thinking of
approbativeness or the desire for esteem or admiration from other persons was not “a
specialty,” says Lovejoy:

To provide a clear understanding of this powerful and persistent motive, Lovejoy
borrows from phrenologists the term approbativeness to describe the various and
interchangeable terms for: “The love of praise; desire to excel and be esteemed;
ambition; the desire to display and show off; . . . the desire for a good name, for
notoriety, fame . . . and to be well thought of, sensitiveness to the speeches of other
people, and love of popularity.” The common theme was that there is a human desire
for the admiration and honour of others and that this desire is 'irrepressible'. It cannot be
'expunged'. People have to learn to live with it, both with the benefits it provided as a
motivation to do great things, and as a constant source of strife and quarrel.

While the various writers Lovejoy refers to can be said to infer approbativeness, many
of them used certain common generic names to describe several different affective
phenomena which tends to confuse matters. Lovejoy does us a great favour by sifting
through these imprecise accounts of human desire and motivation so that the necessary
distinctions can be made and understood. The affective phenomena, variously
described as ‘love of praise’, ‘love of glory’, ‘love of fame’, ‘pride’, etc., were ‘species
of the genus of hedonistic susceptibilities’ which Lovejoy describes as “that peculiarity
of man which consists in a susceptibility to pleasure in, or a desire for, the thought of
oneself as the object of thoughts or feelings, of certain kinds, on the part of other
persons.” There are three varieties of this susceptibility: the wish merely to be noticed - to be at least an object of attention and interest on the part of others; the desire for affective attitudes – sympathy, friendliness, affection; love, and the desire for some form or degree of what is called a ‘good opinion’ of oneself on the part of other persons. It is this third affective state, where a person wants another to judge or evaluate her favourably that Lovejoy takes up at some length in his lectures. Adam Smith, the eighteenth century philosopher, perhaps best summed the value of the approbative desire when he wrote:

> The desire for the esteem and admiration of other people, when for qualities and talents which are the natural and proper objects of esteem and admiration, is the real love of true glory – a passion which, if not the very best passion of human nature, is certainly one of the best.  

And it was not just philosophers (nor just political theorists and satirists) who saw good in the desire. The Jesuit, Mariana, for example, saw it this way:

> Who does not see that it is by this desire for praise that men are powerfully stirred to undertake great deeds? .. For none - or certainly very few - would ever have braved danger for the defence of the common weal, for their country, or for their own dignity, or would have preferred the public good to their own, or despising the comforts of life, have devoted themselves to the study of wisdom, unless they had been incited by the desire and hope of immortality.

The idea was that the desire for praise, and the pride associated with it, were necessary and sufficient to motivate persons to act in the public good. This was a consistent feature in the writings of the time, and Immanuel Kant captured this strong sense of the social utility associated with the desire for esteem and admiration with these words: ”[a] craving to inspire in others esteem for ourselves, through good behaviour (repression of that which could arouse in them a poor opinion of us,) is the real basis of true sociality.” The desire for praise, Lovejoy concludes, was thought to make for social concord, “since it causes individuals to do what others wish to do and esteem and admire them for doing.”

There were two different features of the desire. It could lead a person toward those things approved of and valued by others or it could act as a restraint against acting in
ways that offended others. The 'disapprobation' or disapproval of certain actions was considered to be just as strong a consequence of the desire for glory as was the attainment of the glory itself. John Locke says of this aversion to blame and condemnation, and the fear of disgrace and disrepute, that:

He who imagines commendation and disgrace not to be strong motives to men, to accommodate themselves to the opinions and rules of those with whom they converse, seem little skilled in the nature or history of mankind. . . . He must be of a strange and unusual constitution, who can content himself to live in constant disgrace and disrepute with his own particular society.18

Voltaire understood things in much the same way, “God has wisely endowed us”, he writes,

with a pride which can never suffer that other men should hate and despise us. To be an object of contempt to those with whom one lives is a thing that none has ever been, or ever will be, able to endure. It is perhaps the greatest check which nature has placed upon men’s injustice; it is by the mutual fear that God has thought best to bind men together.19

However much the fear of blame was thought by Locke and Voltaire and some others to be the key factor of man’s “dominant and universal passion,” most writers of the time found it, not in the fear of “disgrace and disrepute”, but in the craving for reputation, praise, and applause.20 For most, the desire was seen as having been implanted in ‘man’ to insure private vices never outweighed public virtues. The Protestant divine, Abbadie, claimed that:

[i]t pleased the wisdom of the creator to give us, for judge of our actions, not only our reason, which allows itself to be corrupted by pleasure, but also the reason of other men, which is not so easily seduced ... for it is the desire of being esteemed that makes us courteous and considerate, obliging and decent .... and in general all that is most admirable in society.21

In the minds of these writers the approbative desire or the desire to excel over others possessed not only social utility that could assist reason or public virtue, but it was more effective than either reason or virtue. Lovejoy suggests it was a widely accepted premise, that:

all men were incapable of being actuated by any other motive, that the craving for admiration or applause was not only universal in the human species but also that it was ingeniously implanted in man by his creator as a substitute for the Reason and Virtue which he does not possess, and is the sole subjective prompting of good conduct, and the motive of virtually all the modes of behaviour necessary for the good order of society and the progress of mankind.22
What these writings reveal is that the desire to receive praise, acclaim and honour from others was thought to be both the spur to great deeds and a key constituent of social order. Its counterpart was considered equally important. No one, it was thought, could stand the disapprobation of his fellow man. The desire was considered so embedded in human nature that almost every good and evil was in some way attributed to it. The desire was seen as the reason a person sought to excel and the cause of destructive competition, unjustified and arrogant pride, malignant envy, spiteful jealousy and even the source of shame.\textsuperscript{23} Despite its potential for good, the approbative desire needed to be, in some way, tamed and directed along the right path or it would harm the person who failed to acknowledge its motivating power. It could, so these thinkers thought, motivate a person to greatness or to self-destruction.

It is to John Adams, who Lovejoy considered to have surpassed many of his predecessors in his insistence upon the universality and supreme potency of the love of praise or as he calls it the “passion for distinction”, that I want now to turn our attention. Nature, says Adams, “ has kindly added to Benevolence, the desire for reputation, in order to make us good members of society.” And the reasoning required to respect the rights of others is abstruse and “would not occur to men . . . The only true effective means of insuring political and social accord was by the statesman understanding the motivating power of the love of distinction and the fear of disapproval.”\textsuperscript{24} Like many before him, Adams thought he recognised that within a political society neither reason nor public virtue could carry the weight that would insure social stability and progress. It was therefore “the principle end of the political philosopher and the statesman to regulate this passion, which in its turn becomes the principle means of government.”\textsuperscript{25}

Economic success was also attributed to the desire for distinction. Adam Smith had much to say on the issue; and I think we can easily recognise ourselves in his descriptive portrait of the key motivational factor in the relation between work and reward. To what purpose, Smith asks,
For to what is the toil and bustle of this world? What is the end of avarice and ambition, of the pursuit of wealth, power and pre-eminence? Is it to supply the necessities of nature? The wages of the meanest labourer can supply them . . . What then is the cause of our aversion to this situation? From whence, then, arises that emulation which runs through all the different ranks of men, and what are the advantages of that great purpose of human life which we call bettering our condition?26

Smith then answers his own question by claiming that human beings do these things in order to:

be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of . . , are all the advantages which we can propose to derive from it. It is the vanity, not the ease or the pleasure, which interests us. But vanity is always founded upon our belief of our being the object of attention and approbation. The rich man glories in his riches, because he feels that they naturally draw upon him the attention of the world . . . At the thought of this, his heart seems to swell and dilate itself within him, and he is fonder of his wealth upon this account than for all the other advantages it procures him. 27

The idea that it is pride which most pleases the wealthy person is not just culturally specific and time-bound to a Scottish philosopher of the Eighteenth century. Earlier, in 1693 the French theologian La Placette wrote “[i]t is certain that the cause of our love for . . . possessions, fine clothes, handsome furniture, etc. . . is not so much the utility or pleasure we find in them, as for the glory that comes from them.”28 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, too, in his customary assertive style said of 'articles of luxury', that

since the value of these useless products lies only in l'opinion, their price is itself a part of their value, and they are esteemed in proportion as they are costly . . . The importance which the rich man attaches to them is not due to their utility, but to the fact the poor man cannot have them'.29

Rousseau quotes a Latin tag from Petronius to sum up his argument. “I don't want to have any goods except those that the populace will envy me for possessing.”30 There are two issues of particular interest to us in Rousseau’s comments. There is the idea that goods have subjective value primarily because they provide the possessor of them with a sense of distinction from others and a reason for pride, and because some or most other people do not have these goods, they also lead others to either “look up to or envy those who do have them.”31 These are issues I explore in greater detail in Chapters Seven and Eight.
The material so far presented illustrates the importance that these older writers placed upon the desire and esteem of others. As John Adams states: “[a]mong the ‘appetites and propensities’ calculated by nature to render man fit for society, none was more essential or remarkable, than this desire of every man, to be observed, considered, esteemed, praised, beloved, and admired by his fellows”.** Lovejoy makes the point that the words used here by Adams are not synonyms, they are carefully designed to establish different degrees of ‘distinction’. In the first two, ‘observed’ and ‘considered’, Adams saw merely the desire for attention - the desire to be noticed, and this notoriety is sought regardless of 'the means by which it may be attained'. The 'show-off', 'big-shot' or 'skite' are marked by this degree of distinction. The greater number, however, search for distinction, neither by vices or virtues, “but by the means which common sense and every day's experience show by riches, by family records, by play, and other frivolous personal accomplishments”. But there are, says Adams, “a few, and God knows, but a few, who aim at something more. They aim at approbation as well as attention; at esteem as well as consideration; and at admiration and gratitude, as well as congratulations. Admiration is, indeed the complete idea of approbation, congratulation and wonder, united.”\(^{32}\) In claiming admiration to be both the highest among the different degrees of distinction human beings can experience and the completion and unity of approbation, congratulation and wonder, Adams is making a bold statement that requires closer scrutiny. In the next chapter I undertake to explain what it means to admire, and argue that Adams’s bold statement has, in fact, a good deal of credibility, even in contemporary times.

As touched upon earlier, many of the writers under review saw the approbative desire, and the passions in general, as being far more potent than Reason. The passions here refer to the workings of the heart, and it is the passions which

act on the imagination, and the imagination, being corrupted, works upon the reason, always representing things to it, not as they are in themselves . . but as they are in relation to the present passion, so that they may pronounce the judgement they desire.\(^{33}\)
Jacques Abbadie, a French protestant theologian dwells at length on “the inventiveness of the mind in discovering reasons favourable to what it desires,” and the general consensus, says Lovejoy, was that the “wise man is aware of the fact that his own judgements, opinions, and even moral sentiments, may, like other men’s, be really formed in him, not by reason, but by the prejudices, appetites and passions which ought to hold a much inferior rank in the intellectual and moral system.”

During the period under review there were differing views on whether the approbative desire was or was not a derivative of self-esteem. Abbadie is one who thinks not. What is commonly thought to be derived from self-esteem, he says, such that “the good opinion of our fellows is valued simply because it confirms the good opinion we have of ourselves”, is mistaken. The two desires vary independently; and men in general, he thinks, “prefer to have faults that are esteemed than good qualities which society does not esteem,” and like “to gain consideration for qualities which they know very well they do not possess.” I think we can recognise ourselves in Abbadie’s portrayal of the human propensity to gain, at least some of the time, the approbation of others at almost any cost, even when we secretly know we have done little or nothing to justify it. Abbadie’s comments reveal a shift from the more open acceptance of the justification for receiving public acclaim evident in the honour ethic of the Golden Age of Athens, and today we may display a reticence about accepting such public esteem as proudly as once was thought justified. So while we are less inclined to view a ‘greatness of soul’ as Aristotle did in terms of a ‘reaching out after esteem’ and ‘honour’, we continue to grapple with what it means to have self-worth and the role the esteem of others plays in this worth. As Aristotle commented, “[h]e who thinks esteem a small thing, will think everything else a small thing”. The abundance of self-esteem theories and self-help books would seem to validate Aristotle’s statement, that indeed we do not, in the 21st Century, think esteem a small thing. But as Lovejoy notes, it is unclear whether Aristotle, in claiming that esteem is not a small thing, is referring to self-esteem or to the esteem of others. Lovejoy thinks that the desire for self-esteem exists independently,
but gains support from the admiration of others; “it is easier to feel satisfied with your qualities or your acts or performances if your fellows appear to think highly of them”.

What is important, in Lovejoy’s view is that Aristotle is not condemning either desire. “Neither modesty nor the concealment of one’s good deeds or qualities seems to have been counted by the Greeks as among the virtues”.

Just as the desire for the esteem and admiration of others is seen by earlier writers as both a spur to excellence and a folly leading to all manner of vice, the desire for self-esteem, as we would expect, has its own down-side. It may take the form of an indifference to or contempt for the opinion of other persons. This can occur where the person esteems herself the more because she is, or believes herself to be, unconcerned about the esteem of others. The desire for self-esteem, here, “may manifest itself outwardly in bumptiousness, aggressiveness, defiance of social convention and rules.”

There is little reason to doubt Lovejoy on this point, for as we have seen in the work of Baumeister in the opening chapter, high self-esteem together with an ego-threat is sufficient to set off aggressive behaviour. Significant also is that in many cases, self-esteem appears to be a revolt against one’s own desire for the esteem and admiration of others. When a person understands that she is not going to be admired for her actions, the adoption of some form of assertiveness can deflect attention away from the deep anxiety that resides over being placed, through external judgements in “a humiliating position of subjection to others.”

Lovejoy sees that “the effect of the conjunction in human nature of approbativeness with the propensity to self-esteem, and of the adverse impact of the former upon the manifestation of the latter” has “produced a large amount of self-concealment and of insincerity in the average individual’s intercourse with other members of his social group.” It might, therefore, seem to be “an unhappy consequence of the interplay of the two desires of self-conscious beings,” says Lovejoy, that such insincerity and self-concealment exists, “[b]ut it is an actual, and human nature being what it is, not a
wholly regrettable consequence... which probably serves to increase the total sum of pleasure enjoyed by the participants in social converse.”  

To praise others, and not praise oneself, says Lovejoy, are rules of the game. Whether these rules have changed since he lectured in 1941 I shall leave for others to decide, but in some quarters at least it does seem that given the rise to prominence of self-esteem over the past forty years, it is possible to argue the case for quite a different scenario today; if not in how people actually do go about establishing their own sense of self-worth, at the least in how many theorists and self-help advocates present the supreme value of self-esteem.  

It would be remiss to review the writers of this period of Western thought without including some of the ideas of that universal gadfly, Bernard Mandeville. His ideas amused some and infuriated others. He took particular delight in carrying to its extreme the view that public benefits come into being directly from private vices – specifically pride or what he termed vanity. According to Lovejoy, Mandeville’s general thesis is this:

that approbativeness and the desire for self-esteem and the aversion from their opposites are the initial and the principle subjective sources, the inner and distinctively human appertenties, from which, in fact, the kind of conduct usually recognised as moral arises; that these are the affective components of human nature through which the interests of other men and the moral standards of society get their hold upon the conduct of the individual.  

The challenges that Mandeville presents are taken seriously by Lovejoy as they were by David Hume and Adam Smith. In response to Mandeville, Hume has this to say:

It has always been found, that the virtuous are far from being indifferent to praise; and therefore they have been represented as a set of vain-glory men, who had nothing in view except the applause of others. But this . . . is a fallacy. It is very unjust in the world, when they find any tincture of vanity in laudable action, to depreciate it upon this account, or ascribe it entirely to that motive.

It is because he considers “vanity is so closely allied to virtue”, that Hume can say that “the love of fame of laudable actions approaches so near the love of laudable actions for their own sake, that these passions are more capable of mixture, than any other kinds of affection; and it impossible to have the latter without some degree of the former.”
Smith is thinking along the same lines when he writes; “[t]he Love of virtue . . is . . the noblest and best passion of human nature. The love of true glory [is] a passion inferior, no doubt, to the former, but which in dignity appears to come immediately after it.”

It is clear that for Hume, Smith, and others, the desire for the esteem and admiration of others was not only potent but laudable, and it was deemed natural that the virtuous person would want this desire gratified as much as any person. The approbative desire is considered by the writers under review to be ingrained in the human psyche and this has consequences for current day self-esteem theories and psychological explanations of human motivation.

In current theories of self-esteem, as we have seen, it is typical to consider a person who openly and obviously seeks the esteem and admiration of others, especially when there seems little or no justification for such approbation, to be manifesting some form of psychic disorder. Take the narcissist, for example, in whom the approbative desire is patently obvious.

These patients present an unusual degree of self-reference in their interactions with other people, a great need to be loved and admired by others, and a curious apparent contradiction between a very inflated concept of themselves and an inordinate need for tribute from others.

What appears to be a curious contradiction, I would suggest, is actually the workings of the two distinct desires we have examined in this chapter – those of self-esteem and the approbative desire in its extreme form. For the narcissist, there is the desire to be one’s own source of wonder and holding to the hope that one is able to be so; and there is the different desire to be seen by others as wonderful and worthy of their esteem, the gratification of which becomes the means to bolster the pride of self-esteem. While there are many other factors in narcissism besides the desire for pride in oneself and the approbative desire for the esteem of others which help distinguish those suffering a psychic disorder from most of us, it ought to be clear that this apparent contradiction is common enough among human beings to suggest it is a source of struggle for most of us. There is a constant, though not necessarily disturbing tension to satisfy both the
desire for self-esteem and approbation; and this tension is a necessary part of establishing a person’s sense of self-worth. The narcissist reveals how each of the desires has its own potency, and how when these potent desires are disconnected from and not integrated into a balanced sense of self-worth, they create a psychic disorder.\textsuperscript{51}

In the opening chapter it was claimed that the perfectionist wanted above all, to be able to avoid the reproach of others. It is now possible, given our grasp of the role of approbativeness in self-worth to better understand the conundrum facing the perfectionist. As she deems herself to be the only reliable judge of the worthiness and admirability of her own actions, there is little or no gratification sought in the approval of others. What does bother the perfectionist, however, is the disapprobation of others. As Bergner puts it, the perfectionist imposes standards upon herself that demand the investment of all her energy, "in part because it is so vitally important that she place herself beyond the dreaded reproaches of others."\textsuperscript{52} To raise herself above the possibility of such disapprobation or reproach, the perfectionist decides she will be the sole judge of her entitlement to esteem and admiration. To her disappointment and frustration she finds her own actions undermine this entitlement. As much as she is determined to be worthy of admiration – her own admiration – this fails to eventuate and the prospect of experiencing acute shame looms large. This is because she has distanced herself from others, and as I shall argue throughout the remainder of the thesis, it is in relationship with others that our own imperfections are covered and our desire for esteem is gratified. The perfectionist, however, cannot bring herself down to this level of interaction because she fears that others, whom she has treated with either indifference or contempt, will not miss their opportunity to ridicule her pretentious endeavours.

The perfectionist knows better than most how much human beings enjoy standing in judgement of others for she has adopted this role in evaluating her own actions. The idea, at first, seemed to be a pleasurable one, but in the wake of constant failures she
discovers that being one’s own judge is far from pleasurable. She has, in fact, become her own hanging judge. Nevertheless, she would rather stay trapped in this mode of severe self-judgement than be faced with the more unsettling disapprobation of others which, if she permits it any hold upon her, will end her hopes of rising to perfection and to the reward she most earnestly seeks – that of being able to self-admire – which will assure her of her own worth and render inconsequential any reproach from others.

The desire for the esteem and admiration of others has long been associated with the idea of pride. The term “pride”, as Lovejoy notes, most naturally refers to self-esteem, but has also frequently been employed to designate approbativeness, the desire for some form or degree of approbation from others. It is therefore possible to say that there is a pride associated with self-esteem and a different form of pride associated with receiving the esteem of others. Pride gained from the desire to be approved or admired by others, leads the individual to act as other individuals, or the community in general, desire him to act – in other words, to subordinate his private desires and interests to the public interests. It is, in fact, the principle, or the only dependable, motive for the behavior which is general described as moral. If it is not a virtue, its overt effects are, in the main, the same as those of virtue; and it is far more potent.

There is also a further difference between pride as a vice and pride as appropriate, or proper pride. At one extreme is the opinion that pride “is the principle, or even the only, effective psychic force of all that is most needful and most desirable in human behavior whatever its intrinsic nature;” at the other extreme is “the opinion that it is the principle psychic source of most of the evils and miseries in man’s existence.”

It is understandable, then, that pride has had its supporters and its detractors. The detractors have viewed it as a deadly sin, a source of evil. The supporters have seen it as a necessary component in progress and in personal growth, without which, human beings would have little reason to strive for excellence. Both these perspectives on pride place great store in its power to bring about significant change in the individual’s life. It is puzzling, therefore, why present day social psychology finds little room for pride,
particularly the role it plays in self-esteem. Among the many pages written on self-esteem, few have included any notable analysis of pride and most theorists ignore the phenomenon of pride altogether.55

Where pride is seen as a vice, it is often presented as if it can only be justified through external validation from others. The idea, here, is that “subjectivity no longer suffices; sustainable pride involves intersubjective conditions of validity.”56 I think the claim that pride can only be sustained or considered moral if there is support from others misconstrues what pride is and its contribution to self-worth.57 There is pride in oneself which may fail to impress others, and any account of pride must account for pride in this self-justifying way, irrespective of justification from external sources. It is because such self-justified pride can manifest itself in arrogance or conceit and can become an obnoxious state-of-mind that we expect it to be brought under some form of external judgement. I think it is mistaken, however, to think that pride – appropriate or proper pride - cannot be justified without confirmation from others. There can be justifiable pride in oneself without the requirement of external validation, but such pride needs to be a part of an integrated sense of self-worth and not merely associated with self-esteem alone.

This is to say that pride associated with self-esteem can be either a pride-in-self-esteem or the pride-of-self-worth. The former is self-affirmation isolated from other forms of affirming self-worth, while the pride-of-self-worth is a pride that is shaped by, and is a response in keeping with, these other forms of self-affirmation. The distinction I am making here between self-worth and self-esteem is important and I will return to it in greater detail in Chapter Five.

I would suggest that proper pride in oneself does not require external validation but it takes on a more assured tone when in fact a person is admired by others. Because it is pleasurable to believe one is worthy of admiration, it follows that when one is admired,
the appropriateness of feeling the pleasure of pride is confirmed. In being admired by others, one feels self-affirmed in one’s pride. The usual requirement is that a person do, or be something that is typically approved of and admired in society, or at least bring her self-love down to something others can live with. It means that we act in accord with what others do in fact approve of and admire, but this can vary markedly within any society.

Perhaps the clearest example of what I call pride-in-self-esteem is provided by Branden. Insisting they are different, Branden relates self-esteem and pride in the following way:

Self esteem is confidence in one’s capacity to achieve values. Pride is the consequence of having achieved some particular value(s) . . . The deepest pride a man can experience is that which results from his achievement of self-esteem [and] since self-esteem is a value that has to be earned, the man who does so feels proud of his attainment.

This distinction between the “I can” confidence of self-esteem and the “I have” achieved basis for pride, on Branden’s account, appears strained and does not capture the essential link between pride and self-esteem. For Branden, self-esteem is, or should be, “unaffected and unimpaired,” even where someone fails in some particular undertaking. That is, self-esteem is not, or ought not to be, dependent on particular successes or on occasions for pride. Yet the deepest pride is in having achieved self-esteem, so it would seem to follow that this deepest pride is also, or ought also to be, unaffected and unimpaired by setbacks, failures, and I would suggest, occasions for shame. On this account, pride in self-esteem is permanent, as permanent as the self-esteem supposedly attained.

Pride for the egoist, here, is the pleasure derived from her own power to think she has attained self-esteem, rather than from the pleasure derived from any other more easily recognisable accomplishment. For most of us, where pride is experienced in being esteemed by another, it is a pride associated with some specific quality or act which the other admires and there is a sense of the contribution the other makes to one’s feelings of pride. The egoist, however, sees no need to acknowledge the other’s contribution to
her pride. The pleasurable feeling in having her desire for esteem satisfied need not be connected to any specific accomplishment beside the accomplishment that the egoist considers all that matters – that she has, in her own mind, attained a state of being that she is happy to call self-esteem. Nor does her self-esteem need any validation from others. This is pride-in-self-esteem, a permanent state of mind dissociated from other aspects of self-worth. It is dissociated from the special nature of the esteem from others and from worth-to-others and self-respect. As I argue in Chapters Four to Six, this type of pride is impervious to shame and as a consequence leads to many problems in relationships and normal interaction with others.

To understand the difference between pride-in-self-esteem and the pride that comes from the satisfaction of the desire for esteem from others, there is a need to recognise that pride is not our only form of self-affirmation. It is where pride is treated as the only form of self-affirmation that self-esteem is seen as the entirety or whole of self-worth. As we proceed through the thesis, and particularly in Chapters Three and Five, I examine these varied forms of self-affirmation or as I also alternately refer to them, ‘sources of self-worth’, and it will hopefully become clear why the pride associated with the satisfaction of the desire for esteem from others is different from pride-in-self-esteem.

For now, suffice to say that there are several forms in which one’s self-worth can be affirmed and it is only where the pride associated with self-esteem is integrated with these other forms of self-affirmation, that pride will be experienced in accord with one’s whole sense self-worth. This is the pride-of-self-worth. This is to say that pride without foundation in a sense of self-worth incorporating the various forms of self-affirmation, creates an environment of self-preoccupation in which one can begin to believe it is possible to self-admire. It is where this belief in self-admiration gains a hold that pride becomes clearly objectionable. When isolated from the esteem of others and from self-respect, pride as an entitlement to be admired appears pretentious and ridiculous. The
person trapped in such pretence comes to believe she is a wonder to herself. Only when one’s self-esteem is integrated into self-worth, is modified by the opinion of others, and incorporates a sound sense of why it is imperative one have self-respect, can pride in oneself be considered appropriate.  

The thought of always being able to gratify our own desire for esteem and admiration is an enticing prospect. We ask ourselves the question; if I desire to be admired, and I am capable of admiring, what is there to stop me from admiring myself? It is in moments of pride that self-admiration seems a highly attractive possibility. As I shall argue throughout the thesis, the potency of this seduction to self-admire has serious ramifications for human interaction. I will claim that believing oneself capable of self-admiration is the source of many of the negative and destructive attitudes and actions of individuals.

The only reliable source we have in endeavouring to render ourselves fit objects of admiration is to learn from the experiences we have in admiring others. Bertrand Russell once said, “[i]f we want happiness, we must learn to envy less and admire more”. The more we admire others and take inspiration to create in our own style qualities and skills we most admire in them, the more likely that we will come to believe ourselves worthy of admiration. It is a matter of wherever possible finding in others whatever can be admired and a willingness to give to them an appropriate expression of this admiration. What this means is that we need to understand what takes place in admiration and this is taken up more fully in the following chapter.

In this chapter I have highlighted the significance of the approbative desire and argued that it is a distinct and different phenomenon from the desire for self-esteem. Most self-esteem theories subsume approbation and self-worth under the more general concept of self-esteem, and this view, I suggest, needs to be revised. A review of some of the writings of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries has shown us that the desire for
the admiration and esteem of others was considered independent of the desire for self-esteem and was not a mere derivative of the desire for self-esteem. As I will argue in Chapter Five, there are sources of worth that extend beyond the desire for the admiration and esteem of others, but the importance of this desire and the sort of pride that flows from its satisfaction needs to be acknowledged. Even if we are not prepared to attribute to the approbative desire quite the level of potency that Adams does when he says that

the desire of esteem is as real a want of nature as hunger; and . . . [e]very personal quality, every blessing of fortune, is cherished in proportion to its capacity of gratifying this universal affection for the esteem, the sympathy, admiration and congratulation of the public,63

we must acknowledge its significance as an independent contributor to self-worth. Importantly, the desire for the admiration and esteem of others, engages us in exchanges and interactions with others and it is the nature of these exchanges that I now explore in the next chapter.

In conclusion, it is important to acknowledge the ‘approbative’ desire, not just because it is different to and distinct from the desire for self-esteem, but because it reveals that we cannot be satisfied with our own esteem. So long as we subsume the esteem of others under self-esteem, we miss the essential point that we seek the admiration and esteem of others because we are not satisfied with our own self-esteem. This raises the question: why are we not satisfied with our own self-esteem? It is because there is a fundamental limitation to how we can see ourselves, and that this limitation compels us to seek the approbation of others. In the next chapter I will explore what it means to admire, and argue that an understanding of how we admire reveals that the limitation in our own self-evaluations is, in fact, that we cannot self-admire.
ENDNOTES

3 Deigh 1995, pp. 150-151.
6 This distinction is generally referred to as a difference between public and private esteem, and I will sometimes refer to public esteem as an abbreviated form of the esteem of others.
7 This inattentiveness would appear to be more common in psychology than in sociology, and some sociologists may dispute my claim, drawing attention to the well established theories of Symbolic Interactionism, according to which “the self is a social product derived from the attitudes and behaviours that others exhibit toward one’s self”, Owens and Goodney 2000, p. 35. This theory might seem to indicate that the desire for approbation can be accounted for in terms of interactionism. Such an account of approbativeness, however, has difficulties because of the additional principle upon which such a theory insists, that “individuals eventually come to see themselves as they believe others do”. Ibid. This is far too strong a proposition. It fails to distinguish the approbative desire from the desire for self-esteem. While reflected appraisals contribute to self-worth and impact upon a person’s opinion of herself, we attribute to individuals a measure of autonomy and an independence from the opinions of others. It is the formation of self-worth which comes from within that constitutes self-esteem, and however much it is shaped by reflected appraisals and interaction with others, it allows the individual to resist and reject where self-worth is threatened.
9 Ibid., p. 131.
10 Ibid., p. 90.
11 The love of honour has, of course, been a dominant theme at other times as well, e.g., in the ancient Greek honour ethic as Bernard Williams, among others, has highlighted. Bernard Williams. 1993. Shame and Necessity. Berkley: University of California Press. I have chosen this more recent period of history because I think many of the themes espoused by these Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century moral psychologists resonate through our shared cultural heritage.
12 The literature covering this topic is vast, and because some of it is so obscure and some of it is out of print I have relied on Lovejoy’s scholarship in relation to the quotations of earlier writers.
19 Voltaire. Traité de Metaphysique, 1734, as quoted in Lovejoy, p. 181.
21 Abbudie, 1698, p 423, as quoted in Lovejoy 1961, p. 163.
23 Ibid., pp. 212, 217, 227, 250.
25 Ibid.
26 Smith1976, p. 50.
This may well be an exaggerated account of the potency of the ‘approbative desire’, but I will let Smith’s words stand, here, because although there are likely to be issues of power, greed and influence also associated with ‘riches’, the note Smith makes about pride has relevance to what I say about envy and provocation to envy in Chapters Seven and Eight.

La Placette. 1693, Traite de l’orgueil. p. 41, as quoted in Lovejoy, p. 146.


Lovejoy. 1961, p. 210. While these strong motivations of esteem and envy do not in themselves account for all the benefits derived from possessing goods, they are central. There are also matters of convenience, comfort, and ethical concerns – say, in contemporary terms - over the ownership of a private motor vehicle verses public transport, etc., but for these writers the desire for esteem was so potent that wherever the opportunity arose a glimmering buggy (the equivalent of a bright new car) would be clearly preferred to one that was second hand, and desired precisely because it provided a boost to esteem. As Samuel Johnson wrote in Rambler No. 164: “Every man, however hopeless his pretensions may appear, has some project by which he hopes to rise to reputation; . . . and by which others may be persuaded to love, or compelled to fear him.” As quoted in Lovejoy 1961. p. 137.

Adams. 1851, p. 248, as quoted by Lovejoy, p. 200,201. Smith 1976, has a similar view of admiration when he states, the “[a]pprobation, mixed and animated with wonder and surprise, constitutes the sentiment which is properly called admiration,”Ibid., p. 31.


Jacques Abbadie. 1692. p. 241, as quoted by Lovejoy, p. 29.


Abbadie, ibid., p. 413, as quoted by Lovejoy, p.161.


Lovejoy 1961, p. 100.

Ibid., p. 97.


Ibid., pp. 100, 101.

Ibid., p. 101.

Ibid., p. 110.

Ibid., p. 111.

One example from Branden 2001, p 251, illustrates the shift in relative importance attributed to self-esteem and approbation. Branden advocates that a person must hold self-esteem as her “highest value and most exalted concern”. If the person is to draw “closer to the sunlight reality of the human potential”, self-esteem must be understood as “the supreme expression of selfishness and self-assertiveness”. Self-esteem, on Branden’s account is to “set the context for the entire therapeutic enterprise.”

Lovejoy 1961, p. 179


Ibid., p. 88.

Adam Smith. 1976, p. 309.


There are those who think we all live in a narcissistic age or that narcissism is the central dysfunction of our age, Donald Capps (1993) and Christopher Lasch. 1979, The culture of narcissism: American Life in an age of diminishing Expectation. New York: Warner. But this is too strong a proposition, I think. While I want to claim we all have what I will term, here and now, a fundamental and shameful limitation, this ontological fact about being human does not reduce to narcissism.


Ibid., p. 217.
At least one notable exception is Branden’s distinction between self-esteem and pride. He claims that self-esteem is the “I can” and pride is the “I have”. Branden 2001, p. 125. As I shall soon show this is a distinction that creates problems for both the concept of pride and for self-esteem.


Adam Smith. 1976, p 146, and 182. I think that those admired, in the main, display humility rather than go about making an open exhibition of their brilliance. This is a theme I return to and develop in Chapter Eight.

There are those, of course, who can, through the magnitude of their excellence, carry off an acceptable conceit. There are also others who play on the ‘unwritten’ rule which forbids the display of too much pride by exaggerating their show of pride to the point where it becomes a delightful self-mockery of their own pretensions. The better comedians do this well.

The role of self-respect in an overall sense of self-worth will be explained in greater detail in a later chapter, for now it is sufficient to say that self-respect is a person’s awareness of and guard against her vulnerability to shame. On appropriate pride, Smith, 1976, says “The man who neither ascribes to himself, nor wishes that other people should ascribe to him, any other merit besides that which really belongs to him, fears no humiliation, dreads no detection”. p. 253.


I have made the claim that we are beings who cannot self-admire. The task for this chapter is to explain just why we cannot self-admire and how this has major ramifications for self-esteem. I will examine what it means to be in a state of admiration and to see if what we discover about admiration fits with our idea of a healthy pride. When we are asked, “what is admiration?”, the first thing that strikes us as odd is that unlike almost every other term denoting something about the self - like self-respect, self-regard, etc. - we are confronted with a term that is rarely found in either common language or in text books. This means that we must begin an examination of admiration with what transpires in our admiration of others rather than in any self-reflection. The difficulty we have in reflecting on how we might self-admire, does not, in itself, preclude the possibility of self-admiration, but it alerts us to the possibility of not being able to self-admire. If it was common practice among self-conscious beings like ourselves that we did self-admire we would surely have found a term to describe such a phenomenon and it would be in common everyday usage. By referring to our experiences of admiration for others we can at least recognise particular features of the experience that qualify it as admiration rather than respect. It is to our admiration of others - admiration of their qualities, skills and excellences - that we must turn, to make clear the impossibility of self-admiration. If the argument holds good and self-esteem cannot include self-admiration, then we will have grounds to doubt the strength or stability often attributed to self-esteem.

Perhaps the first thing to notice about our admiration of others is that it can be evoked without any necessary moral approval of a person’s behaviour. So long as there has been some manifestation of a skill or excellence that we accept as valuable, we can admire this skill or excellence without approving of the way in which it has been put to use. As
Lovejoy says, “exceptional courage, strength of will, intellectual power, may evoke admiration independently of any moral approbation of the behavior in which they are manifest.”¹ This is to say that the response of admiration “may be out of accord with the ordinary moral criteria which the same individual accepts.”² There are skills that evoke our admiration even when these skills have been employed for activities which we do not find morally acceptable. This is why we can admire the brazen criminal as well as the ‘Great Artist’. This fact about admiration might seem to render it unreliable as a guide to ethics, but this would be too hasty a conclusion, for what we admire may reveal something about what lies at the core of our humanity which no account of ethics can ignore. I am suggesting that in our experiences of admiration, much is revealed about what is fundamental to human existence and this impacts upon what we deem to be ethically important. It is in later chapters that the role of admiration in morality will become clearer. Presently, it is the fact that we can admire skills and qualities in others independently of the use to which they have been put that is of particular interest, as is the variability in the degree or intensity of our admiration for different qualities in others.

The variability in the degree of admiration indicates that there are some qualities apprehended as more valuable than others. For example, the inspiration that can be derived from listening to a wonderful rendition of one of Bach's Brandenberg Concertos is different from the 'sneaking' admiration that can be felt for a con artist who has 'relieved' a few of the wealthy of their money. The intensity of feeling is not the same, yet we do label our response to both the wonder of Bach’s concerto and the sneaking respect for the con-artist with the same word ‘admiration’. It is important, therefore, to account for why we use the same term to describe both experiences. We use the one and same word ‘admiration’ to describe very different levels of agreement with, approval of, and esteem for others in our interactions with them. The central task of this chapter is to examine and explain these different levels and intensities of admiration.
To assist our understanding of what it means to be in admiration of another, I will utilise the ideas of two theologians, Benjamin Warfield and John Milbank, and the philosophers Martin Heidegger and Sam Keen, all of who have written on the relation between love, wonder and admiration.³ I argue for two claims: that at its highest pitch, admiration is the discovery of something precious in another and that the apprehension of the precious in another engages the admirer and the person admired in an exchange of gift. These two features of the highest degree of admiration explain why self-admiration, to this highest degree of admiration, is simply not possible.

The most basic level of admiration is that which we call sneaking-admiration. This is the sort of response we find ourselves experiencing when we hear of, say, a con-artist who has tricked some millionaire out of some of her wealth. Such sneaking admiration is typically manifest in a smirk or a secret chuckle and there is a reticence about openly expressing it. The reluctance to admit our sneaking admiration may well be because it is mixed with other emotions, some of which we know or fear will attract disapprobation. For instance, it is likely that reactions such as resentment and envy will be experienced along with sneaking admiration. As these reactions are in general understood to typify negative and destructive attitudes, it is unwise to express too much admiration for the con-artist, lest we be seen as taking undue pleasure in the victim’s loss or suffering.

It is important to examine sneaking-admiration and its association with resentment because if it is a matter that sneaking admiration only ever emerges due to resentment against a victim, then we will have to admit that the word admiration is wrongly used in this context or that admiration cannot, in every case, be separated from immorality.⁴ Neither of these possibilities hold good, I suggest, because it is admiration we experience, if only of a lower order, and while sneaking admiration is mixed with other emotions like resentment it can be experienced without the negative implications of resentment. By negative implications I
mean the harmful effects of an embittered attitude toward others and toward life in general. A full account of resentment and its double-sided nature will need to wait, but suffice to say that resentment can be moral, so that sneaking admiration can be based on moral notions such as a sense of justice or moral indignation. The con-artist, we might think, has acted admirably in divesting the wealthy of her ‘ill-gotten’ gain. Sneaking admiration can also be based on the resentment which manifests in bitterness and desire to detract. The most obvious form of this bitter resentment is envy. Here our enjoyment resides, not so much in our admiration for the con-artist we admire but in seeing others whom we envy suffer a loss. Where resentment has led to envy, the level of sneaking admiration is minimal for the focus of attention is on those envied not on the person having outwitted them. Because resentment can be easily misconstrued as envy, even when the resentment is based on the moral notion that the wealthy have got their come-uppance, there is an understandable reticence about making our admiration for the con-artist public. We might be interpreted as being more envious than we actually are. The poetic or divine justice we might find in the con-artist’s activity may well be misconstrued as rationalisations and excuses for envy.

Sneaking admiration is an impure admiration, and while it may be mixed with resentment, either of the moral or bitter kind, there are other emotions and attitudes that can accompany it. For example, Robert C. Roberts speaks of our ability to take “a moral holiday.” We can adopt the perspective of someone whose views we do not accept in the normal course of events. We can adopt another person’s viewpoint without this temporary identification with what another has done, changing our own standards. The context in which this occurs most easily is in humour, where we find ourselves chuckling at something that stands opposed to our moral commitments. Something of this same temporary adoption of another’s moral perspective seems probable in our sneaking admiration of the con-artist. We would not agree that the con-artist’s actions were morally acceptable, but we sneak a little admiration...
of her by momentarily acknowledging that her audaciousness has brought some light heartedness into the world.8

It takes a great deal of bravado and a measure of impertinence to be a con-artist; a level of self-confidence that can overcome a natural fear of being caught and being made an object of ridicule. Some schemes are so poorly thought out or so badly executed, that however much bravado is included in the ‘scheme’, the con-artist can end up looking like a goose. Of course, not all confidence tricksters steal from the wealthy. There are those who rob the poor and helpless. In most cases we simply don't feel any admiration for those who prey on the weak in our society, which indicates there is a limit to what we do admire even when in different circumstances the same bravado and audaciousness will evince from us at least a sneaking admiration.9 We seem able to put caveats upon the type of acts that will elicit and retain our admiration. Some acts of daring are plainly stupid and some are so violent and harmful that we cannot muster any admiration. But take the case of a con-artist who devised a scheme to divest some people of part of their bank savings. He simply went into a bank and wrote out his bank account number on a number of deposit slips that were to be used by depositors that day. By the end of the day’s business the con-man’s bank balance had increased substantially. Depositors simply failed to check their deposit slips properly and ended up depositing their money into the con-man's account. Not only was this an audacious and daring strategy, we are surprised by the simple ingenuity of the plan.

What cannot be overlooked, of course, is that sneaking admiration is only possible where we ourselves have not been harmed in any way. It is a rare individual who after being conned or robbed can feel admiration for the person who has inflicted upon them personal loss or harm. So long as the act exploits someone else or some group of people one does not much like, or upon an institution whose authority and power probably deserve to be challenged, sneaking admiration can bring a wry smile to one’s face. This is about the limit
of sneaking admiration, however, for it does not warm the cockles of our hearts nor inspire us to go out and emulate the criminal's deeds. Still, if we are honest with ourselves, and if only in passing, we do experience in some cases, this lower order form of admiration even when we fully understand the illegality or immorality of a criminal's actions.

While the con-artist’s daring and ingenuity are admirable, it is only where these admirable qualities are put to some greater public good that we can openly express our admiration for the person using them. This is a fuller experience of admiration - when we recognise the value of what another person has done and expressions of praise spring from our lips. The value of the actions resides in the contribution another person has made to the betterment of society as a whole. To give an example: I hear the news that a person has dived off rocks in a very dangerous stretch of water to save a fellow human being who had been swept into the ocean. The admiration I feel for the rescuer is not an admiration associated with any direct benefit to me. I was not drowning. For all I know the person who was drowning could have been a thoroughly unpleasant individual whose death may have been a blessing to us all. The character of the drowning person is irrelevant. I am moved to admire the rescuer because she has willingly put her own life at risk in order to save another's life and this is a good thing for any person to do for any other person when the circumstances call for it.

Because the actions of the rescuer did not impact upon me directly, I think we can attribute this experience of admiration to a sense of public good. For want of a better term, we might simply refer to this as approving-admiration. We value the rescuer's actions because we approve of any action that maintains and advances the public good. And it is not just persons who improve the welfare of human beings whom we admire. Those who work to save animal life or the environment, etc., also elicit approving-admiration from us. Whatever can be seen as adding 'good' to our human existence is subject to this sort of
approving-admiration. We take pleasure in and assurance from such acts, and it accounts, for example, for the generally high esteem we place upon those in the medical profession. The simple label 'doctor' or 'nurse' engenders a sense of admiration because these are professions that are recognised as having contributed significantly to human wellbeing.

This approval rating is advanced every time a new 'procedure' is developed or when the spread of particular disease is arrested. Just recently a specialist within my home city developed a new and effective way to treat severe burns. She saved the lives of burn victims and has offered hope for all future victims. It is difficult not to admire this sort of contribution to the public good. The specialist was rightly honoured in an award ceremony and her persistence and ingenuity is admired and stands as an example for us all.

I may never fall off rocks into the ocean, nor suffer third degree burns, but I do not need to undergo these sorts of events to feel admiration for people who uphold and advance the public good. My admiration for them is firm because I understand myself to be a part of society for whom the advancement of good and wellbeing is vital. I cannot exist alone. I was not present when that person slipped off the rocks into the ocean whirlpool. I am not a trained doctor or a burns specialist. I could not have saved this or these lives nor alleviated suffering in these particular ways. If others rely upon me to advance the public good in these areas they will be disappointed. Therefore, I recognise the need for others to possess skills I do not possess or that I am unable to exercise. They deserve not only my admiration but also my praise. I can openly express my admiration because my praise will receive support from many others who also admire acts of public good and this public support marks a distinction between approving-admiration and sneaking-admiration. I also want the person whom I admire to know of my feelings. This openness is simply not available nor desirable in the case of my sneaking-admiration for the con-artist.
Approving admiration for the public good is not, however, the most exhilarating form of admiration that I can experience. This is because the acts that elicit such admiration do not impact upon me directly. To hear about such bravery is sufficient to feel admiration but had I been the person saved by the rescuer, or had I been badly burnt and my life saved by the specialist, my admiration would, understandably, be of a higher order. It is possible to account for admiration when I have personally benefited from acts of general social value in terms of simple self-interest. While self-interest can explain why my admiration would be greater had I been saved from drowning rather than simply hearing about someone else being rescued, it cannot adequately explain why, as I am about to suggest, the admiration I may have for my life-savers is far less exhilarating than the admiration I am likely to have for those from whom I derive great pleasure; my favourite artists, sport stars, etc.

One simple explanation for the discrepancy in the level of admiration I will feel in these comparative situations is that drowning or suffering from burns is not conducive to feeling the sort of exuberance I experience when in admiration for artists and sport stars, or whoever I most admire. I am in a battle for life. By contrast, standing before a masterpiece in an art gallery or being present at a major golf tournament, for example, provides me with the possibility of experiencing and witnessing something wonderful. I am full of anticipation and expectation. No such excitement accompanies drowning or being burned, and even after being ‘saved’ from drowning, it is gratitude I am likely to experience rather than exuberant admiration. The context is different, and therefore the degree of admiration I experience will differ. This difference in how I feel toward the person who has saved my life and toward the artist or the golfer is of vital importance in our understanding of admiration. As much as the life saving act is of far greater importance in the scheme of things than the excitement derived from viewing a painting or watching a golf shot, my admiration for my life saver is unlikely to be as self-affirming and joyous an experience as the admiration I have for the artist or for Tiger Woods.
Why should this be? Given that my life has been saved it would seem my admiration would be at its highest pitch or greatest intensity for the person saving me. What could be more valuable than life? The answer to why I will not feel the same degree of admiration for my rescuer as I will for my favourite artist resides in the fact that with the latter and not with the former I can be an active participant and co-contributor in the exchange between us. In being saved I am the passive recipient of the other’s gift of life. My inferior position *vis a vis* the other, accounts for why I may have enormous gratitude but less than exuberant admiration for her. It is where I am a co-contributor to the exchange, that is where I bring something to the exchange that is of value to the other, that a higher degree of admiration as well as gratitude emerges. This points to a fact about admiration that will become clearer when the highest form of admiration is discussed later in the chapter; that in admiration there is a sense of indebtedness on the part of the admirer and that this indebtedness has to be discharged in some way. The discharge in admiration typically takes the forms of praise and applause, and is therefore not onerous. There is also a clear sense of indebtedness in feeling gratitude, but the discharge here is more onerous and less self-affirming. There is more appeal in discharging the debt of admiration than discharging the debt of gratitude because one has already brought something of value to the exchange. An admirer brings to the exchange what she already values and finds self-affirming. This feature of admiring what we already value and enjoy marks a different degree of admiration from those things we approve of and from those things for which we have, or ought to have, gratitude.

The issue before us is the difference between approving-admiration and the exhilaration we experience in works of creativity, beauty, dexterity, etc.; in short; some form of excellence from among the “harvest of human genius.” We do not attend an art gallery or The Masters in Georgia with mere gratitude in mind. We come full of hope and expectation of being inspired. We understand that artists do not paint and tennis players do not play in order just to receive just our gratitude. We understand that they paint and play for much
more than this. They do 'their thing' presumably because they love to do it and because success brings rewards besides the praise of their fellows, but as they are participating in activities enjoyed and lauded by many people, it is a natural consequence of their success that they will receive the praise and honour of an admiring public.12

The significant feature of the sort of admiration which we are prepared to express for the artist and the sportsperson, etc., is to a significant degree related to what we ourselves value and approve of ourselves for valuing. When we stand before an absorbing painting or stand affixed as a twenty metre put roles into the hole, all that we thought admirable and worthy to be highly valued is confirmed. We understand the skill required to complete such tasks and we, ourselves, have in some small but important measure contributed to the admiration we feel for the person bringing out into the open something we hoped could be done. It is not a matter that our hope or belief is so robust that we knew that this exact and precise event would take place, rather it is a hope born out of a knowledge that given the right circumstances and sufficient encouragement someone will produce a new and extraordinary act of excellence that we can wonder at and admire. We understand that our commitment to art or to following sport or supporting whatever activity we value, has in some measure provided the possibility for such exciting and exhilarating events to come forth. We do all we can to support and encourage those who have the skill and ingenuity to excite us and we are prepared to admire them when such skill and ingenuity is shown.

Martin Heidegger considered all admiration to include ‘self-affirmation’, where the admirer has “a certain freedom over and against what is admired.”13 When he says that in admiring “there always resides an attitude that knows itself as applying to oneself as much as to the admired”, I think he has it essentially right. There is much to be said for Heidegger’s claim, here, where a certain degree of admiration is at issue. In her admiration of another the admirer affirms her own values. But the form in which self-affirmation occurs varies with
the different degrees of admiration. Heidegger’s idea that self-affirmation means holding
the upper hand is only one particular form in which self-affirmation can take place. Self-
affirmation can occur in another form where the admirer is not, nor believes herself to be,
in a superior position.\textsuperscript{14} So where Heidegger claims there is ‘self-affirmation’ in (all)
admiration, I prefer to use the term \textit{confirming-admiration} to describe this experience an
admirer has of “a certain freedom over and against what is admired”.\textsuperscript{15} I limit this
experience of possessing a control over what one admires to one form of admiration so as
to distinguish it from a higher degree of admiration that, as I shall soon explain, strikes a
person as wondrous and in which self-affirmation takes a different form – a self-
transcending form.

The form that self-affirmation takes in cases where the artist or sportsperson is admired is a
confirmation of one’s own already established values so that the experience of admiration
itself confirms the admirer’s good sense in valuing such things. The most obvious example
of confirming-admiration can be seen where a person attaches herself to the honour
 accorded the artist and sportsman so that she can bathe in a reflected glory. We have all
seen comedy sketches where the art lover is presented as a pretentious snob. The phrase
'pretentious \textit{moi}?' is a common cliche that captures the ridicule we are willing to pour on
those who attempt to take for themselves some of the glory attached to the artist. I am sure
we have all met such people. And sports fans are not immune from this clamour for
reflected glory either. Many have built their own self-image upon the success of a favoured
team or player. A person’s self-image often rises or falls according to their team or player’s
performance. While, at times, this is the stuff of comedy, it must be made clear that this
longing for reflected glory is nothing unusual. It has long been a part of human existence.
We admire someone for having lifted our spirits and for having brought us a share in the
glory. Our critique here is to highlight the difference in forms of admiration rather than any
condemnation of attempts to bathe in reflected glory.
Although we may be content to admire others in either an approving or confirming way, there is another experience of admiration over which we have far less, if in fact any conscious control. There are times when 'out of the blue' we are 'struck' by the wonder of some action or by some personal excellence being exhibited by another. Where, in approving and confirming admiration, we retain some right over who and what we admire and do so according to what we value both in social and personal goods, in these moments when we are struck by the wondrous, our admiration is involuntary and that which we apprehend as valuable comes as a surprise. It exceeds our expectations.

Let me give an example. Many years ago I was in the UK and for the first time in my life, watched the soccer World Cup. I had never seen the game played before but because of my involvement in other football codes I was able to understand the key components of the game and the basic skills required to play it well. Or so I thought. At just the time I had assured myself that I knew what could and could not be done in the game, an event took place that had me gasping in awe. My jaw literally dropped in astonishment. What one particular player did was far and above what could be expected given the limitations imposed upon the players by the nature of the game itself. The player was Pele and he did something so extraordinary that upon seeing it I experienced a wondrous admiration for him that has never waned.16

Doubtless, everyone has their own story to tell of how a particular event aroused in them a wondrous admiration for someone. It is necessary to give this form of admiration a label only in order to distinguish it from the other forms of admiration which differ from it in important respects. The label we attach to it is far less important, however, than an understanding of how it impacts in our lives. Such admiration can be called wondrous, loving admiration or alternatively, admiring love. It will be asked at this point, why, if the experience we are attempting to describe is admiring love, do we bother with calling it a
form of admiration. Surely it is a form of love and only confusion will ensue by describing admiration as love and love as admiration. But this is precisely the ambiguity necessary to begin to grasp the power of admiration. There is a form of love that has relied upon our grasp of what it means to admire in order for its special characteristics to be understood. Just such a word for love which depends substantially on our grasp of what it means to admire is the Greek word *agape*. While there is continuing debate about what constitutes *agape* love, I want to employ two theologians, of different eras, to highlight the close relationship of admiration and love.

I start with the ideas of Benjamin Warfield, a theologian of the Presbyterian stream and a renown scholar of the period between the two world wars. Warfield produces an analysis of the different Greek words used to express the idea of love commonly in use in the period of the construction of the New Testament.\(^1\) In a paper called “*The Terminology of Love in the New Testament*”, Warfield explains the various uses of the Greek words for love, including the one for friendship, another for the natural affection family members feel for one another, yet another other for the passion within love and the one that emerged as the most ideal for new testament writers to express the idea of God’s love for humanity.\(^2\)

While the word *agape* was not a word in common use in classical Greek literature, where it was employed, according to Warfield - as in some of the writings of Homer and Euripides - it held a 'distinctive' place. It could not fail, he says, to suggest to every Greek ear the ideas of “astonishment, wonder, admiration, approbation”. It derives its impulse or distinctive quality from “the apprehension of preciousness rather than the pleasantness of its object.”\(^3\) *Agape* was the term used to convey the apprehension of something valuable rather than of something merely pleasing. Warfield finds 'good psychology' in the distinction a fellow theologian makes between the “two things that create love...perfection and usefulness, to which answer on our part, first, admiration and secondly desire; and both...
these are centred in love.”20 We need not be concerned with just how 'good' this psychology actually is to note that the term *agape* is beginning to sound as if it is an expression of love that has as its base admiration and wonder. It is a word created to capture the sense of wonder the Greeks of Homer's time thought lay in the apprehension of something precious in an object, which was usually, but not exclusively, a person.21

More importantly, Warfield takes issue with the notion, common among his fellow theologians, that *agape* was adopted and employed by new testament writers as the ideal expression of the love between God and humanity because it was more 'rational' than any other form of love. What was being claimed is that *agape* “holds the qualities of a person in view and gives itself a justification of its inclinations”, as one theologian put it.22 In other words, *agape* was being understood as possessing an ability to “explain why it is we love someone or some object.”23 It was being set apart from the 'involuntary' nature of other forms of love and promoted as the love that can justify itself. Warfield will have nothing of it. *Agape* is just as involuntary as the love of the pleasing or the love of delight. That there is something precious apprehended in an object, does not mean there is a rationalistic ground for apprehending it so. It is easy enough after the event to justify why I have experienced *agape* love but this rationalising does not occur at the instinctive moment I am enthralled in the experience itself, for it rises in the heart as involuntarily as any form of love. As Warfield says,

> the perception of those qualities constituting the object admirable is an act the same in kind as the perception of those qualities constituting it agreeable; and the reaction of the subject in the emotion of love is an act of the same nature in both cases.24

The reaction we experience and express as *agape* love, says Warfield, is just as instinctive and just as immediate as is our experience in any form of love. It admits only of rational justification after the event. The involuntary nature of the agape-experience is a very important concept to grasp in our understanding of the higher order admiration we are
scrutinising. There is no ground to account for the agape-experience in terms of a rational consideration operating through acts of reflection. What is different about the agape-experience, on Warfield’s account, is the apprehension in an object of something precious, something to be highly valued. Indeed, as he shows in a study of the writings of Xenophon, it is the apprehension of something that is prized; and in the Jewish tradition, something to be admired.25 So we have two features of the agape-experience, one, that it is involuntary and secondly, that it is the apprehension of something precious.

What benefit to our understanding of admiration has been gained by our brief introductory study of the meaning of the word *agape*? We set out to examine the relationship between admiration and love, and there is evidence that *agape* love is best understood as admiring love. Admiring love is the apprehension of value in an object which is informed by a feeling of its preciousness, as Warfield puts it, so that *agape* “moves in a region closely akin to that of esteeming, valuing, prizing.”26 In short: the English word ‘admiration’ is used to explain much of what the Greek term *agape* was intended to convey about love. It is therefore not without justification that we can begin to understand the higher order admiration as *agape* love or the agape-experience. If we do so, a clearer distinction between the sorts of admiration we have so far discussed – sneaking, affirming and confirming - and now the highest order admiration, becomes a little clearer. As it stands, however, we have not yet fully distinguished this most pure admiration from its lesser forms. To do this I want to borrow from some of the ideas of another theologian - John Milbank.

The work from which I make use of Milbank’s ideas is an article in response to Derrida’s notion of gift.27 Derrida had claimed that ‘gift’ is indeed the ethical impulse, such that what we, as ethical beings desire most is to be able to give without thought of reward or recompense.28 The problem is that even in the thought of giving, let alone the actual act of
giving; the intended gratuitousness in the idea of giving is annulled. We cannot give gift - pure gift - because there is already a reward attached to the idea of giving and this idea of reward cancels out gift. Milbank takes issue with Derrida and proposes not the idea of pure gift but of a purified gift-exchange, within which there is gift. He argues that *agape* is this purified gift-exchange and he employs the notion in order to transcend or move beyond the 'immanentist' view of Derrida to a rigorous defence of trinitarianism. Milbank's reaffirmation of trinitarianism in terms of *agape* or the purified gift-exchange between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is well beyond the scope of our interest in admiration. It is the association of *agape* to gift-exchange which I want to bring into focus.

Derrida's notion is that pure gift is an impossibility and yet we cannot elide the human desire to give, or cease believing that we should be able to give. The notion of gift, here, is of unilateral giving. Gift cannot be, for acknowledgment of the gift cancels the gift by rewarding the giver with the knowledge that he is the giver. The essential point for Derrida is that if there is to be a pure gift it must be a gift without obligation or duty; it must be different from and without any hint of exchange. For Milbank, however, what can be given can only be given within an already existing context of gift-exchange. In the exchange between persons, there is the possibility of gift because there is the ground of gift-exchange already present. It is not a matter of one person desiring to impart pure gift but of two or more people wanting to share in gifts within an exchange. This idea that gift and giving emerge within the interplay of an exchange is, I suggest, indicative of the experience of highest order admiration. This is to say that to understand what transpires in admiration we need to grasp the notion of gift-exchange.

In most societies today the ancient practices inhering in gift-exchange have been largely displaced by contract. The parties to a contract are assured of their benefits of the exchange through written conditions: 'The purchaser shall …', and 'the vendor will …', etc. In archaic
societies, however, gift exchange consisted in at least these following three components – an obligation to give, an obligation to receive and an obligation to give back. And the term obligation is not too strong here because the whole fabric of these societies was founded on the successful compliance to these conditions.32 There was, (and still is in some societies), enormous power attached to giving. It brought the recipient under the giver’s power, for the recipient was immediately indebted to the giver and the only way to discharge this debt was to return-gift. The return-gift was not to give back what one had received, this would amount to an insult because it is a refusal to accept the gift as gift. The return-gift had to be different and appropriate to the person's circumstances. We are acutely aware of this appropriateness and value even today. We do not give a blind person tickets to a sky-show or concert tickets to a recital of Mozart to someone who is deaf. Nor do we normally spend thousands in return for having received a cup of sugar. To receive a gift, then, is to also accept a responsibility to return-gift, and return it as something different and appropriate. In this way, a particular exchange of gifts is brought to a satisfactory completion.

While gift-exchange is most readily recognised in terms of material goods, it was also relevant in issues of honour and prestige.33 Those in archaic societies who gave out of a plenitude were honoured as 'big men', but the more they gave the greater the sense of obligation upon the recipient to return gift in some way. Where this return was not possible by way of material goods, it spilt over into matters of loyalty and obedience. Something had to be returned as these gifts were thought to be imbued with the persona of the giver and inalienable from him.34 When a 'big man' gives three goats to a fellow tribesman he is expecting a return-gift of some sort. It might be gold, or his fellow's daughter as a wife, access to water, or loyalty in times of war, etc. The important thing is that he expects to receive some appropriate gift in return for his gift. This is to say that there is no pure gift - no outright gratuitous act. There is gift only within the context of gift-exchange. We are playing here with the idea of gift or gift-in-exchange in a way that can be interpreted as a
departure from “the contemporary understanding of gift in a strictly formalist and unilateral manner as not expecting a return, and as indifferent to its own content.”35 We like to contrast gift with contract and accredit to the former the possibility of unilateral action and to the latter multilateral action, but gift-exchange stands between the two, or more precisely, outside either the notion of pure gift or contractual obligation.

All of this is played out in a conscious awareness of the conditions that make possible the imparting of gift. No one is fooled into thinking there is pure gift, says Milbank, for all exchange, even under the name gift, such as 'here is a gift for you', is known to be laden with obligation. A pleasant obligation it may be in many cases, for the exchanges of gifts are a means to distribute wealth and accumulate honour and prestige, strengthen relations and generally act as a social bond. This sense of obligation, therefore, is not the sort of obligation we understand in legalistic terms. It is a mixture of personal and social obligation for the preservation of a society. We know, even today, that in receiving a gift, we are immediately under an obligation to return-gift. If the gift we have received is valued then we will place great care in the quality of the return-gift. If the gift so called is of little value we have a choice - to either return something of approximate value or be more generous. Adopting the latter option runs the risk of outdoing the original giver, and thereby devaluing her original gift and risking her disapprobation.

How does this help us to understand admiration? I consider much of the 'structure' in place in gift-exchange - the obligations to give, receive and give back –can be said to be present in the moment we are struck by admiration as the agape-experience. The admired person is the gift giver and the admiring person is the receiver who must return-gift in some appropriate way. This is to say that within the conditions of an exchange, the admirer is immediately aware of her debt for having received gift from another and, therefore, she is responsible to respond and return-gift in an appropriate manner. The most appropriate
manner is to issue praise or to clap, applaud, congratulate, etc. These responses are sufficient for acts of social value or for brilliant acts that confirm one’s own values; in short, for approving and confirming admiration. But such responses are inadequate and somehow not fully appropriate in certain contexts. Recall that a distinctive feature of the agape-experience was the apprehension of something precious in another. This apprehension can now be described as the reception of the gift of something precious in another. Where one has been struck by the preciousness of some quality in a person that strikes one as worthy to be prized, to simply applaud her will not be a sufficient return-of-gift. Receiving as gift that which is precious in another means that there is always a residue of indebtedness which accompanies the highest admiration. The praise, applause and congratulations can only partly dispel the indebtedness. There is much more that needs to be returned if the obligation of receiving gift is to be met.

When in admiration of another, the obligation to return-gift is never experienced as a burden but as a natural blessing. The difficulty, however, resides in the fact that the admirer knows she cannot return-gift beyond what is possible to return, and all that is typically accepted as return-gift seems inadequate. Praise and applause are not adequate return-of-gift; so what is the admirer to do? One course of action is to take inspiration from the experience and desire to emulate the other. Because the return-gift has to be different to the gift, there is a need for creativity in the emulation. To be admired for the same reason another is admired is not as gratifying as being admired for one’s own excellence, so that the inspiration will be to emulate in one’s own unique way that which one admired in another. To provide a full account of the relation between admiration and emulation, here and now, would be to divert attention away from the central issue under discussion, but it is an important relation that will be taken up for further examination in Chapter Seven.
It must be noted that the line between confirming admiration and the agape-experience of high admiration is often blurred. I may admire a director who has created a challenging interpretation of Shakespeare's Macbeth, or a conductor who has led a stirring rendition of my favourite Mozart symphony, essentially because I already value these works and carry my love for them with me to the performance or recital; but under the right conditions I can also find these interpretations and renditions wonderfully inspiring and invigorating because I have never expected to hear or see what my senses are presenting to me. These are the occasions when the particular instantiation of artistic creativity can strike me as stunning. As much as I enjoy admiring those who confirm my own values, there is a hope in being struck by what may be called the miraculous. To admire only that which will confirm our own values can mean we are unprepared for the miraculous which as Sam Keen illustrates, requires “a willingness to stand in a relaxed receptivity before an object [with] a certain reverence, epistemological humility, and a willingness to participate.” I take Keen to mean by the term epistemological humility, a preparedness to accept that one does not know all there is to know, so that together these attitudes of reverence, humility and willingness, “lie at the heart of contemplation. In contemplation one returns to an object that was given in wonder in order to prolong admiration . . . Out of such admiration grows gratitude and impulse to celebrate, or possibly even to worship.

At the outset of this chapter I proposed that self-admiration was not possible. In light of what has been discovered about admiration of others, particularly higher order admiration, it is now possible to explain why this is so. To be in admiration is to have apprehended as precious, some quality or excellence in a person or object, and in the acceptance of this something as precious, to be engaged in a gift-exchange which requires a return-of-gift. If this is indeed how high admiration is experienced, then, it is not an experience one can have of oneself. The clearest evidence, therefore, that one cannot admire oneself as one can admire others comes through an understanding of the gift-exchange nature of high order
admiration. I cannot be both a gift-bearer and a gift-recipient. I cannot impart a gift and then expect a return-gift and I cannot without lapsing into gross self-delusion think I am indebted to myself for having given to myself a gift. To complete a gift-exchange there need to be two or more people. Experiencing high admiration of oneself is not possible because at issue is an incapacity rather than a mere inability to self-admire. I am confronted not with just an inability to self-admire, which with diligence could become a personal skill, but with the utter impossibility of ever self-admiring because I cannot be both a precious bearer of gift and the recipient of this gift. This incapacity has major ramifications for how I will establish my sense of self-worth and how I will relate to others.

It is here that the distinction between *pride-in-self-esteem* and *pride-of-self-worth* I outlined in Chapter Two can be most clearly seen. Where for those whose pride is founded on the various forms of self-affirmation or sources of self-worth, the quality or excellence at issue can only be thought or imagined as worthy of admiration. Proper pride or the pride-of-self-worth is the pleasure derived from reflecting on one’s worthiness to be admired. The pleasure derived from such a reflection does not carry the same ‘affect’ as the feeling one has when in admiration. The affect of admiration is not brought on by self-reflection or rational justification; it is as Lovejoy says, a “spontaneous, essentially aesthetic experience”, brought on, we can add, by the surprising and wondrous apprehension of something precious. The self-affirmation in admiring another resides in the new creation that emerges in the gift-exchange. An admirer becomes a different self, so to speak, in and after the exchange than the person or self who entered it.

Where pride is based on a full sense of self-worth, self-admiration is understood to be an impossibility, but the notion retains an allure which is difficult to dismiss out of hand, so that the awareness of a moment of self-glorying induces in many people a sense of embarrassment. This is to say that there is a sense of mild shame (embarrassment)
associated with moment of proper or appropriate pride, and this accounts for shows of modesty. It is at this point, that Heidegger’s idea of the ‘truly noble person’ taking offence at being admired takes on special relevance.⁴² Heidegger’s claim refers to where a person is being admired by others, but I suggest the idea makes better sense when applied to one’s own thought about, and the temptation to believe in, the possibility of self-admiration. Such thoughts threaten to bring offence to oneself. The noble person, or more simply the person of a robust self-worth, feels a sense of shame in even thinking self-admiration a possibility, but she cannot help being enticed by such a possibility, and the realisation of her susceptibility to such an enticing idea is sufficient cause for embarrassment.

A further point I made in the preceding chapter was that to have a healthy or proper self-esteem it is necessary to experience pride. Self-esteem is reliant upon pride, and pride sustains self-esteem. If, however, pride cannot include self-admiration, then self-esteem cannot be founded on or sustained by admiration of oneself. We cannot treat ourselves as an object of high esteem as we do others. How then is self-esteem founded, if not upon self-admiration? Without the capacity to self-admire, to be able to esteem oneself requires justifications – and these can come only from a sure sense of self-worth not from any pretence of self-admiration. A healthy self-esteem ultimately depends upon moments of self-affirmation, in pride, joy and in the self-assurance of self-respect.

It is important to reiterate that we are not without the means of seeing ourselves worthy of admiration. Proper pride, the pride-of-self-worth, depends on thinking of ourselves in this way. The difference resides in thinking or imagining ourselves as fit objects for admiration rather than pretending that we are experiencing the same ‘affect’ as when we are in admiration of others. Pride, even healthy pride, and all forms of self-affirmation, fall well short of high admiration, and the person with a healthy sense of pride will feel slightly ashamed that the thought of self-admiring had crossed her mind. This is particularly evident
when a person is being admired and the pride she experiences in the gift-exchange seems slightly improper given that there is another person engaged in the exchange and that, to a degree, this other person has contributed to her own feelings of pride.

This means that the incapacity to self-admire de-stabilises pride-in-self-esteem. In place of the self-affirmation that emerges in admiration of others and in thinking oneself worthy of admiration, there is, in pride-in-self-esteem, the pretentious belief in the possibility of self-admiration. One is self-affirmed when in admiration for others through either a confirmation of one’s own values or in being an inspired participant in a gift-exchange. A self-affirmation based on the pride-of-self-worth comes through the approbation of others, and, as I will discuss in detail in Chapter Five, through being of worth to others as their admirer as well as possessing self-respect. In contrast, pride-in-self-esteem is a self-affirmation isolated from these other sources of self-worth.

The form in which self-affirmation takes place in pride-in-self-esteem is therefore permanently contingent upon being able to convince oneself that one has an entitlement to feel pride, or more precisely, because this is a rational justification for primitive egoism, the right to label whatever self-affirming pleasure one experiences as pride. A full argument will have to wait for later chapters, but at the deepest level, I would suggest, the anxiety present in the self-affirmation founded on pride-in-self-esteem discloses an ever present fear about being exposed as shameful. To avoid, or to alleviate or dissipate the gnawing effects of this shame based anxiety, relief is at hand by believing oneself to be in a state of self-admiration. This explains the narcissist’s view of herself as a super-achiever and also why her presumptuous self-assertion is so often accompanied by an inordinate desire, or outright craving, for admiration. However much the narcissist wants her pride-in-self-esteem to be the proof of her self-worth, it fails all too frequently to provide this assurance because it is but one form of self-affirmation. In isolation from other sources of
self-worth, such pride is deprived of the sort of justification that accompanies the pride-of-self-worth.

To conclude this chapter, I think it can be said that the incapacity to self-admire reveals a fundamental disgrace. To be incapable of self-admiration means that we are limited in how we can see ourselves. This would not be such a problem but for the fact that we admire others and know what enjoyment and delight is derived from admiring. We also experience the pleasure of being admired and have pride in attracting the admiration of others. Yet in this array of pleasures there is one we are denied. Herein lies the shame: that we have to live with a view and understanding of ourselves different from and comparatively inferior to how we would like to be able to see ourselves. This is to say that shame inheres in not being able to self-admire and even among the noble or virtuous - those with a robust sense of their own worth - this can create difficulties in relationships and interactions with others. The nature of these difficulties is explored in Chapters Four and Six.
ENDNOTES

1 Lovejoy, 1961, p.94
2 Ibid.
4 This is the line of argument used by Michael Slote, 1983. Goods and Virtues. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Time does not permit a discussion of Slote’s commonsense virtue; suffice to say I am unconvinced by his main argument about self-regarding virtues possessing equal status with other-regarding virtues. My reasons for disagreeing with Slote on this point should become clear toward the end of the thesis, and I shall comment on it in Chapter Eight.
6 This brings to light the phenomenon of envy and the relation between resentment and envy; a topic which is taken up in some detail in both Chapters Seven and Eight.
8 It is typical to think of con-artists as male, but in keeping with all else written in the thesis, I’ve used feminine pronouns. It must be noted, of course, that many con-artist’s are in fact women, as the movie Dirty Rotten Scoundrels illustrates, with great humour.
9 I am thinking, here, of the spy or intelligence officer whose deception often requires the same skills of daring and audaciousness.
10 On gratitude, Smith 1976, p. 68, says, “[t]ill we have recompensed him, till we ourselves have been instrumental in promoting his happiness, we feel ourselves still loaded with that debt which his past services have laid upon us”. Terrance McConnell, in his book Gratitude discusses this very problem in relation to expectations of gratitude. He takes issue with Gilbert Meilander’s account of ‘gift’ which can be summarised as gift freely given with no intention of ‘binding’ someone to a return. McConnell thinks otherwise, but, ‘even if . . . the benefactor . . . recognises that her beneficiary will incur a debt of gratitude, it does not follow that the purpose, intent, or aim for which she undertook the act was to create such a debt’. See Terrance McConnell, 1993. Gratitude. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. p. 25, and Gilbert Meilander. 1984. The Theory and Practice of Virtue. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press. p. 164.
12 This is to say that the ‘goods’ are internal to the practice and do not depend on external factors. There is intrinsic value in these activities; a point highlighted by Alasdair MacIntyre 1981. After Virtue: A study in moral theory. London: Duckworth.
14 Heidegger goes so far as to say that all admiration is self-referential, fundamentally arrogant and patronising. Ibid., p.143. In his view the admirer holds the superior position so that for the “truly noble person . . . every admiration is an offence.” This interpretation seems at odds with other statements he makes that “within its proper limits, admiration is a necessity” and “without admiration, what would become of the ski jumper or a race driver, a boxer or actor.” Ibid. I shall leave the reader to consider the level of coherence in Heidegger’s argument on this point.
15 Ibid.
16 To those who know little about soccer the following will not seem all that impressive, but to those who follow soccer it will resonate with their own love of the game. The game had been the usual stalemate with both defences on top and the ball mostly just being played around in midfield. Pele had the ball at his feet just
inside his own half. He dribbled the ball for a few metres and then suddenly and totally against the prevailing 'rhythm' of the game, launched the ball toward the goal some 50 metres away. I was stunned by the audacity of the act - who would even think of doing such a thing in a World Cup! My amazement was completed a second later when the ball flew toward goal and tipped the crossbar before deflecting into the crowd. Pele had attempted something that I had never even considered possible - to score a goal from inside your own half. Pele's actions were not just totally unexpected - at least by me at that time - they were also bordering on the sublimely ridiculous. He was willing to run the risk of being ridiculed. Imagine if his kick had sailed harmlessly into the crowd or dribbled off his foot just a few metres away. He would have received the hoots and howls of the crowd. So a part of my admiration for him was due to the fact that he was prepared to take a risk. In all, we are returned to the element of surprise, ingenuity and risk of ridicule that we began with in our examination of sneaking admiration. Along similar lines, Smith 1976, p. 20, says that “approbation heightened by wonder and surprise constitutes the sentiment which is properly called admiration”.

18 These distinctions follow the Aristotelian path of philia, storge, eros. Warfield 1988. pp. 529,530. On agape as the most suitable word to describe God’s love for humanity, see pp. 551, 555.
19 Ibid., p. 538
20 Ibid., pp 539-540
21 This, as my argument aims to show, means that the concept of agape has relevance in a secular understanding of love. On this point, I am addressing the concern Robert C. Solomon voiced when he says, that because agape has been characterised as a selfless giving, it “has been idealised to the point where it becomes an attitude possible only to God, thus rendering it, virtually inapplicable to our human fellow-feelings”. Robert C. Solomon, “The Virtues of a Passionate Life: Erotic Love and the “Will to Power”, in MidWest Studies in Philosophy. Vol 13. 1998, p. 105.
22 The theologian referred to is Schmidt. Ibid., p. 540. Warfield also refers to Trench and Cope as other theologians following this line.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., pp. 544, 548.
26 Ibid., p. 545.
31 Milbank, 1995. p 124, 150. See also pp. 131, 132, 144, 146.
32 Milbank points out a fourth condition of gift-exchange was also likely to be present - an obligation to give back more, which he thinks may well have led to the idea of contract. 1995, p. 127.
34 It is unclear, from what I have read, whether or not females could also give and expect a return-of-gift in the sense I have outlined. Because female’s giving probably was not acknowledged institutionally, I have followed others who have written on archaic societies in their use of the male pronoun.
36 Oxford English Dictionary. The Latin term for admiration is admirari meaning ‘to point to a miracle’.
37 Sam Keen 1969, p. 35.
38 Ibid. There is a sense of equality in the experience of high admiration regardless of the gulf between the achievements of the admired person and the admirer. The equality is clearly not in the level of achievement but in the equal enjoyment both or all parties experience in the gift-exchange and in their contributions to the exchange. It is as if all the participants understand that they are present in a mode of existence which transcends anything they have as individuals brought to the exchange; that they have
been elevated above the ordinariness of everyday life and that they are experiencing something special in human relationship. I am in general agreement with the social interactionists on this point; that we seem able to “effortlessly co-ordinate our actions with others to create a new ‘realm’ wherein ‘this almost magical, unselconscious, effortless mode is for us primary and the other more cognitive mode is secondary and derived from it.” John Shotter 1980. “Men the Magicians: The Duality of Social Being and the Structure of Moral Worlds.”, in Models of Man ed. Antony.J. Chapman & Dylan M Jones. Leicester: The British Psychological Society. p. 14.

39 Lovejoy 1961, p. 94.

40 The concept of different selves is not germane to an understanding of admiration as gift-exchange, but “a discontinuous succession of self phases”, as Jennifer Radden, calls attention to the fact that “[o]ur heroes, whose lives we hold up for praise and emulation, include . . . those who have striven after a single goal and those whose lives - ruptured and divided by contrasting themes and projects - reflect a discontinuous succession of self phases.” As Radden describes it, “ideological conversions of various kinds, and radical changes of goal and interruptions of continuity that such conversions imply, are admired in their finest flowering. Moments occasioning radical character change, such as Augustine’s conversion, stand at the center of our celebration of individualistic agency.” Such conversions and radical character change, I am claiming, very often take place in gift-exchange. Jennifer Radden. 1996. Divided Minds and Successive Selves. Cambridge, Massachusetts, A Bradford Book, MIT Press, p. 197.

41 Lovejoy claims there is an element of humility in receiving esteem from others. There is, he says “an implicit recognition of the limitation of our own competence as judges of values and of ourselves”. Lovejoy, 1961, p. 235. I, too, think that humility and pride are not mutually exclusive, and I argue this point in Chapter Eight.

Chapter Four: Concealment and Shame

We have seen how Deigh’s disagreement with the Rawlsian view of worth was based primarily on the failure of this view to account for acts of concealment in shame. In this chapter I want to examine the notion of concealment and see if it is indeed, as Deigh thinks, a crucial component in our the experience of shame and how, if at all, this impacts upon our understanding of self-worth. In the opening chapter, I also canvassed and rejected the idea that a veneer of high self-esteem covering an actual state of low self-esteem could explain aggression. But perhaps this idea was too quickly dismissed, and perhaps there is a connection between concealment, shame and a veneer of self-esteem. As Branden states, “[t]o the extent that men lack self-esteem, they feel driven to fake it to create the illusion of self-esteem”, and in doing so, they condemn themselves “to chronic psychological fraud - moved by the desperate sense that to face the universe without self-esteem is to stand naked, disarmed, delivered to destruction.”¹ There is a depth to these words that Branden himself seems to gloss over in his promotion of an ‘authentic’ self-esteem. The illusion of self-esteem might well be more prevalent than Branden himself would like to admit; for who among us does not fake it when it suits us to do so? If standing naked and disarmed is indicative of feelings of shame then it might be considered good sense to fake self-esteem if it helps us to avoid the unpleasant and unwelcome feelings of shame. The possibility here is that perhaps not all the illusions we create are tantamount to outright fraud or deception. There may be instrumental value in covering shame.

Allport, too, as we may recall from Chapter One, reminds us that there is,

not just in the crudest forms of self-esteem, a great super-structure of masquerade built up in every life. All in the interests of self-esteem one may cover one’s true emotions, put on a front, and at a considerable cost avoid exposing one’s weaknesses. The persona that develops protects one from unwelcome narcissistic wounds . . . What is even more spectacular, likewise in the interest of self-esteem, is the capacity men have for deceiving themselves.²
For Allport, we have a masquerade built upon weaknesses we do not want exposed, and also in the interests of self-esteem, a covering for unwelcome wounds. Allport’s insights here suggest that covering up and covering over, are two sides of concealment; one that amounts to a refusal to acknowledge something about ourselves that, however shameful it might be, ought to be acknowledged, and the other, to cover over something that does not deserve to be exposed for if it were to be fully exposed, shame will be needlessly increased. Where Branden is suggesting that the ‘illusion’ of self-esteem conceals a lack of a genuine self-esteem, Allport is claiming that in the interests of self-esteem, there is both a concealment of weaknesses which can lead to outright self-deception and a covering for unwelcome wounds. These two sides of concealment, that it amounts to acts of deception and of self-protection, need to be better understood if we are to grasp the connections between self-esteem and shame.

In this chapter, therefore, I will explore the various acts of concealment and the methods employed to conceal as they occur in everyday events before moving on to an account of shame experiences. I think it can be shown that both the negative and positive sides of concealment have a direct relation to experiences of shame, and reveal that what lies at the core of shame, and that which we most want to keep concealed, is our incapacity to self-admire. Throughout the preceding chapters I have suggested that our incapacity to self-admire is the root cause of our vulnerable to feelings of shame. To assist in making this claim as plausible as possible I will return to the accounts of the narcissist and perfectionist discussed in the first chapter, and interpret an important account of failure provide by William Desmond in a way that I believe makes better sense of his insights into how we must give up an “untenable way of being.”

It may be that the desire for concealment runs far deeper than attempts to fake self-esteem. Annette Baier, for example, claims that “[t]ruth, let alone the ‘whole truth’ is something we
rarely want told to us.” Baier is interested in the virtue of truth telling and in the context of Kant’s famous refusal to condone any lies, she asks whether honest candour is wise or even possible. For Kant, our own good sense, backed by the will of Providence, directs us to cultivate “reserve and concealment . . . that the defects of which we are full should not be too obvious.” Reserve and reticence, it seems, are our only defences against mockery and censure. Better for a man to be “alone with his thoughts, as in a prison”, says Kant, than place himself “in a friend’s hand completely, to tell him all the secrets that might detract from [his] welfare if he became our enemy and spread them abroad.” Baier considers that what Kant is advocating is not altogether natural to us, and that “[s]hame, fear of mockery and hurt, and a wish to retain respect are what makes us want to shut ourselves away from others”

Of special interest to Baier, are Kant’s comments about women being talkative because of training infants in their special charge. She explores the possibility that children learn from their mothers “the arts of speech”, among which is the art of misleading people. “If loquacious women are the ones who transmit the arts of speech, then in all honesty we should add guile to loquaciousness as imitable attributes of those entrusted with transmitting them.” This is to say that “speech enormously increases our ability to mislead others, at least for a while. One’s ability to mislead is coextensive with our ability to pretend, to put on a convincing show.” This leads Baier to say that

[w]hat speech adds is the ability to pretend to beliefs. Intentions, feelings, and some desires can be acted out without speech, but beliefs can only be indirectly faked before we have speech as the vehicle of pretence. . . . Speech enables us to tell the truth and to lie, to make public and to cover up what, without speech, had to remain only inferred from the version of our intentions and our feelings that was made public. For these latter naturally do tend to get expressed and do not depend upon speech for their communication.

Candour in our emotions, says Baier, comes naturally to us, since reticence and faking take effort and training. “But there is no such thing as natural candour in respect of beliefs that inform our expressed emotion, desires, and intentions . . . Our ‘true beliefs’ do not
automatically distinguish themselves from our self-deceptions and our fantasies in the way in which our true emotions make or made themselves evident. Beliefs require speech for their most direct expression, and unless we express them they remain unexpressed . . .

[expression is the norm of emotions, the exception for beliefs."\textsuperscript{13} Baier is saying that non-verbal expression of emotion is natural, and attempts to deceive others are far less likely to succeed with emotions (desires, intentions) than with beliefs. “Since there is no spontaneous expression of ordinary belief states, there is nothing to suppress, only something to produce, when we try and conceal or deceive others about our matter-of-fact beliefs”.\textsuperscript{14}

Put another way, Baier is explaining that we use words to deceive and conceal our belief states. By contrast, “our natural spontaneous nonlinguistic expressions of emotion do put constraints on our ability to deceive about what we feel.”\textsuperscript{15} The fact is, “lies and silent closure come as naturally to human lips as truths, as far as factual beliefs go . . . Factual truth is no more the telos of speech than fairy tales are.”\textsuperscript{16} This leads Baier to say that, “[t]he truth about one’s beliefs is not so accessible to oneself or to others as one’s current feelings.”\textsuperscript{17}

Baier’s view on how beliefs can be self-deceptive as well as concealed from others is a point I consider vital in our understanding of the form of self-esteem that is isolated from self-worth and which is highly susceptible to pretentious fantasies about the possibility of self-admiration. But there are many other aspects of concealment that need to be explored before concealed beliefs of this pretentious sort can be better understood, in particular those that are closely associated with shame. For Kant, reticence is primarily a self-protective necessity, a protection against public shame and mockery. But from another perspective, such reticence can be seen “as a form of consideration of others, a protection of them from undue embarrassment, boredom, or occasion for pity.”\textsuperscript{18} Concealment, on this account, is
not so much self-protective but sensitive to others’ awkwardness when confronted with exposures of shame in them. What is important to note is that in either case, or in both cases, at the heart of concealment, is shame; either one’s own or that of others who are ‘embarrassed’ by things that do not deserve to be exposed so openly.

The features that Baier brings to our attention have relevance to what Thomas Nagel sees as “a decline in privacy in Western societies, particularly in North America,” where “[t]oo much in the personal conduct of individuals is being made a matter of public censure, either legally or through the force of powerful social norms.” Concealment is a ‘condition of civilization’ for Nagel. He thinks that the public-private boundary must be maintained for it “keeps the public domain free of disruptive material: but it also keeps the private domain free of insupportable controls.” The idea that everything should be out in the open, he says, “is childish and represents a misunderstanding of the mutually protective function of conventions of restraint, which avoid provoking unnecessary conflict.” There is or ought to be a ‘smoothly fitting public surface’ that “protects one from the sense of exposure without having to be in any way dishonest or deceptive, just as clothing does not conceal the fact that one is naked underneath.” Ideally “the social costume shouldn’t be too thick”. There are clear overtones in Nagel’s views of Kant’s concerns over exposing too much of one’s thoughts in shame, and of the wisdom of reticence. “Some forms of reticence have a social function, protecting us from one another. . . Other forms of reticence have a personal function, protecting the inner life from public exposure” so that, “[i]n general its not a bad idea,” he says “to stick with the conventions of reticence and avoid overloading the field of interaction with excess emotional baggage.” For Nagel, as for Kant, a large slice of this reticence consists in remaining silent. If some things are brought out into the open, then, there is a demand for a joint response, and “the manifestation of their reactions would lead to a direct collision, filled with reproaches, counter-reproaches, guilt and defiance, anger, pity, humiliation and shame.”
I have quoted Nagel at some length to highlight the seriousness with which a philosopher of some renown takes the issue of concealment and the twists and turns it can take in relation to covering shame. For Nagel, concealment and shame are important matters, not only as they play out in the public domain, but in everyday personal and social relations. The depth of concern Nagel has in these matters, reveals I would suggest, our own ambivalence over what is appropriate to keep hidden and what ought to be brought to light in our ongoing struggles with shame and its debilitating effects. This ambivalence is clearly evident in Nagel’s perspective on intimate personal relationships and the level of reticence appropriate in personal relations. Where Kant sees freedom in those moments of “selected disclosure in an occasional exchange of sentiments”, Nagel thinks that “selective intimacy permits some interpersonal relations to be open to forms of exposure that are needed for the development of a complete life.” Intimacy plays an important part in the development of an articulate inner life, because it permits one to explore unpublic feelings in something other than solitude and to learn about the comparable feelings of one’s intimates. “Intimacy in its various forms is a partial lifting of the usual veil of reticence.” The intimacy of which Nagel speaks is a constrained intimacy, not quite as stilted as Kant’s notion of selected disclosure, but as Martha Nussbaum rightly points out, “the vulnerability to shame is part of the exposure of self that is involved in intimacy”, and it is unclear whether Nagel considers there is, or ought to be, any similar reticence in intimate personal relationships as he believes there is and ought to be in the public domain. Intimacy requires that one be prepared to be shamed, or as Nussbaum says, “[t]o put oneself in a position, in a personal relationship, in which one would not feel shame at the other person’s critique of one’s character is to insulate oneself from that person in a way that impedes intimacy.” In varying degrees both Kant and Nagel see intimacy as somewhat stilted and perhaps this indicates that feelings of shame cannot be brought under control at any level of intimacy, or at either the private or the public level of interaction. The dynamics of shame operates wherever people encounter one another, whether informally or intimately.
Occasions for shame and for concealment within intimate relationships are issues not taken up by Nagel and to grasp something of the importance of them in intimate and everyday relationships I shall, in the latter part of this chapter, explore some of the examples given by Swann, and the ideas of Golberg.\textsuperscript{32}

Nagel’s argument on concealment is directed at the private-public boundary and this is not an issue I want to discuss at any length in the thesis.\textsuperscript{33} It is the relation of concealment to shame at the personal and interpersonal level in that is central to my thesis and Nagel’s views here reveal something of the difference between knowing something is shameful and covering it over so it is not put on display, and covering it up so that it remains unacknowledged and repressed. I take Nagel’s point to be that while we may be aware of the shameful nature of some private matter, there is a significant difference between the knowing of it and bringing it fully out into the open. Still, if as Baier says, our beliefs are easily concealed behind the artful guile of speech, then the question becomes: what forms of concealment are appropriate in protecting either oneself or others? And which are devious acts of deceit designed to keep secret that which ought to be brought to light? This is to say that what is concealed in shame admits of both the sorts of things that ought not be exposed and the things that, given the right context, need to be exposed. As Nagel puts it, “[c]oncealment includes not only secrecy and deception but also reticence and non-acknowledgment.”\textsuperscript{34}

To be able to distinguish an appropriate covering for what contributes positively to self-worth and protects what ought not to be exposed, from that which ought to be brought to light but is not, we need to turn our attention to the feelings experienced in shame and what these feelings of shame reveal to us. But before the theories and ideas on shame are examined, there are some further points about the dual possibilities of concealment that need to be highlighted. First, David Nyberg provides further evidence of the ambiguous
nature of concealment. He claims that “the human trait for self-deception, for voluntary
blindness, numbness, dull-mindedness, and ignorance is definitely not something we boast
about.”35 It might be thought that concealment here is entirely deceitful and harmful. But
Nyberg goes on to say that “[a]fter all, if we let this cat out of the bag, we would threaten a
finely tuned and expertly regulated social system of selective perception, exposure and
understanding.”36 He uses an analogy of bacteria to make his point about the value of
deception. “It is clearly a mistake”, he says,

to neglect context in evaluating bacteria, only some of which are culprits of disease; others
contribute to the flourishing of life. The same may be true for deception which is not only, or
always, a moral problem. Its moral status is defined in terms of other notions such as hurting,
dignity, fairness, and friendship. It is therefore, a morally complex idea. The tough proposition we
have to consider is how and why to deceive whom about what and for how long.37

Nyberg suggests that many of our deceptions, then, are more like ‘editing the truth’ than
denying it altogether.38 This is a theme to which we shall return again in the examination of
shame.

Another complication over concealment is explained by Capps. In a similar vein to Kant
and Nagel, but with a greater emphasis on personal reticence in direct relation to shame
experiences, Capps rejects the assumption that self-disclosure of shame experiences makes
a person feel better. Most people, he suggests, have for very good reasons, concluded that
“They will never divulge a certain shame experience to another soul, believing, quite
rightly, that such revelation may only make matters worse . . This means that a part of the
self, perhaps a part that is central to who one is, remains isolated, unshareable with any
other.”39 It is virtually impossible, he says, to relate a shame experience as though it were
over and done with, and

so we often modify the story in the retelling, eliminating the details that made the experience a shameful one
in the first place. If something we said caused the shame experience we modify the words, making them just
different enough so that, if this modified version were accurate, we would probably not have experienced any
shame at all. If we did something that caused the original experience of shame, then in the retelling, we
modify the act just enough so that it no longer contains the features of our behaviour that produced the
feelings of shame. . . We modify the story because we want so desperately that the event never happened, or
at least, never happened in the way we experienced it. These modifications may create a useful fiction, an imagined alternative to what really happened, but they also reinforce the sense that shame experiences are ultimately incommunicable, thus increasing our sense of isolation and aloneness in the world.  

Here we can begin to understand the close association between shame and concealment. Many shame experiences are so painful that we want to cover what has been exposed in them and this makes an analysis of shame difficult. There are a number of problems confronting the researcher into shame. As Stephen Pattison comments; “[s]hame is obscured by factors such as human aversion to the phenomenon, linguistic confusion and the assimilation of shame to guilt. The opacity is increased by the wide variety of academic and clinical approaches to shame.” And in the words of Lewis, “[s]hame is like a subatomic particle. One’s knowledge of shame is often limited to the trace that it leaves”. 

The complexities of research into shame are multiplied when we acknowledge that, as Francis Broucek highlights, one may be ashamed of anything which one feels in any way identified - one's ethnic origins, country, religion, family, etc. One may feel shame over failure to be accepted or valued by any person or group whose acceptance is desired. “Any perceived loss of love or respect from a loved one may trigger shame. . . Any loss of control over one's body, mental functions, or emotions may elicit shame. . . When personal boundaries are not respected by others, shame and shame rage are apt to be the result.”

That shame can strike at any time and for a host of reasons is a key point to Deigh’s disagreement with Rawls’s auteur theory of self-worth and this is an issue I take up in Chapter Five when I focus more explicitly on self-worth. But here we are examining shame, and I will now introduce two very different perspectives on the value of shame in what may be called a flourishing human life. One view is that a ‘liability’ or susceptibility to shame is a necessary component of the moral life. Gabriele Taylor sums up this view when she argues for a conceptual link between shame and self-respect, so that we can characterise self-respect by reference to shame: “if someone has self-respect then under
certain specifiable conditions he will be feeling shame. A person has no self-respect if he regards no circumstances as shame-producing. Loss of self-respect and loss of the capacity for feeling shame go hand in hand."\textsuperscript{44} Taylor goes on to say that “[a]voidance of shame is one way of losing self-respect, for it is one way of blurring the values the person is committed to”, and shame is a moral emotion “because it is so closely related to the possession of self-respect and thereby to the agent’s values.”\textsuperscript{45} From a different perspective, shame is seen primarily as debilitating, meaningless, and serving no social or moral purpose. Capps believes that shame experiences bring one face to face with the senselessness and meaninglessness of human experience. Shame does not “fit into any meaningful pattern” and seems “strangely out of place”. It pulls and tears and leaves “embarrassing splotches, defacing what would otherwise be a beautiful work of art.”\textsuperscript{46} Shame experiences are evidence that “one's life has discontinuities, is always on the verge of chaos, is deeply flawed”. In short, Capps says, “shame is not a learning experience, for what has one learned that one can use in the future?”\textsuperscript{47}

How is it possible to reconcile these two contrasting views on shame? One possible explanation is that there are varying degrees of exposure in shame; that when experienced in small manageable doses, shame is a valuable moral and social emotion; while in intense form, there are only feelings of helplessness. Kaufman is one theorist who presents shame as underlying almost all of our personal and social ills and he places it at the centre of his theory and practice. On almost every page of his book, \textit{The Psychology of Shame}, Kaufman includes a commentary on shame and its decisive role in nearly every conceivable disorder or unhealthy state.\textsuperscript{48} “Shame is the principal impediment in all relations . . . it is a sickness within the self.” And yet shame, according to Kaufman is also "central to a sense of identity [and] alerts us to any affront to human dignity . . . [It] is the experiential ground from which conscience and identity spring".\textsuperscript{49} His account is primarily a description of acute and chronic shame where the experience of apparent transparency, so often referred to in regard
to shame, “is created precisely by the sense of exposure inherent to shame. Many shame-based individuals, for example, feel as if they are impostors, only waiting to be unmasked.” Self-exposure is at the heart of shame, or as Pattison puts it, “The person experiencing shame feels that they can suddenly be seen to their disadvantage in a direct and uncomfortable way”. There is an “uncontrollable and unwelcomed exposure”. We have difficulty, not only facing others but of facing ourselves. Self-recognition is simply too hard to bear.

We are confronted, even in these few descriptions of shame feelings, with the paradoxical nature of shame, not only in the different levels of intensity, but also in the co-occurrence of concealment and exposure. The typical way in which we account for both concealment and exposure in shame is to say that acts of concealment are directly related to that which the person in shame thinks has been exposed. There are problems, however, with this neat fit between concealment and exposure. The argument relies on the idea that it is only where one is being exposed will concealment be considered necessary. But we have seen that we are beings who do a very good job of concealing without being prompted to do so by feelings of shame. This poses the question: is there a connection between our everyday acts of concealment and the sort of concealment in moments of shame? I think there is; but before arguing for such a connection, it is necessary to grasp the importance various theorists have attached to the function of shame.

Shame on a functionalist account serves a social purpose. Its key function, according to Pattison, is “to prevent individuals from acting upon impulses that might prove dangerous to the self and anti-social to others.” There are other functions attributed to shame and without listing them individually, it suffices to say that functionalist accounts of shame tend to overlook how shame can ravage and deplete, and leave a person feeling helpless. As Pattison himself reminds us, many of the functions of shame may sound positively useful,
helpful and good. It may appear then, that there is no problem with shame. It is just one particular emotional phenomenon that forms a proper part of the human landscape. What has become of the very sharp, painful and dysfunctional aspects of shame? Are we, in fact, dealing with shame experiences at all in any direct way in these accounts of the functions of shame?54

Furthermore, there is a tendency when focusing on the functions of shame to miss the ambivalence inherent in responses to it. For example, if as Lewis claims, “once having experienced shame, the intensity of aversive experience serves to ensure the thoughts, actions, or feelings that led to shame do not recur,”55 then the issue of the appropriateness of concealment remains unexamined. If shame is seen as serving this sort of function, then the desire to conceal, as a cover-up, converts into the motivation for even more concealment. The point may be reached where a liability or susceptibility to shame is all but lost. It is here that concealment ceases to be self-protective in any positive sense. Instead it becomes a cover-up of motives, actions and beliefs which stand in opposition to a healthy sense of self-worth. The person who conceals too much can become what we term shameless. Given that there are these two distinct views of shame; the one that shame is necessary to live a moral life (Taylor), and the other, that it is utterly destructive and meaningless (Capps), I think it reasonable to take seriously Leon Wurmser’s psychoanalytic explanation of different forms of shame.56

Wurmser makes a distinction between what he calls ‘shame anxiety’ and ‘acute shame’. Acute shame is the very sharp and painful feeling that is marked by a general disengagement with others; covering one’s face, avoiding eye contact, etc. Shame anxiety is “the anticipatory threat of being exposed, humiliated, belittled and rejected. It signals the danger of contemptuous rejection.”57 I will refer to this anxiety as anticipatory shame.** Pointing to another form of shame, Pattison says there is “an important distinction to be
made between acute, reactive shame that occurs in particular situations and chronic shame or shame proneness as a personality or character trait. The former is painful but temporary and limited in its effects which are by no means all negative.” The latter are extended in time and influence; casting “a permanent shadow over a person’s life, character and personality.”

We are introduced here to the possibility that shame may be a multiform phenomenon. If this perspective is adopted, then there is the acute form of shame, chronic shame, shame anxiety and a fourth form of shame which Helen Block Lewis calls bypassed shame. This is where a person experiences “a cognitive awareness without any of the affects of feeling shame”. The person is aware of the cognitive content of shame-connected events, but experiences only a 'wince', 'blow' or jolt'. The acute feeling of shame is absent, but there is “a periphera, non-specific disturbance in awareness, which serves mainly to note the shame potential in the circumstances.” Michael Lewis provides a useful comparison between bypassed shame and felt shame. “In felt shame”, he says, “we ‘own’ the shame, but learn ways of dealing with it. In bypassed shame, people repress the initial experience of shame and focus their attention elsewhere.” These distinctions between forms of shame will figure prominently in subsequent discussion in this thesis.

I began this chapter with a quote from Branden: “To the extent that men lack self-esteem,” he says, “they feel driven to fake it to create the illusion of self-esteem”. It is now time to apply what has come to light about concealment in shame and the different forms in which shame can be experienced to the question of faked or genuine self-esteem. A great deal more will be said in the following chapter, but we have enough to work with to begin an analysis. Firstly, it is important to understand the distinction between acts of concealment that cover-up what should to be brought to light, and acts of concealment that cover-over or cover-for things that do not deserve to be brought into full sight. There are things that need
to be exposed and there are things that need merely to be disclosed. To disclose something is to note it without leaving it uncovered and exposed. The covering for what has been disclosed can be in the form of respect or mercy or some other form of charitable regard for our vulnerability to shame. A case of rape, for example, must include evidence of a person having been violated, but we need not expose all the details of the shameful event. The disclosure of the details is covered by a concern for exposing further shame.

I think there is an important connection between the illusion of self-esteem and what the philosopher William Desmond says about the modern cult of success and its impact upon how we respond to personal failure.63 I think much of what he says is relevant to our understanding of shame because feeling ashamed is very often associated with personal failure. “My failure”, writes Desmond, becomes a cracked mirror that mocks my former proud boldness. . . The ineradicable precariousness, insecurity, contingency of my nature beats on me, beats through me . . . I experience a terrifying, sinking feeling that my existence is not necessary. Not only do my actions 'come to nothing', my very existence 'counts for nothing'.64

These feelings of meaninglessness and emptiness are easily recognisable features of acute shame. In what he describes as the modern cult of success, Desmond highlights the belief that everything is within our own power and that this has resulted in a belief in what he calls an activist selfhood. “Assured of our infinite capacity to resolve problems, we gloss over and disguise forms of failure not amenable to such problem-solving”.65 This modern cult of success is closely related to the promotion of self-esteem as a cure all for personal and social ills that I discussed in Chapter One. The higher the self-esteem the better, on such accounts, and failure to attain this cultural prize becomes the mark of inferiority and activates shame.66
My pride, says Desmond, “counts for only so much, as in a certain sense does my inner self. What is more important is that I go to greet what being gives with joy.”67 This going to greet what is, is not a determination to succeed at all cost, nor a resignation to failure; rather it is a reconciliation. "To be reconciled is not to 'give in' but to 'give up' - give up, that is, an untenable way of being."68 It is not simple surrender, but “a surrendering of oneself to what passes beyond the defective way of being.”69 According to Desmond, we require a new acceptance of the role failure plays in our lives. The failure that induces shame is one where the self has discovered its own limitations and an 'otherness' it cannot master.70 I think the resolve to overcome failure is related to the sorts of projects and life plans we undertake to create self-worth.71 With this in mind, the pretence of self-admiration is one method of resolving a sense of failure. The limitation is assumed to be no more than one’s current inability to self-admire rather than an ontological fact. It is thought to be a temporary failure which can be overcome, either by the adoption of delusions of grandeur and super achievement as exemplified by the narcissist, or by severe self-criticism to raise oneself above others (and their reproaches) as exemplified by the perfectionist.

Both types of psychic disorder are founded on the concealment of beliefs; one about being able to self-admire, the other about the possibility of avoiding shame and the reproaches of others. These beliefs amount to a failure to reconcile to the human incapacity to self-admire and to the shame that inheres in this incapacity. There is a profoundly radical limitation in this incapacity which impacts on our own sense of self-worth and the refusal to reconcile ourselves to it is the refusal to pass “beyond a defective way of being.” This explanation allows us to understand the ambivalence we have toward shame and toward concealment of it as it manifests itself in the various forms of shame affect. In turn, it assists us to grasp the distinction between a self-esteem founded on a refusal to reconcile with shame and a self-worth that incorporates an awareness of, sensitivity to, and respect for the power of ontological shame.
The distinction between *cover-up* and *cover-for* (over) goes some way toward explaining the difference between the concealment of things that ought to be exposed and the hiding of things that, although recognised as shameful, are immediately covered so that they are not fully exposed but are merely disclosed. This explanation was adequate while the precise nature of what we thought appropriate to cover over remained unexplained. In light of the discovery that we are all subject to ontological shame, that is we are all incapable of effecting a self-covering through self-admiration, it is now possible to refine the distinction so that acts of concealment can be seen as either a cover-up and denial of our incapacity to self-admire, or as a covering or cover-for this incapacity. The sort of concealment of which Nagel speaks and so much of our everyday conversation is a cover-for ontological shame. Reticence in speech and action is self- and other-protective for it keeps our shameful ontological limitation under a suitable and necessary cover.

Acts to conceal or cover-up are different. The intent is not to reconcile with ontological shame but to keep secret the pretence of self-admiration and to avoid shame at all cost. It is the pretence of self-admiration that the narcissist attempts to hide from view in feelings of shame. This explains why those whose self-esteem is founded on a belief in the possibility of self-admiration, will displace their feelings of shame onto others as quickly and as forcibly as possible. The pretence must not be exposed. While specific incompetence and imperfections can no longer be concealed, the pretence of self-admiration can be. Or so it is thought by the person who reacts in anger to the mere hint of disconfirmation. Disconfirmation of what the narcissist or egoist believes to be her true value is an affront because it threatens to expose her pride as pretentious, boastful and without substance, and if this affront is permitted to go unchallenged, the person will be compelled to ‘see herself’ as a fraud. The pretence must be hidden from view and there is the deep suspicion that the challenge to this pretence is a denial of a person’s right to feel pride simply because it is a pleasure which has been self-generated. In fact, as is well recognised, the full emotional
The charge of shame is simply not permitted a hold by such a person and the sense of impending shame is sufficient to do what must be done to retain the pretence of one’s entitlement to self admire.

The consequences that flow from the refusal to accept ontological shame can be seen, I argue, in the negative emotions that damage relations, thwart the creativeness of human interaction and lead to psychic disorder. In Chapter Seven the impact of maintaining the pretence in self-admiration is explored in perhaps the most destructive of the emotions, envy. But for now, I will return to the examples of the narcissist and perfectionist, to bring into relief how concealment and shame play out in these personality extremes. In the opening chapter these two extreme personality types were taken as problem cases for the maintenance of any neat division between high and low self-esteem. Now it is in relation to concealment and shame that I want to look once more at these dysfunctional types.

For the perfectionist the key motive is to raise herself above and beyond the “dreaded reproaches of others.” Perfection will grant her a position of safety, a position from which no one can find her wanting. Her normal human imperfection, however, leaves her feeling “vulnerable, endangered, and hyper-concerned that others will attack and devastate [her].” In other words, perfectionism, by its very nature is sought because it will enable a person to conceal from others the sorts of imperfections and failures the perfectionist believes will render her of little or no value in the world. For the perfectionist, therefore, there is an unyielding ambivalence about being admired. The problem, as she sees it, is that the admiration of others can not count for much because others, as the source of this admiration, are imperfect and seem, to her at least, not to be concerned about such shortcomings. Yet she desires admiration and esteem. The only admiration worth having, then, is the admiration of a being who has reached perfection and this she hopes to achieve herself, but is never able to achieve.
There is a certain tragic nobility about the perfectionist challenge to ontological shame. There is also, however, an ambitious defiance of it rather than a reconciliation to it, so that the air of nobility is tainted by the fear of being made an object of reproach. How then do we account for the perfectionist’s constant self-criticism and the bouts of shame she suffers under the weight of this self-criticism? I think it plausible to say that she is working with the notion that ontological shame can be overcome but that there is a deep ambivalence about experiencing shame because it is a revealer of the very deficiencies she wants removed or overcome. As soon as she has addressed any particular imperfection highlighted by shame, she cannot rest on her laurels, more imperfections need to be faced and feelings of shame will reveal them. It is an endless cycle of shame, change, and more shame. The perfectionist lives within this solipsistic rut, never accepting that there is no escape from her inherent shame – from ontological shame.

What might otherwise appear puzzling about the perfectionist’s persistent and severe self-criticism makes good sense when it is understood to be related not just to her desire to rise above the dreaded reproaches of others, but to failures in acting or being thoroughly worthy of her own admiration. The perfectionist is trapped in a world of pleasureless striving and endless failure, and persistent frustration, I would suggest, brings to the fore a resentful defiance against her incapacity to self-admire. Much of the severity of her self-criticism in the face of constant failures, may be attributable to this resentment. In Chapter Seven I shall examine resentment as it relates to a sense of the unfairness of life itself.

The difficulty the perfectionist faces is that she is compelled by the ideal she has set to take full responsibility for her experiences of shame. She will not be able to disown her shame, for in so doing she will have lowered her strict standards. She is most vulnerable, then, to acute and chronic shame, and to a lesser extent to anticipatory shame. What, then, remains concealed when the perfectionist experiences shame? If she is vulnerable to acute shame
and may well become subject to chronic shame, what sense of her self-worth is she supposedly protecting? What the perfectionist wants concealed, I am suggesting, is her vulnerability to shame. We shall return to these questions after exploring more of the different types of shame.

For the narcissist, an impending onset of shame has to be displaced or suppressed. She must disown her feelings of shame because these feelings uncover the pretence of a robust sense of self-worth but which is nothing more than an impoverished pride-in-self-esteem. On various accounts, narcissists are “preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love,” and possess “an almost exhibitionist need for constant attention and admiration.” What she wants concealed is her belief in the possibility to self-admire; a false belief but one that has great allure for her because it epitomises the consummate self-affirmation. Following our examination of the various forms of shame, it can be said that it is bypassed shame at issue here, more than anticipatory shame. This can be said because anticipatory shame is fully felt and owned, so much so that the anxiety attached to it will often lead a person to withdraw herself from the company of others, or at the least become as inconspicuous as possible. In bypassed shame, by contrast, there is a recognition of the cognitive content of the potential for feelings of shame and these approaching ‘affects’ of shame can be averted if displaced quickly onto others.

The narcissist asserts and bullies her way toward the realisation of her belief in self-admiration. She does this by not only demanding the attention of others, which she knows she can achieve as much through fear as admiration, but also through exhibiting a willingness to displace her shame onto those who disconfirm the value she thinks she has in the world. Such disconfirmations are an affront to the narcissist and will be treated as matters of disrespect. Only the opinions of others that confirm the narcissist’s sense of
self-importance can be permitted to stand. Any opinion or judgement that disconfirms or challenges the substance of her pretence will be met by rejection or aggression. The narcissist is thrust into an uncomfortable uncertainty about what to expect from others, for she knows that every person who can confirm her worth can also disconfirm it, and this disconfirmation will expose her fraudulent pretence.

As we saw in Chapter Three, esteem is established and maintained on continuing admiration, so self-esteem based on the belief that one is able and entitled to self-admire, is the sort of self-esteem that results in conceit, arrogance and fanciful ideas of self-importance. In short, the belief in one’s ability and entitlement to self-admire is the source of a false self-esteem. It is a pretence to which the narcissist, and I think it can be said, all of us to some degree and at some time, fall prey. It is not easy to escape the allure of self-admiration, even when one is experiencing justifiable pride, and one reliable signifier of how deeply one has become enamoured with the idea is a lowering susceptibility to shame and attitudes toward others that testify to thoughts of superiority and grandiosity. The temptation to believe in the possibility of self-admiration is a constant temptation, because it seems an attractive means of self-gratifying one’s desire for esteem with all its accompanying benefits, perhaps chiefly among them, the avoidance of reproach from others.

The narcissist and perfectionist differ in the form in which they refuse to be reconciled to ontological shame. The narcissist places such store in believing herself a wonder of the world that a reconciliation is impossible for it would mean diminishment of her own worth as she sees it. The perfectionist struggles with a reconciliation because to accept the impossibility of self-admiration would amount to settling for a normal life of imperfections and failures, and the shame that comes from these inevitable failures. Both resist ontological shame by ignoring it, with the effect that in the pursuit of the chimera of self-
admiration there are serious consequences for their psychic wellbeing. Ontological shame cannot remain concealed or covered-up forever, and it will inevitably find an outlet in emotions which are destructive to both the person herself and to others. The problem is they have to invest enormous psychic resources in either pretence of self-admiration to subdue doubts (narcissist) or in a rigorous and constant self-criticism (perfectionist). The doubts which the narcissist has are made evident in her craving for the admiration of others; for she suspects that her own self-admiration, or rather the pretence of it cannot do all that she thought it could do for her. The perfectionist has no doubt about her vulnerability to feelings of shame, but this is thought to be caused by or related to her inability to be an outstanding and perfect human being, rather than to her simply being human and being subject to ontological shame.

It is not only in these two personality extremes that we can see the manifestations of ontological shame. I will conclude this chapter with some examples from everyday life among ordinary people, who in one way or another display the struggle we all have with our own incapacity to self-admire. The idea here is to show that it is not just among those with some serious psychic disorder that the incapacity to self-admire has undesirable and disturbing effects. For example, some people are afraid to see themselves as bright or capable or attractive to others, because in the process their hopes of being admired and loved would be raised and in the bargain they would be setting themselves up and exposing themselves to the dangers of bitter hurt and disappointment. Far better, they conclude, to think little of oneself, expect little, and thus both avoid the pain of disappointment and even create the possibility of pleasant surprises.76

This disposition to adopt defensive or self-protective postures to avoid disappointment is provided in a case described by Swann. He recalls a story about a patient who, under therapy was making progress, or so it seemed, until one day he abruptly ended the session.
His therapist was flabbergasted for he had enormous respect for ‘Frank’ and had taken pains to communicate these feelings to him. He looked Frank in the eye and told him he admired and liked him. Frank was visibly shaken by the statement, turned pale, lost his balance and spilt his coffee. When Frank calmed down, the therapist asked, “What's wrong Frank? Didn't you believe me when I said how I felt?” Frank slowly replied, "The trouble was that I did believe you. It just made me anxious to think about people liking me. It just never feels quite right.”

It is not a matter, therefore, of Frank thinking himself unworthy of admiration. He believes, in fact, that he is worthy of it. The problem is that he cannot accept the natural expression of it from others because the feeling it produces in him doesn’t feel quite right. Ontological shame can explain how feelings of shame can permeate even the moments where one does or ought to feel justifiable pride. I would argue that Frank has a vague sense of ontological shame but has mistaken it for what he thinks amounts to the impropriety of experiencing proper pride. He has failed to distinguish between proper pride, to which he is entitled, and pride-in-self-esteem which is a self-assertive denial of ontological shame. He has lumped all pride together as improper, or ‘not quite right’ and in doing so is failing to recognise the importance of proper pride as a self-covering for ontological shame. Frank, like many others with negative self-views, is failing in his responsibility to self-cover his inherent shame. Unlike the narcissist who opts to cover her shame in a pretence, the negative self-view person simply cannot bring herself to cover over or self-create a covering for her inherent shame and she is therefore exposed as being a negative person whose company is not enjoyable. She has no illusions about the possibility of self-admiration. She knows too much about herself to think such a state-of-being is achievable. But accepting that one is incapable of self-admiration is far from acknowledging one’s own responsibility for creating a cover for it in actions and qualities that justify feeling pride and other forms of self-affirmation.
As illustrated in Frank’s case, it is often the case that the person with negative self-views possesses an admirable degree of honesty to which we respond with warmth and understanding. The difficulty arises for those who have to live with such a person, for ontological shame is always on show in them and having it constantly exposed has the effect of dampening down intimacy or gift-exchange. It is hard work to enter gift-exchange with a person who cannot accept herself as possessing qualities that elicit admiration. We can now make better sense of Swann’s statement that “[p]eople with negative self-views may be accustomed to hearing occasional words of praise, but they are not accustomed to having people over-praise them in responses of wonder and delight. It’s too much for them.”78

Of course I am highlighting the type of negative self-view wherein the person, like Frank, is shown respect and granted a certain amount of dignity. In many cases of people with negative self-views there is, sadly, avoidance of close and intimate relationships, a gravitation toward abusive relationships and a susceptibility to exploitation. In these less accommodating circumstances, such a person suffers because her inherent shame is exposed for all to see and this exposure of ontological shame is a magnet for those who enjoy displacing their own shame onto her. The disparagement and denigration of a person in such a state is wonderfully captured in the German word Schamgelachter, the ridiculing of another’s shame.79

Here is a final example of ontological shame as it is disclosed in a common everyday event. Carl Golberg gives an account of a young woman robbed on a dark street at night, who upon returning home is brought to shame in a confrontation with her boy friend. She flees the confrontation after being chastised for being so careless. The young woman had made similar errors of judgement in the past so it is understandable that her sobs of "I'm worthless! I'm a loser. Everything I do is wrong", etc., are indicative of her feelings of
acute shame. It is what Golberg brings to our attention about the boyfriend’s reaction that is of most interest. The boyfriend, according to Golberg, is also experiencing shame without acknowledging it and this form of shame leads him to condemn his girl friend. The reason the boyfriend is reacting so harshly toward the young woman is because he has to rid himself of 'a painful impotence'; a sense of the utter helplessness he feels in failing to be her protector. He had shown the young woman tenderness and care on previous occasions, but

now there was an outburst of anger caused by uncomfortable feelings of helplessness that the young woman's actions stirred in him. Goldberg thinks this common response is a form of self-condemnation, and that the anger displayed “may be indicative of our deep susceptibility and caring about the pain and misery of others.” Unfortunately, he says, “few of us have learned to identify the feelings of shame caused by a despairing sense of helplessness and to express them in a direct way.”

Being a protector, carer and adviser are sources of self-affirmation. The actions that proceed from the intention to protect, care and advise provide a covering of not just another’s actual or possible exposure to shame, but of one’s own shame. The young man has been exposed as less than admirable, or to put it more crudely, given the significance he attaches to caring for his girl friend, he has been exposed as a failure in his role as protector. As Taylor puts it, “a person experiencing shame is forced to think that he is less admirable than he had supposed,” and the young man had supposed he was admirable for being a caring protector. His helplessness has been exposed. He wants to help and this help is in covering, what Edmund Burke once called “the defects of our naked shivering
And it is ‘our’ shivering nakedness that many people want to help cover; not just their own but that of others, particularly that of those with whom they are intimate.

There is shame over one’s partner acting in a way not worthy of admiration. The young man derives enjoyment and self-affirmation from his admiration of the young woman. He sees precious qualities in her that he admires, but at news of her latest mistake, these qualities have now, temporarily lost their lustre and with it he is unable to self-affirm his own worth. Ontological shame has been exposed. Temporarily at least, admiration has been lost and as it is the most refined of all our coverings for ontological shame (it is said, ‘love is blind’, and ‘love covers a multitude of sins’), the loss of admiration amounts to being witness to the exposure of shame. Moreover, being in the presence of another’s shame is an uncomfortable, sometimes disconcerting experience. The sight of it typically generates at the minimum a sharp recoil and in some cases a contemptuous disdain.

There is also a sense of contagion associated with obvious displays of shame from which, I think it plausible to infer that all the different experiences we label shame have a common cause. It is the human incapacity to self-admire that constitutes the limit which most effects our self-belief and our interactions with others. Ontological shame is both a blessing and a curse. It compels us toward achieving things for which we can rightly feel pride through which a covering for it is provided, and it remains a limitation with which we perpetually struggle and go to great lengths to cover up or conceal, lest we appear to be worthless beings. The struggle to reconcile oneself to it means we forever grapple with the allure of the pretence of self-admiration. For most of us we come to reconcile ourselves to the fact we cannot self-admire through accepting responsibility for accomplishing things for which we can rightly feel a proper pride. Our feelings of pride need to be matched with a humility without which pride becomes a permanent state of mind within which the pretence of self-admiration can take hold.
Humility carries with it an unmistakable image of our shame and is therefore the ideal counterweight to an unbridled pride, which, given the pleasure associated with it, encourages us to be forgetful of our inherent shame. Where the belief in self-admiration does take hold ontological or inherent shame is covered up, and in the concealment a constant wariness and suspicion replaces the delightful spontaneity of gift-exchange. A mean spiritedness toward others replaces a willingness to enter gift-exchange and the consequence of repressing or suppressing ontological shame is that relations with others become strained, unlovely and eventually harmful. A mean-spiritedness festers into disparagement and envy. Where one holds to the possibility of self-admiration, every instance where others have seemingly earned the right to self-admire, is, as we shall see in Chapter Seven, fertile ground for envy.

Being admired and being an admirer provides us with a cover for our incapacity to self-admire. Without being able to admire, we would not be able to enter gift-exchange with others and enjoy the experience of communion with others. Such affirmation of oneself and of others in the gift-exchange outweighs the pride we have in our own individuality. High admiration reveals the positive, and not to make too strong a point on it, the lovely side of being incapable of self-admiration. It is the finest covering for shame that human beings can experience in our relations with one another.

We saw earlier in the chapter, in the writings of Baier, how beliefs are far easier to conceal than feelings. As long as one holds to the belief in the possibility of self-admiration, ontological shame will be viewed as possessing no value whatsoever. It becomes a curse which cannot be lifted, seeping into every nook and cranny of life and rendering us incapable of healthy relationships and respectful interaction. The erroneous belief in self-admiration needs to be exposed for the sham that it is. The difficulty is that in exposing it as a sham, our ontological shame, which ought not to be revealed without adequate cover,
is also exposed. We need to uncover the belief in self-admiration while not fully exposing the shame that leads to the belief, and the pretence and fakery that issues forth from it. While dis-covering or uncovering the pretence is straight forward in cases like conceit, arrogance and contempt for others, it is less obvious and more difficult to spot in other negative emotions – as we shall soon see. There is a need not only to uncover that which conceals ontological shame, but to re-cover from bouts of shame that expose our incapacity to self-admire. More will be said on recovery in the following chapters but suffice to say here, that recovery from acute bouts of shame require one to seek out the best means of covering ontological shame while not concealing from oneself the specific causes of the shame experienced. Together with an addressing (a dressing) of, and an attending (a tending) to these specific causes, I think it equally important to find ways to admire others, for in so doing, the finest covering for ontological shame is within our reach.
ENDNOTES

1 Branden 2001, p. 110.
2 Allport 1937, p. 169.
5 Ibid, p. 262.
7 Ibid., p. 208.
8 Baier, 1990, p. 263.
9 Kant, 1963, p. 226. Kant also claimed that loquaciousness in men is contemptible, and contrary to the strength of the male.
11 Ibid., p. 265.
12 Ibid., p. 265.
13 Ibid., pp. 265, 266.
14 Ibid., p. 267.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., p. 270.
18 Ibid., p. 279.
20 Ibid., p. 4.
21 Ibid., p. 8. Nagel adds that "the intrusive desire to see people in extremis with their surface stripped away is the other side of the human need for protection from such exposure" Ibid., p. 16.
22 Ibid., p. 7.
23 Ibid., p. 9.
25 Ibid.
26 I return to the issue of ‘greater shaming’ in society in Chaper Six in the discussion of shame and guilt.
27 Ibid., p. 18.
28 Ibid.
31 Ibid., p. 216.
34 I touch upon shame and concealment in the public domain in Chapter Six.
35 Nagel 2002, p 4. I agree with Nagel insofar that an active calling for more and greater shaming in society is unwarranted, but the neat line he draws between private and public is dubious given that many of those who occupy public office employ the sort of artful guile and deliberately misleading speech that do more than cover over shameful actions but cover them up. So when he says that, “we should . . . leave people their privacy which is so essential for the protection of inner freedom from the stifling effect of the demands of face,” his argument can appear to condone all that is done in private as inconsequential for the retention of public trust, and this is perhaps asking too much. He wants that which is shameful to remain a private affair, concealed under the cover of conventions of reticence, but the very nature of public trust is founded on an acceptable degree of honesty and openness about how the person entrusted with such power, lives her life. It may be too much to ask of us to view those in public office as mere functionaries, as if they are in some way separated from the lives we lead and the standards we set.
37 Ibid., p. 81.
38 Ibid., p. 61.
39 Ibid., p. 73.
40 Capps. 1993, p. 82.
41 Ibid., pp. 82, 83.
42 Pattison. 2000, p. 61.
46 Ibid., p. 83
47 Capps. 1993, p. 78.
50 Ibid., p. 18.
51 Pattison. 2000, p. 72.
53 Pattison 2000, p. 79.
54 Ibid., p. 82.
55 Lewis. 1992, p. 140.
57 Ibid., pp. 49,50. The term ‘anticipatory shame’ is used by Pattison, 2000, p. 84.
58 Pattison 2000, p. 83.
60 Ibid.
61 Lewis. 1992, p. 10.
63 Desmond 1988, p. 295.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.[my italics]
I am borrowing terms from Kaufman who also links failure and shame. 1996, p. 45.

Desmond 1988, p. 299.

Ibid.

Ibid.

The connection between failure and shame is also noted by Pattison, 2000, p. 108.

Desmond 1988, p. 303, follows the Heideggerian path of *being-toward-death* by claiming it is finitude as the ultimate failure to which we need be reconciled. But it is questionable whether *being-toward-death* lies at the core of a resolve to overcome all failures that undermine the desire for and belief in success. I have no cause to disagree with him about the significance of death in our lives. The issue of our finitude, however, is not one that strikes me as the sort of limitation that impacts upon our everyday lives in quite the way a failure to feel and believe oneself successful does and how failure to be successful is cause for shame. Others agree with Heidegger and Desmond, that the limit of mortality is the source of most of our ills, particularly Ernest Becker 1974. *The Denial of Death*. New York: Free Press.


Ibid., p. 31.

American Psychiatric Association 1994, as referred to in Chapter One.

I explore the difference between acts that show disrespect and acts (omissions) that are merely refusals to esteem in Chapter Seven.


Ibid, p 55 This introduces the notion of humility. There may be, among some who hold negative self-views a ‘fawning humility’ that exposes ontological shame rather than merely discloses it, as in a show of modesty. Another side to humility which allows it to co-exist with proper pride, is an issue I take up for discussion in Chapter Eight.


Ibid., p. 261.

Ibid., p. 265.

Ibid., p. 262.


Chapter Five: Shame and Self-Worth

Our dignity as human beings, paradoxically, depends upon the acceptance of our shame.

Frederick Turner

In this chapter I will return again to Deigh’s objections to the Rawlsian account of self-worth and shame that I introduced in Chapter One. On what Deigh calls the Rawlsian characterisation or ‘auteur theory’ of worth, “what a person does with his life, how well he directs it”, constitutes self-worth. By contrast, according to Deigh, there is “a sense of worth that comes from knowing one’s status or essential nature and “worth is attributed to one because of one’s status, fixed independently of how one conducts one’s life”. It is because the Rawlsian characterisation of self-worth is too narrow and alternative sources of worth are ignored that it cannot account for what Deigh considers crucial in an account of shame; that there are acts of concealment involved. If shame is the reaction to a loss of self-esteem, what is being concealed, he asks? Why does a person in shame seek to hide? On the auteur theory of worth, acts of covering up are not self explanatory and “one must make use of supplementary materials to explain these acts.”

This appears to be a valid objection because, as was explained in the previous chapter, acts to cover-up and cover-over are hallmarks of the shame experience. The second problem, according to Deigh, is that Rawls has a too narrow view of what constitutes worth so that on this auteur theory of worth only those excellences a person chooses herself as part of her life plan will be the things over which she can feel shame. As Rawls writes, “[i]t is our plan of life that determines what we feel ashamed of, and so feelings of shame are relative to our aspirations, to what we try to do and with whom we wish to associate.” He gives the example: those with no musical ability do not strive to be musicians and feel no shame for this lack. But what if the person has parents and other family members who are musicians,
will she not feel ashamed if asked by some visiting relative or family friends to ‘play something for us’? This is Deigh’s point. The question of ability or lack of it does not figure in every case of shame. There is a sense of worth that inheres in one’s identity and it is in relation to this source of worth that shame can strike. This particular person may be deeply ashamed of not having any musical ability if in fact her identity consists in being a member of a musical family.

On the Rawlsian account, according to Deigh, what the loss of a sense of self-worth means is the loss of a certain view of oneself. “One had self-esteem and correspondingly a good opinion of oneself,” and a “change in judgement about the worthiness of one’s ends or the excellences of one’s person destroys that view. One’s good opinion of oneself gives way to a poor one. This constitutes loss of self-esteem.”6 Shame on this characterisation, as Deigh describes it,


is the shock to our sense of worth that comes from realising that our values are shoddy or from discovering that we are deficient in a way that had added to the confidence we had in our excellence. Either is a discovery of something false in the good opinion we had of ourselves, and such self-discovery spells loss of self-esteem.7

As Deigh rightly points out, self-discovery of this sort, “does not figure in every experience of shame, for a person who has a poor opinion of himself is nonetheless liable to feel shame when the very defect that is the reason for the poor opinion is brought to his notice.” 8 In other words, a person with little or no self-esteem can experience shame and this obvious feature of shame casts doubt upon the close connection between self-esteem and shame.

This leads Deigh to claim that we should conceive of shame,

not as reaction to a loss, but as a reaction to a threat, specifically, the threat of demeaning treatment one would invite in giving the appearance of someone of lesser worth. Like fear, shame serves to protect one against and save one from unwanted exposure.9

Shame, on this account, is protective
in that it moves one to protect one’s worth . . . We might say that the doing or exposure of something that makes one appear to have less worth than one has leaves one open to treatment appropriate only to persons or things that lack the worth one has, and shame in inhibiting one from such things and in moving one to cover them up thus protects one from appearing to be an unworthy creature and so from the degrading treatment such appearance would invite.

As I see it, there are at least two problems with Deigh’s views. Firstly his description of shame is a little too loosely defined so that “a reaction to a threat, specifically, the threat of demeaning treatment”, that he sees as indicative of shame, seems equally suitable a description of anger. Anger is a common reaction to the threat of demeaning treatment and in the opening chapter we saw how ‘threats to ego’ were thought to result, in people of a certain disposition at least, in aggressive and violent responses. No doubt this sort of reaction lies at the extreme end of responses to the threat of demeaning treatment, but Deigh’s description of shame, as far as I can see, can fit anger as well as an experience of shame. To be able to claim that the reaction to a threat of demeaning treatment is one of shame and not anger, there must be an understanding of ontological shame. Without this explanation, acts of concealment that Deigh considers crucial in shame could be just as easily accounted for in the anger-response to an impending onset of shame. This would be a concealment of shame where a peripheral awareness of shame-related events lead to anger being displaced onto others because the affect of shame has been disowned. What we would have here is a case of bypassed shame not the typical case of acute shame.

To rule out the possibility that the reaction to a threat of demeaning treatment is anger and not shame, there needs to be a connection made between the threat and ontological shame. This can be made through recognising that ontological shame generates various responses when there is a threat of exposure. The response can be one of anger or it can be one of acute shame. I would suggest, however, that it cannot be both at the same time. While anger can be a response to feelings of shame, there is a clear distinction between the two emotional reactions. In acute shame, there is ownership of one’s own ontological shame, while in anger there need not be any such ownership. This is to say that to make good sense
of Deigh’s idea of the link between shame, concealment and self-worth, there needs to be a way of explaining this connection without there being other reactions like anger intruding into the picture. The difficulty is that anger has long been associated with shame, particularly in psychological literature. “Anger is an emotion of potency and authority”, say June Price Tangney and Rhonda L. Dearing. “In contrast shame is an emotion of the worthless, the paralysed, the ineffective. Thus by redirecting hostility, by turning their anger outward, shamed individuals become angry instead, reactivating and bolstering the self, which was previously so impaired by the shame experience.” The idea forwarded here is that because shame is so unpleasant and debilitating one will do almost anything to escape from its clutches. But things do not seem quite right. For instance: how is it possible for a person paralysed in shame to suddenly and effectively impose her control on the situation through expressions of anger? I think there is a conflation of acute shame with bypassed or disowned shame. It would seem that in cases of acute shame, “[t]he shamed person feels a pervasive sense of inadequacy,” as Nussbaum claims, “and no clear steps suggest themselves to remove that inadequacy.” It would seem that only where there is peripheral awareness of shame will anger surface so that the anger response to shame better fits our account of bypassed rather than acute shame.

Deigh’s view of shame as a reaction to a threat of demeaning treatment because one has given the appearance of having lesser worth than one actually has, coincides with Wurmser’s anxiety shame or what I have called anticipatory shame. Anxiety shame for Wurmser is “the anticipatory threat of being exposed, humiliated, belittled and rejected. It signals the danger of contemptuous rejection.” This is just the sort of threat of demeaning treatment Deigh thinks underlies all shame experiences, but until supplementary material is introduced, his description of shame remains too closely aligned with anger and does not fit the severest and most acute experiences of shame – those that rip and tear, and make one feel a pervasive sense of inadequacy.
Alongside the problem in Deigh’s description of shame, there remains the question of whether his account of self-worth is adequate. For Deigh there are “aspects of our identity that contribute to our sense of worth independently of the aims and ideals around which we organise our lives.”\textsuperscript{15} There is a worth “attributed to human beings because of their species or because the kind of beings they are conceived to be: rational ones, say, spiritual ones, or autonomous ones”, worth is “attributed to one because of one’s status, fixed independently of how one conducts one’s life”.\textsuperscript{16} Shame motivates a covering “because one senses that the worth one has is threatened.”\textsuperscript{17} In the previous chapter I explained the acts of concealment in shame as cover-up or covering-for ontological shame – and this is very different to Deigh’s view that a person in shame is covering up to protect her worth. In short, I am claiming we want to hide in shame because our fundamental condition is being exposed as shameful. Deigh is saying that we hide and cover ourselves in order to protect our worth. If this is so, in what does self-worth consist?

Moral philosophers have debated this issue for centuries. In exploring what constitutes self-worth we are confronted with disagreements over what is meant by the terms ‘self-esteem’ and ‘self-respect’. Are they synonymous, and how they are related to self-worth? For some theorists, self-esteem and self-respect are synonymous; for others they are not. Some see self-esteem and self-worth linked, for others it is self-respect and self-worth. Thomas Hill, for example, is representative of those who connect self-respect to self-worth. “Those who have self-respect are often said to have a sense of their own self-worth. But what sort of worth, one wonders, is in question?”\textsuperscript{18} Amidst an array of different perspectives, Robin Dillon provides a useful distinction, “[h]owever the self as object is conceived,” she writes,

\begin{quote}
respect for oneself is generally regarded as the appreciation of one or other of two kinds of worth: a kind of worth that is unearned, invariable, and inalienable, often called “dignity,” and a kind of worth that individuals earn more or less of and that is subject to diminishment and loss as well as enhancement, which may be called “merit.” This distinction regarding worth corresponds to the divergent characterisations of respect: respect is viewed both as a response to (the importance of) dignity and as a response to (the quality that is) merit.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}
I think this view of the relation between self-respect and self-worth is representative of much of the philosophical literature on the topic and in broad terms it captures much of Deigh’s disagreement with the Rawlsian account of self-worth. Where Rawls presents an account of worth in terms of merit, Deigh leans more toward the idea of dignity or the worth one has which is fixed independently of one’s life plans. Most importantly, as Dillon sees it, “[w]hat connects respect, honor, esteem, and regard” is “their common concern with worth. The notion of a sense of worth is a common element in contemporary discussions of self-respect, indeed, it is generally regarded as the core of self-respect, if not the whole of it.” But again, there are problems in such an account because not everyone can agree on whether self-respect is synonymous with self-esteem. If these are different concepts regarding the self, then it cannot be that self-worth lies only at the core of self-respect.

I propose that there is a need to rethink self-worth in light of an understanding of our human incapacity to self-admire, and therefore everything that is associated with a reconciliation to and a covering for ontological shame will contribute to self-worth. I think it plausible to suggest that there are four aspects or components of self-worth: self-esteem, public-esteem, self-respect and worth-to-others, specifically as an admirer. As we proceed with the analysis it will become clear that these aspects of self-worth are interrelated so that while they can be isolated for conceptual clarity, in reality they comprise a whole committed to covering ontological shame. To label one part of self-worth as self-esteem and another as self-respect is important for reasons that will become clearer as ontological shame and admiration are introduced into this discussion of self-affirming worth, but all the components of self-worth come in and out of focus, rise to prominence under certain conditions and assist in the development of other aspects of self-worth. As the source of worth that, I will argue, comes from being an admirer is not typically included in accounts of self-worth, considerable time will be spent throughout the chapter on explaining its significance.
First to self-esteem and self-respect. Gabriele Taylor provides what I consider to be a convincing argument for distinguishing self-respect from self-esteem. Self-respect differs from self-esteem because

[f]or a person to have self-respect does not mean that he has a favourable attitude toward himself, or that he have any particular attitude toward himself at all. Nor is self-respect connected with emotional pride . . . To respect the self, then, is not to think either favourably or unfavourably of the self, but it is rather to do that which protects the self from injury or destruction.21

For Taylor, it follows that, “the occasions for loss of self-respect and the occasions for feeling shame coincide as neither does with the occasions for experiencing a blow to one’s self-esteem,”22 and that, “whenever a person experiences shame then he experiences an injury to his self-respect . . . A person has no self-respect if he regards no circumstances as shame producing. Loss of self-respect and loss of the capacity for feeling shame go hand in hand”23 On the other hand, in Taylor’s view, “to suffer a blow to one’s self-esteem is to modify one’s favourable attitude toward oneself. Hence to suffer such a blow one has to have a favourable attitude toward oneself in the first place. But a person may not have such an attitude”24 Taylor’s point is that if we insist that shame is dependent upon one having self-esteem, then presumably those who have little or no self-esteem will not experience shame. As we saw earlier, John Deigh makes the same point with reference to a person’s shame over defects. Shame strikes those with low or no self-esteem as often as it does those with high self-esteem.

Both Deigh and Taylor see in shame reason to distinguish self-worth from self-esteem. For Taylor it is not simply that shame is related to self-respect but not to self-esteem, it is also the case that self-esteem is to be distinguished from self-worth. A blow to one’s self-esteem, that is, a modification of one’s favourable attitude to oneself, she says, “may be experienced if the person concerned believes that he does not get the recognition he ought to have, he deserves better than he gets.” But while suffering a blow to his self-esteem, “he
may not therefore also think that he is worth less than he thought.” So Taylor clearly establishes that neither self-respect nor self-esteem are synonymous with self-worth.

To get to the other two aspects of self-worth I’ve proposed it is necessary to return again to Rawls’s conception of self-worth. Rawls’s auteur theory of worth confers meaning to one’s life through the projects one chooses for oneself. But satisfaction in successfully pursuing favoured activities is different to these activities and projects actually possessing worth-in-the-world. As John Cottingham puts it, “We cannot bestow meaning on our lives just by floundering after individual gratification.” If all the worth Rawls attributes to one’s life plans is individual gratification, then his notion of self-worth is indeed barren. But he sees more than this in self-worth. He captures a sense of the importance of a person’s value to others and how a person’s excellences are sources of pleasure for both the person herself and for others. He speaks of “complimentary activities in which people join together and take pleasure in their own good and one another’s realization of their nature”. He distinguishes between things that are good primarily for us (for the one who possesses them) and attributes of our person that are good both for us and for others as well. Rawls thinks that at the same time that various excellences (imagination, wit, beauty and grace and other natural assets) enable a person to carry out a more satisfying plan of life enhancing our sense of mastery, these attributes are appreciated by those with whom we associate, and the pleasure they take in our person and in what we do supports our self-esteem. The excellences are a condition of human flourishing; they are goods from everyone’s point of view. These facts relate them to the conditions of self-respect, and they account for their connection with our confidence in our own value.

The shortcoming in Rawls’s account is that he sees the ‘appreciation of others’ as ‘supporting our self-esteem’, and he associates shame with these chosen excellences and a sensibility to shame only among those ‘with whom a person cares to associate’. This means that even the esteem one receives from others is subsumed, by Rawls, under self-esteem.
But these forms of esteem are different. Firstly one can have self-esteem without public esteem, and it is possible to receive the plaudits of others and not have self-esteem.

A person can be admired even though she knows that the very thing for which she is admired is either a sham or is not what she truly believes in. This is a case of a person accepting praise and honour while knowing she does not deserve it. And a person can be admired for the ‘wrong reasons’ and feel embarrassed because she has been misunderstood. It is not only possible but necessary that a person who believes herself to be worthy of admiration maintain her esteem in the face of disconfirmation from others. I earlier pointed to the conscientious objector, who while believing herself to be worthy of admiration for adhering to pacifism, will not easily receive public accolades if her country is at war. So while Rawls does see a source of self-worth in being appreciated by others, it is not a source of worth distinct from self-esteem. He considers public esteem – the admiration of others – to be a part of self-esteem and this leads to the sorts of problems just outlined. Instead, it appears that it is better to understand public esteem as a significant and distinctive aspect of self-worth.

As much as human flourishing, on Rawls’s view, requires we develop qualities and make the most of natural assets to render ourselves fit objects for admiration, there is, I would suggest, a further requirement of the “condition of being valued and esteemed by others,” that we not only develop excellences but that we be prepared to admire excellences when they are not our own. This, I have no doubt Rawls thinks we do when we are a part of complimentary activities and that we take pleasure in one another’s ‘realization of our nature’. It is just that this is not clearly marked as a source of self-worth quite independent of the worth in self-esteem. A different view of human flourishing is provided by Cottingham. Self-worth is constituted in how successfully a person has acted in accord with what Cottingham calls our “(interdependent) flourishing as human beings.” In order to be
meaningful, a life must meet standards of some pattern tailored to our human nature, rather than being a pure function of isolated individual choice . . . What is proposed is that to count towards the meaningfulness of a life these varied activities have to be more than just performed by the agent with an eye to personal satisfaction, they have to be capable of being informed by a vision of their value in the whole.32

In spite of the importance he attaches to the ‘appreciation of others’, Rawls’s account fails to capture all but a portion of this vision. When he says that “to possess these excellences and to express them in actions are among [a person’s] regulative aims and are felt to be a condition of his being valued and esteemed by those with whom he cares to associate,”33 the condition of being valued and the vision of a meaningful life are too narrow. In restricting self-worth in this way, Rawls’s account of shame is incomplete. As Deigh rightly points out, shame can strike where one has not chosen any specific life plan or one’s associates (both Mme. Peterat and Earl Mills). In relation to shame this would suggest that a sensibility to shame does not reside only in “actions and traits that manifest or betray the absence” of one’s own excellences, as Rawls thinks, it resides also in not being willing to acknowledge another’s excellence.34 The shame here is likely to be more chronic than acute and it is not uncommon to find those considered to be living in a state of chronic shame unable and unwilling to find anything in the world worthy of admiration.

What is meant by being in a state of chronic shame, is not that a person suffers an endless stream of acute shame experiences, rather it is a general dyspepsia which has more to do with not being able to find much in life to enjoy, and this lack of enjoyment is directly related to the person’s own incapacity to self-admire which permeates her psyche and undermines every effort at establishing self-worth. Hope in finding meaning and joy among the scraps of self-worth the person clings to is gradually lost and a state of chronic shame ensures that relations with others are unfulfilling. The lack of enjoyment might be assumed
to be associated more closely with not receiving acceptance from others, which, given the nature of acceptance will always include a sense of belonging, and the pride and worth that comes from such belonging. This may be true enough, but I think the dyspepsia has much to do also with an inability to find things in others to admire. Praise after all is a natural response to things in the world that delight us. It is not uncommon to find those considered to be living in a state of chronic shame unable and unwilling to find anything in the world worthy of admiration. The shame experienced where one is unwilling to be open to and prepared for opportunities to admire, accounts, I suggest, for the sense of worthlessness and meaninglessness that lies at the root of chronic shame. Not only does the shame-bound person think herself unworthy of admiration, she also believes she possesses no value to others as an admirer and so no engagement in gift-exchange is possible.

Where one has worth in being an admirer and in satisfying another’s desire for esteem, there cannot be the same sort of self-affirmation as when one is conscious of being worthy oneself of admiration. There is, to borrow a term from Kierkegaard, ‘a sweet surrender’ in admiring than precludes any pride. This quality of being-of-worth to others through admiration of them is much underrated in a culture that promotes activist selfhood and self-empowerment. To be an admirer is to be of worth to others in assisting them to feel proud, and Bertrand Russell had it right, as I mentioned in Chapter Two, when he claimed that if we want to increase happiness we must learn to admire more and envy less. This is a source of self-worth which is generally discounted in self-esteem theories. Being an admirer of another’s qualities and skills brings with it a special type of self-affirmation which I shall explain shortly.

For now, it is important to stress that all of one’s worth, be it self-authored, possessed in an identity or derived from being an admirer, is a covering for ontological shame. What one is and does is not just of worth because one feels good about it, or because one thinks highly
of oneself, it is of worth because it is a covering for ontological shame. In light of what so far has been explained about ontological shame and its power to expose, it is important that the covering of it by means of self-worth is understood to be necessary not just for oneself but for others also. To live the flourishing life requires that the incapacity to self-admire not undermine and reduce to vanity one’s own worth and that of others.

The idea that we possess self-worth in being of worth to others, both as their admirers and by eliciting their admiration, brings into sharp relief the difference between pride-in-self-esteem and pride-of-self-worth. This distinction was established and partially explained in Chapter Two. I shall first elaborate on pride-in-self-esteem, an understanding of which will then enable us to recognise how different it is to pride-of-self-worth. Self-esteem is founded on both pride and confidence, so that the best way to grasp the difference between a healthy self-esteem that contributes to an overall sense of self-worth, and a self-esteem that depends on pride-in-self-esteem and amounts to a truncated and impoverished sense of self-worth, is through explaining how both forms of self-esteem are based on pride and confidence, but that in the former and not the latter, the confidence is based on self-respect.

As Taylor reminds us a person “who has confidence and whose relevant expectations are fulfilled need not have a favourable attitude toward herself.” This might seem strange considering that we normally associate confidence with a person having a favourable opinion of herself; but the point Taylor is making is that confidence comes from having the right expectations and having these expectations fulfilled, and that these have no necessary connection to self-esteem. They do, however, have a basis in self-respect. “To respect the self . . . is not to think either favourably or unfavourably of the self.” Confidence can be founded on self-respect without any reference to the sort of favourable opinion of oneself characteristic of self-esteem because self-respect protects one against needless exposures of shame, and it is in being exposed in shame that confidence can be destroyed. This is to say
that confidence depends substantially on not having one’s hope of success crushed by outbreaks of shame, and it is self-respect which keeps a person alert to occasions where acute shame may strike and destroy confidence. As I shall soon explain, I consider self-respect to be formed in the cauldron of acute shame, and this accounts for how it retains a sensibility to anticipatory shame and assists a person avert the danger of becoming ruthless and unethical.

Confidence for the egoist is contingent upon maintaining an attitude of pride. As representative of the person trapped in pride-in-self-esteem, the egoist’s confidence is limited to her ability to think highly of herself. Her pride and confidence are inseparable, enmeshed, wedded together so that her confidence depends on maintaining a state of pride. Should she discover she has no justifiable reason for feeling pride, then her confidence would be shattered. It is imperative for the egoist to keep her pride and confidence tethered together, and this explains the paradox of her conceit and her craving for admiration. Neither her pride, isolated as it is from other sources of self-affirmation, or her confidence, because it is based mistakenly on pride-in-self-esteem and not self-respect, can bring her the assurance she seeks. Her desire for esteem fails to be gratified. Every detail of a life led in such pride is reason for the egoist to claim that she has the ability and is entitled to self-admire. This is why the egoist, trapped within a world she has created by belief in her entitlement to self-admire, reacts so defiantly against anything that does not conform to this belief.

By clinging to pride as her means of maintaining confidence, the egoist loses her susceptibility to shame. Rather than accept the appropriateness of some forms of shame, as a proper self-respect requires, the egoist refuses to accept her responsibility for any hint of shame and in so doing undermines her self-respect and the most secure basis for confidence. She treats her pride as if it is an achievement to think favourably of herself,
even when there are no grounds for this particular form of self-affirmation. This idea that feeling the pleasure of pride is an achievement has its roots in the idea that self-esteem is an achievement over which one can feel the ‘deepest pride’, as Branden puts it. This deepest pride is over the supposed attainment of self-esteem, and the only way one can be sure self-esteem has been retained when others fail to confirm it, is to continue to feel pride. The pleasant sensation of pride then itself becomes the achievement and replaces or displaces the more abstract notion of self-esteem, so that whatever actual self-esteem one may have had has transmuted into pride. The result is conceit and arrogance, each of which exhibit an imperviousness to shame.

Being a participant in gift-exchange, either as the person admired or as an admirer, is the perfect covering for ontological shame. For the egoist, in contrast, it is her belief in self-admiration which allows her to think she can and has covered her shame. In effect this means, as described in Chapter Four, that she has covered it up. She maintains her confidence through a denial of her incapacity to self-admire and such a basis for confidence is both pretentious and ultimately unsustainable. But is it not just a confidence based on pride-in-self-esteem and the denial of ontological shame that undermines a genuine confidence.

At the other extreme from the egoist, is the person who lacks confidence. Lack of confidence can be traced to a resignation rather than a reconciliation to one’s incapacity to self-admire. Timorousness is the consequence of allowing what appears to be self-respect to dictate every course of action. “I cannot do this because it may occasion shame”. It exhibits a resignation to ontological shame, and because the person is concerned about doing something that will bring her shame, timorousness can adopt the disguise of self-respect to justify itself.
Self-respect is the ground for having confidence. While there seems to be little reason for having pride in one’s self-respect, there is a measure of self-affirmation associated with self-respect and this affirmation contributes to self-worth. The self-affirmation in self-respect is marked by a will to defend against needless exposures of shame and to remain susceptible to appropriate disclosures of shame in recognition of our human subjection to ontological shame. Retaining a willingness, where appropriate, to undergo shame may seem an unpromising basis upon which to build confidence; but as outbreaks of shame are so destructive of confidence, being alert to the possibility of such outbreaks gives one every reason to think that one’s endeavours will be successful and not brought to ruin by shame.

It is as Desmond says, that we must abandon an untenable way of being, and to have a realistic sense of confidence demands one Respekt (achtung) the power of ontological shame to present one’s worth as vanity. Where a person claims to have self-respect but it is not founded on a Respekt for ontological shame, sooner or later there will emerge self-assertive demands for special treatment. This may well account for the assertiveness that can come from pride-in-self-esteem. It comes from a failure to distinguish self-esteem and self-respect, so that disconfirmations or invalidations of a person’s sense of entitlement to self-esteem are interpreted as disconfirmations of her entitlement to respect. This important distinction is discussed in greater detail in the final chapter.

What is missing in such self-assertive demands for respect from others is humility. The disclosure of ontological shame is unmistakable in humility and this accounts for why it is that many of us feel challenged and irritated when confronted by the humble person. Because it carries with it a disclosure of ontological shame, humility can also undermine self-respect and on occasions where it does, or in people who allow it to play out this way, there is the temptation to take pride in it. This is what many, like Nietzsche, who see humility as self-deprecating, sense in it; that it is an inverted pride which one can have in
believing one is worthy of admiration for keeping oneself in a state of inferiority and subjection to others.42

There is an art to respecting oneself, and this art is learnt through experiences of acute feelings of shame. Acute shame may not always be averted even where one has self-respect, because there is not always the warning signal of anticipatory feelings of shame, but much of what will bring the full glare of shame can be avoided through self-respect. Those who merely sense some disturbance and bypass shame, therefore, lack a proper sense of self-respect. To have and retain self-respect is to remain susceptible to feelings of shame and knowing when these feelings are appropriate to accept and own them. Frederick Turner captures this nicely when he writes: “[o]ur dignity as human beings, paradoxically, depends upon the acceptance of our shame.” We must, therefore, “find out how to accept and dissolve our shame in ritual, laughter, art, and insight.”43 Self-respect and dignity coincide precisely where we have accepted the reality of shame and yet been prepared to dissolve its most toxic effects in all manner of ways that accord us a sense of worth.

Because self-respect is closely aligned to shame, I think it plausible to suggest that it is actually formed in the cauldron of shame. The shocking power of acute shame to reduce one to feelings of worthlessness is reason enough for respect (Respekt as achtung) to be formed. In this formation of self-respect, the power of shame to expose one’s imperfections and failings is reduced. In this way, anticipatory shame and self-respect go together. As the example of Mme. Peterat illustrates, the young girl had no experience of the need for self-respect, for she had not encountered in her own home any demeaning treatment over her name. Self-respect would begin to be forged in the pain and tears of her shame, and presumably it would help guard her against similar outbreaks of shame in the future. She could deflate future ridicule by claiming her name was a hoot, unique and summed her up
perfectly. A combination of exaggerated pride and self-derision would disarm most of those who were ready to pounce upon her.

Ontological shame creates self-respect, or more precisely, because we are incapable of self-admiration we are compelled to find our worth-in-the-world in ways that accord with our shameful condition, and self-respect enables us to do this. From the self-respect that comes from protecting oneself against exposures of the incapacity to self-admire comes a second order respect for one’s worth. This is to say that ontological shame impresses upon us the importance of establishing self-worth and making the most of the worth one has been given, either in one’s identity or essential nature, as Deigh highlights, or through one’s life projects (Rawls). Self-respect ensures we retain a sensibility to ontological shame without succumbing to its negative affects. It is from a respect (Respekt) for the power of ontological shame to reduce us to the appearance of worthlessness, that there is an urgency in self-creating one’s worth, for the best covering for ontological shame is what one deems to be of worth to oneself and to others. It is because we are aware of the importance of our own worth in covering for our shameful limitation that so much emphasis is put on self-creation of this worth. There is a stress placed upon authoring all of one’s worth, with the result that the worth we have in identity, class, etc., is often discredited. As Deigh has shown, there is worth in things besides the worth one has self-created.

But ontological shame does not just impact upon things that are of worth. It impacts upon things about ourselves that do not contribute to our sense of self-worth. For example, a physical imperfection is not something over which we derive any sense of self-worth and yet it can typically be a source of shame. Our bodies are a common source of shame. As Donald Moss writes, there is a disownership of certain regions of the body, those that the person cannot include in her ‘idealised self-image’. These specific regions of the body are areas where she is self-conscious about her visibility to others. “When a part of the world
has already become a region of futility, incapacity, or shame,” says Moss, “that region is
relinquished and the related parts of the body are often disowned as ‘not me’ or as ‘that
thing I am helplessly encased in’ . . with this loss of a region of the world comes mourning,
grieving, and tears.”44 Wherever possible we hide our own imperfections from view, but
they can suddenly become the focus of one’s attention and we can feel ambushed by
shame. These imperfections and shortcomings are sources of shame, I suggest, because
they are things about ourselves that we do not personally consider worthy of admiration or
sources of pride. As it is that which is admirable that covers our shame, these imperfections
are exposures to, and constant reminders of our incapacity to self-admire.45

While we want others to overlook or look beyond our physical imperfections and see more
to us than these flaws, it is otherwise with the qualities and excellences we have or believe
we have. These are open to view, as we want them to be seen, appreciated and admired. It
is our inability to be of worth-to-others as an admirer which perhaps strikes most cruelly in
acute shame. As much as we want to be seen in the world as embodying things that can be
admired, we want also to be appreciated as a person who is willing to admire. This is to say
that the human desire for admiration and esteem is such that much of our value to each
other resides in being able to assist one another in the satisfaction of this desire. When in
shame, one’s value to others as an admirer is lost. ‘Who, among those who see me now in
shame, would value my admiration of them?’ When in a state of acute shame it is
impossible to admire.46 It is not possible to enter gift-exchange. If one could somehow
muster some form of appreciation for another while undergoing shame, one’s words of
praise will appear sycophantic or envious. As Leslie Farber puts it, “envy asserts itself in
the costume of admiration,”47 and this costume is readily put on to relieve oneself of shame.
Whether it is sycophancy or disguised envy, my words of praise will ring hollow when I am
in shame and count for nothing because my shame has excluded me from entering gift-
exchange with another.
One feature of the shame experience that receives little attention from philosophers is how there needs to be a recovery from it if a person is to be able to lead or return to a flourishing life. While philosophers have focused on the experience of shame, a number of psychologists have taken special interest in how recovery is necessary if the person is to avoid becoming shame-bound. Gershen Kaufman, for example, touches upon recovery when he suggests that a person in acute shame turn her attention away from herself and outward toward the world. “When shame generates, the attention turns inward, as if impaling the self under a magnifying gaze. The tool for releasing shame is refocusing attention. By consciously, effortfully, refocusing attention back outside the self through sheer effort of will, shame is released”.48 I think this makes good sense, if it can be done. However, when he also says that to effect a recovery, “The self must learn to affirm the self from within. This . . . translates into having esteem for self, valuing of self, respect for self, pride in self,”49 then much of this initial insight about turning away from oneself toward the world has been lost. It is toward others and what is admirable in them and toward the beauty in the world that one must turn if a recovery is to mean more than simply shaking off the present effects of acute shame.

There have been various strategies suggested to effect a recovery from shame. John Bradshaw, for example, suggests that “. . an important therapeutic first step is to re-engage with the human race, of engaging with a group of people who are non-judgemental.”50 As with Kaufman’s advice to look outward toward others, this seems good advice. But as Pattison rightly points out, specifically in relation to chronic (toxic) shame, “re-establishing effective relationships with self and others probably needs more than a good deal of commitment to self-improvement. Shamed selves are unlikely to be highly motivated to escape from the solipsistic rut of despair into which they have sunk.”51 What is likely to effect a fuller recovery, I would suggest, is to recall that a sizeable part of our own self-worth has been invested in our worth to others as their admirers. As a recovery requires
both a regaining of what has been lost (one’s worth) and a concealment of the unchangeable fact of an incapacity to self-admire, finding ways of boosting self-worth will only be truly effective if all of the sources of worth are utilised.

Our inability to re-cover quickly from outbreaks of shame is perhaps the clearest indication of our incapacity to self-admire. To be able to effect a self-recovery from shame the person will need to re-cover, that is regain the confidence in her worthiness to be admired and in being an admirer. This explains why those who love the shamed person remind her of her value to them and to herself. They will help the recovery by focusing on this worth they see in her; ‘but you have much to be proud of’, ‘remember what you’ve done for others’, etc.

Here, the appeal is to one’s pride in being admirable as a redress of shame. If the shamed person cannot be convinced that she is worthy of admiration, even at the most basic level, then a recovery will never be effected. Until she accepts the salve of praise and edification from others, the shock of shame will reverberate throughout her life. She will become shame-bound, as psychologists label it. Here we can grasp the two meanings of the word ‘recover’. Recovery from shame requires a re-covering of that which is exposed in shame: there is the recovery of something that was lost so that it is now regained, and there is a recovering of that which must be covered again if a return to normality it to be achieved. That which is regained in a recovery is the worth one has and the confidence to once again attain this worth or live in accord with what has been revealed to be of worth. That which is once again covered over and kept from open view is our incapacity to self-admire and how we are deprived of seeing ourselves in the same positive and favourable light as we can see others.

Most of the emphasis in accounts of recovery is understandably placed on regaining what has been in some sense lost and therefore notions of self-worth are deemed central to accounts of shame. It is worth on the Rawlsian account that is diminished or lost in shame,
so it follows that a recovery from shame will mean a regaining of one’s sense of worth. For Deigh, in the experience of shame, there is no diminishment as such in self-worth, rather there is the appearance of having lesser worth than one has. But if shame is only a reaction to appearing to have lesser worth than one has, what has a person to recover or recover from once the feelings of shame have subsided? If one has a worth that shame protects then there is nothing to recover. This would explain why Deigh places so much emphasis on acts of concealment in shame. Acts of concealment in shame are crucial, according to Deigh since the person in shame “covers up because self-worth is threatened.”52 Here concealment seems to function like protection. But as we have seen, concealment is not possible in outbreaks of acute shame. The skill one normally has in concealing what one wants kept from open view has failed in outbreaks of acute shame. One must now effect a recovery, in both meanings of the word: a regaining of the sense of one’s worth and a return to covering for ontological shame.

It is essential to a person’s sense of her own worth that she prepare herself to be an admirer and this means a willingness to find in others things for which they can be admired. Such an attitude requires a certain measure of humility, for humility carries with it an understanding of ontological shame.53 There needs to be a reconciliation to the unyielding reality of ontological shame and humility is the dispositional character trait that marks just such a reconciliation. Recovery from an outbreak of shame requires, then, that a measure of the shame is retained in one’s conscious memory, and humility facilitates this retention. Humility carries with it an understanding of ontological shame, it comports one to the world in a way that worth as an admirer is made the more possible and this in turn creates a covering for ontological shame. It enables one to find what is admirable in others, to see the best in others, from which there can come occasions of high admiration. The best way of recovering from a bout of acute shame, therefore, is in finding things in other people or in the natural world to admire, for in so doing one is creating a valuable sense of self-worth
that does not require any action that draws attention to oneself. In expressing admiration for another, both one’s own worth and the other’s worth are bolstered. This is the nature of entering gift-exchange on the path to recovery: a new recovered self emerges in the exchange, for in the interaction gift and return-gift have been given and received such that one can enjoy one’s new found status as gift recipient and co-contributor to the agape event. Where a sense of worth is derived from one’s self-authored life plans, when success is achieved there is the feeling of pride. But the worth one attains through being an admirer is not accompanied by pride but by joy. There is no pride in being a gift recipient yet a joyful self-affirming humility in having prepared oneself to be open to such exchanges and being rewarded for “a willingness to stand in a relaxed receptivity before an object [with] a certain reverence, epistemological humility, and a willingness to participate.”54

By pulling together some of the key points of the chapter it is now possible to provide an analysis of the relation of self-worth, shame and admiration. Deigh has highlighted what may be called identity worth. It is the sense of worth that is derived from belonging to a particular class, culture, social group, or more simply the human species. I think there is also an empowering sense of worth a person gains from being of worth to others, particularly in being an admirer of their qualities and skills. In outbreaks of shame we lose our worth-to-others as an admirer. This is because in outbreaks of shame there has been a rupture to or an interruption of the normal possibilities for gift-exchange wherein as an admirer one has a joyful sense of one’s worth. At every level of admiration, the admirer gains a measure of the worth associated with, belonging to and contributing to some good in the world. At the social level, approving of socially valuable qualities in others accords a person with a sense of belonging to a community. In applauding the medical researcher, for example, there is a sense of one being-of-worth in the world because one supports and encourages the good making qualities of others. Where admiration is experienced because some specific good impacts directly upon oneself, self-worth is confirmed in having one’s
own values validated and exemplified by another. To have the values that ground my sense of worth confirmed and to see the beauty and excellence that can come from a belief in such values, is a sure confirmation of my being-of-worth in the world.

While there is a sense of self-worth in the admiration because one’s own good sense and excellent taste have been confirmed, it would be little more than a worth associated with one’s self-esteem but for the fact that there is also the sense of worth that comes from having satisfied another person’s desire for esteem. The praise or acclaim that the admired person receives fulfils her desire for esteem and herein lies the worth-to-others that inheres in being an admirer. To praise another is to fulfil her desire for esteem and since one will praise because one has received from another some gift, the praise will be warm and genuine not a begrudging response in accord with a convention or social etiquette. As Heidegger says, “what would become of the ski-jumper or a race driver . . . if we did not show our admiration for him.”55 It would be a mistake to interpret such confirmation as self-affirmation from an egoist perspective. In confirming-admiration, as much as the admirer gains worth through the validation of her excellent taste, as she sees it, there is also the worth she gains from having responded in admiration and what this means for the esteem of the other person. This fellow feeling, as it may be called, is described nicely by Branden when he says, “feeling confident of his value”, the man of self-esteem “will be drawn to self-esteem in others; what he will desire most in human relationships is the opportunity to feel admiration.”56

In high admiration, the sense of self-worth is almost forgotten in the delight and joy of being privy to the manifestation of something precious. To enable oneself to be privy in this way requires a preparation of the sort highlighted by Sam Keen in Chapter Three. One needs to prepare oneself for such exchanges by accepting, first and foremost, that one’s self-worth will be enhanced in such exchanges. Without this element of self-interest, one
will not believe it of much consequence to be able to admire others. One’s self-worth is enhanced in high admiration because being privy to what is precious is a privilege. It is a privilege to be a party to gift-exchange since being presented with and apprehending the precious is an uplifting source of self-worth which as much as one prepares oneself for the experience can only take place when another has an excellence that captures one’s attention.

One cannot achieve a privileged status through one’s own efforts alone. There is a dependence on others to provide the conditions where one can become a privileged participant in the *agape* event. It is another’s qualities and skills, etc., that enable one to occupy this privileged position. Equally, however, without my being willing and able to apprehend another’s qualities as precious, there would not be gift-exchange, and the pride and joy the other experiences, and is entitled to experience, would not be possible. The admirer, therefore, derives a significant portion of her self-worth from being-of-worth-to-others as an admirer. To admire is to be a participant in a new creation which has at its centre either something precious presented to us that which brings joy, or a new sense of delight in having found a validation our own values in another’s excellence. Each of these exchanges is a new creation; one the more brilliant and exhilarating than the other no doubt, but each possessing a self-affirmation and a communion with the person admired that raises the spirits of the admirer above the gravitational pull of ontological shame.

Whatever the degree of admiration I have for another my sense of self-worth is enhanced.57 Even in sneaking admiration, my acknowledgment of the bravado and audacity of the con-artist is a recognition that these qualities are or can be good making qualities that in a different context can be openly admired. Associated with criminality these qualities are rarely openly admired, but sneaking a moment in admiration for such qualities implies that we are prepared to openly express our admiration if and when these qualities are put to
better use. The spy or intelligence agent, for example, is a type of con-artist, sanctioned by the government to gather information and commit other acts of subterfuge in the national interest. Significantly, both the con-artist and the spy possess the skill of concealing their true identity. This suggests that we admire subterfuge partly because we see the value attached to acts of concealment where others are thought not to deserve being told the whole truth and in some cases deserve to be deliberately misled.

As we saw in Chapter Four, we develop skills to mislead where we think it in our interest that certain things remain undercover. In many cases our lack of candour and misleading statements are motivated by the desire to avoid being exposed in shame and to protect the worth we have, but we are also amenable to subterfuge that can give us an advantage over others, and these two possibilities account for why we catch ourselves sneaking a moment of admiration for the person engaged in such undercover activities. It is as if we understand ourselves to be like-minded agents in the world, who to a large degree also operate under the cover of artful disguise. We recognise the value in concealing from others all but the things that they need to know and this appreciation for concealment spills over into an admiration for skilful disguise, confidence trickery and subterfuge.

Earlier I voiced my objections to Deigh’s idea that acts of concealment are aimed at protecting one’s self-worth. Acts of concealment, on my account, are designed to cover ontological shame not protect self-worth. It is only where one’s incapacity to self-admire has not been exposed that it can be said that an act of concealment is an act to protect one’s worth. It is only in anticipatory shame that Deigh’s interpretation of concealment as protecting one’s worth holds good. Where a person experiences anticipatory shame there will be a covering of not only one’s ontological shame but also of whatever worth one has. This protection of one’s worth or covering for ontological shame in anticipatory shame is not present in cases of acute shame where ontological shame has broken through all of the
protective layers. That there is no means of protecting one’s covering in acute shame can be seen in the case of Earl Mills. There is no anticipatory shame for Mills; no opportunity to cover his lack of worth as an Indian. Once he is asked to dance, and knowing that he cannot dance, there is no chance for him to protect the worth he is supposed to have as an Indian. Those who have asked him to dance expect him to be able to dance because that is what Indians do. So Mills experiences shame because the worth he believes others expect him to have, however unwarranted these expectations might be in his particular case, he does not have. This, I think, is how we can best explain the sudden and sharp feelings of shame he feels. This is to say that while Deigh has expanded the notion of self-worth to include the worth inhering in one’s identity, the worth in one’s identity is only protected when there is disclosure of ontological shame and not exposures of it that manifest themselves in acute shame. The vital difference between disclosure and exposure will be explained shortly. Suffice now, to say, that whether one’s worth is self-created or inheres in an identity, acts of concealment are acts to cover for or cover up ontological shame rather than a covering of or protection of self-worth.

Returning to Deigh’s idea that shame is “a reaction to a threat, specifically, the threat of demeaning treatment one would invite in giving the appearance of someone of lesser worth”, I have suggested that this description of a certain reaction which Deigh calls shame could also fit the description of anger. Anger is a common reaction to the threat of demeaning treatment but what might save the description from being equally as applicable to anger as it is to shame is a generous interpretation of Deigh’s use of the phrase “that one would invite in giving the appearance.”58 If this is to be understood as an acknowledgment on the part of the person that she cannot expect to be seen in any other light, that she has only herself to blame, then the notion of an invitation would seemingly rule out the possibility of anger. But not all that we take as an invitation is intended to be so by the person issuing it. We speak of a person ‘inviting trouble’, for example, without meaning
that the person is intentionally seeking trouble, but rather that her actions are likely to attract it. It is plausible, therefore, that the ‘reaction to a threat of demeaning treatment’ will be one of anger at being seen as a person of less worth than one thinks one has, rather than shame. The association between anger and shame is, I think, just as Tangney and Dearing suggest; that “[a]nger is easily substituted for unacknowledged shame because of the latter’s aversive quality and the inhibition of activity associated with it”59 If so, this would amount to bypassed or disowned shame rather than acute shame.

The relation between anger and shame is important because it highlights the depth of feeling we have over being brought to shame, of being-in-shame. Anger is not an untypical response to the threat of being exposed in shame, but it is only ever justified where it can be shown that some injustice has occurred. Where we think anger justified we grant it moral status and find an alternative term to describe it. We call it resentment and sometimes indignation. Not all anger can be justified, however. In fact most of it cannot be justified, because, on reflection, the grounds for moral resentment or indignation fail to be established. What was merely a slight or an accident or a needful reproof, disqualifies the anger from being an expression of moral resentment. Nevertheless, the suspicion that another is attempting to shame one or that some actual shaming has taken place either to oneself or to another with whom one empathises, is sufficient for anger to arise as a means of resistance. An affront – meaning we are confronted with another’s attempt to reduce us to an object of shame – stirs a response that is akin to moral resentment but which is not yet justified in such moral terms. As I shall argue at greater length in Chapter Seven, there is a primordial resentment against being-in-shame, and this primordial resentment lies at the heart of anger. Primordial resentment begins to take its moral turn through a distinction being made between an exposure to, and disclosure of, ontological shame and how the former is unwarranted and never acceptable, while the latter is not only acceptable but necessary for a balanced sense of self-worth. Without such disclosures, ontological shame
will be covered-up and denied, and the resentment against being incapable of self-admiration will fester into negative and destructive actions against others. Primordial resentment turns into bitterness against life itself when feelings of shame are disowned and the source of such feelings is covered-up and denied. It is not a matter that once a person is reconciled to her ontological shame from which she develops a self-respect, that feelings of resentment simply disappear. A reconciliation does not erase or annul this primordial resentment, rather it makes possible a moral turn or modification to it, so that instead of resenting one’s incapacity to self-admire there is an active resistance against actions that expose the shame of this incapacity.

Now that the four different aspects of self-worth have been explained, I will conclude this chapter with a final note on the relation of anger to shame, and in turn to self-worth that, had it been introduced earlier would have made far less sense than I think it makes now. According to Goldberg, one of the best accounts for understanding the decisive factors involved in shame was offered by Hegel who claimed that “shame is an anger about what ought not be.” I would argue that ‘an anger over what ought not to be’, is in fact a primordial resentment against our incapacity to self-admire. The anger Hegel claimed to be at the root of shame is in fact a primordial resentment against ontological shame which if left untamed and directed against needless exposures of shame, will become a resentment against life itself. Only through a reconciliation to ontological shame, only through self-respect, can shame be experienced without one’s primordial resentment against ‘what ought not to be’ bursting forth in anger. And only through self-respect can this primordial resentment against ‘what ought not to be’ take its moral turn and become resentment proper or moral resentment. Where one has self-respect, the thought of ‘what ought not be’, is not about the unfairness of one’s incapacity to self-admire but about how unjust and undignified it is to have one’s own incapacity to self-admire exposed. Where it is exposed so that the person is left without covering, primordial resentment is redirected against those
who, without good cause, expose others to their shame. The moral turn of resentment indicates a valuing of one’s own worth - and that of others on whose behalf one can also feel resentment - for it is this worth that covers ontological shame. Moral resentment, therefore, is a necessary defence against the harmful effects of having this worth appear as nothing more than a vacuous charade. Yet matters are not quite so simple as this. Because there is a difference in the self-worth that arises from esteem and that which comes from self-respect, in defending against exposures of shame that undermine self-worth, moral resentment needs to be directed against actions that are disrespectful rather than actions that exhibit disesteem. This is an issue I explore more fully in Chapter Seven. Before doing that, however, it is necessary to further underscore the role of ontological shame in our emotional responses, in particular how it plays out in matters of wrongdoing, guilt and feelings of shame, and this is the task of the next chapter.
ENDNOTES

2 Deigh. 1995, p. 150.
3 Ibid., p. 151.
5 Rawls. 1995, p. 129.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., p. 152.
10 Ibid.
11 Fear could also be included.
15 Deigh 1995, p. 150.
16 Ibid., pp. 150, 151.
17 Ibid., p. 134.
20 Ibid., p. 6.
21 Taylor 1985. p 78.
22 Ibid., p. 79.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., p. 78.
25 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., p. 129.
31 Cottingham 2003, p. 32.
32 Ibid., p. 30, 31. I interpret Cottingham to mean one’s value in the whole gambit of human endeavour and ingenuity. On this point Taylor says; “to have any thought about what might or might not be important to pursue in life [a person] cannot treat herself as if she were an isolated being. If she is to have a sane view of herself and the life she wants to lead she cannot ignore the evidence of her impact on others and their reactions to her.” 1985, p. 94.
34 Ibid., p. 128.
36 Russell 1930, p. 86.
37 Taylor 1985, p. 79.
Ibid., p. 81. Taylor also adds “it may well be that keeping one’s self-respect is often seen as grounds for feeling proud.” I would simply refine this to say that the form of self-affirmation at issue here may be called self-assurance rather than pride.

Further to footnote 38, this chapter, I am saying that there is self-affirmation rather than pride in self-respect, and it is the self-assurance that comes from having self-respect that grounds one’s confidence.

Immanuel Kant 1964. *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*. trans. H. Paton. New York: Harper Torchbooks. pp. 428, 436. According to Dillon, *achtung* is the appropriate response to dignity. While this may indeed be the meaning Kant gives to the word, I think *achtung* carries a sense of ‘danger’ and infers ‘be warned’, so that it refers to that which threatens dignity or self-worth. p. 16. This is to say that there is an element of ‘fear’ or ‘beware’ in Kant’s use of the word Respekt, a point noted also by Joel Feinberg. 1973. “Some Conjectures about the Concept of Respect”, *The Journal of Social Philosophy* 3, no. 2, pp 1-3.


This has consequences for those in chronic shame and for those who are shamed by unjustifiable social attitudes. Their opinions and assessments of others are consistently discounted, depriving them of their sense of self-worth they can have in being-of-worth-to-others.


This is to admit that there are occasions of misplaced or inappropriate admiration, and that a person’s ego and perhaps self-worth can be bolstered by adoration of the wrong people and for the wrong reasons. An analysis of admiration that becomes adoration, is outside the bounds of this thesis, but I suspect that in adoration the nature of the gift-exchange is different from the gift-exchange of agape admiration; that there is a subordination and imbalance between the parties that forecloses on the necessity of the person completing the exchange in a show of modesty. I alluded to modesty as completing the exchange in Chapter Three. In Chapter Eight, I expand upon this idea in a discussion of humility.


Carl Goldberg, 1996. “The Role of Shame in the Impediment of Intimacy”, in Clinical Approaches to Adult Development. New Jersey: Ablex, p. 261. I have referred to Goldberg because I have been unable to find the exact quotation from Hegel. I have included Goldberg’s interpretation because I do not want to claim that the idea of shame as ‘anger at what ought not to be’ is my own.
Chapter Six: Shame, Guilt and Remorse.

If we come to understand our shame, we may also better understand our guilt.

Bernard Williams

Shame may be unidentified . . . because it is hidden behind ideas of guilt in the person’s mind, possibly as a defence against the unpleasant feeling of shame itself.

Stephen Pattison

To complete this section of chapters dealing specifically with shame, I turn to the complex relation between shame, guilt, and remorse. I begin with an analysis of shame and guilt then provide an account of remorse which explains the fine grained differences between feelings of being guilty and taking full responsibility for wrongdoing.

One need only read through the psychology literature to realise just how strongly held is the view that shame and guilt are different emotions. The most common basis upon which this difference is founded is detailed in the work of Helen Block Lewis’s book *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis*. Lewis proposes a difference in focus between “I did that horrible thing (shame),” and “I did that horrible thing (guilt)” and this ‘influential distinction’ as June Price Tangney calls it, has found its way into almost every study into the self-conscious emotions. In shame, “the whole self is evaluated negatively and exposes our core identity as worthless”, in guilt "our primary concern is with a particular behaviour somewhat apart from the self." It might be thought that the difference in emotional response is due to different situations, but this is not evident in various studies conducted by Price Tangney and Dearing or by other researchers. Although both guilt and shame can be generated by the same event, shame in these situations involves a focus one’s unworthy self in the eyes of others, whereas guilt involves a focus on one’s wrongful act. This differential focus likely underlies differences in guilt and shame action tendencies, either to hide one’s unworthy self in shame or correct a wrongdoing in guilt.
It is not only in psychology that Block Lewis’s distinction between guilt and shame has been influential. Among philosophers this distinction is also maintained, typically in terms of some dissociation between self and act. Gabriele Taylor, for example, says that guilt differs from shame in that “guilt is typically experienced as involving a split in the self: an ‘alien self’ has emerged that stains or disfigures what one is.”\textsuperscript{7} Where “one feels shame about an action, one typically sees oneself as being all of one piece, and thinks of oneself as being thoroughly degraded by the lack of an excellence that one desires to possess.”\textsuperscript{8} Guilt differs from shame in that “it is not felt at the recognition of the failure of a worthy self but is felt rather at the recognition of the emergence of a worse self.”\textsuperscript{9} Where there is danger of a split of the self into the real and alien self, there is the “possibility that the alien self, the doer of the forbidden deed, might assume control, and so what is important to the person feeling guilt is to purge himself of that self and thereby regain his (degree of) integrity”.\textsuperscript{10} So for Taylor, "feelings of guilt are localised in a way in which feelings of shame are not localised; they concern themselves with the wrong done, not with the kind of person one thinks one is.”\textsuperscript{11}

The idea of a difference between shame and guilt has widespread appeal, across all the disciplines, and psychological studies have been carried out with just this ‘differential focus’ or ‘self-act dissociation’ in mind. The general idea is that in shame, one thinks of oneself as a bad person, not simply as someone who has done a bad thing. However, one philosopher who finds the self-act dissociation view of guilt mistaken is Roberts.\textsuperscript{12} His disagreement is based on what he considers basic to guilt, that it is an emotion of self assessment and not just act assessment, so that there is not just a focus on particular acts but, as with shame, on the global self. He recognises that while "self-dissociation is no doubt one way to ‘deal with’ guilt” - say, as it were, “my guilty self is not the real me”, he does not think “this is an essential characteristic of the emotion [and] it is clear that the pain
of guilt depends on seeing the morally sullied self as not alien, but as being one’s real self.\textsuperscript{13}

We shall have reason to return to Roberts’s ideas shortly, as his view on guilt involving the whole or global self, stands at odds with the differential focus theory. But because Block Lewis’s ideas have had it biggest influence in psychology, it is to this field that we will first turn to investigate the validity, or otherwise, of the theory. As Price Tangney and Dearing have based their studies largely on this distinction it is interesting to note their frustration over research data that does not fit neatly with Block Lewis’s differential focus theory. They begin by acknowledging “there are very few, if any ‘classic’ shame-inducing or guilt-inducing events, . . . most types of events (e.g., lying, cheating, stealing, failing to help another, disobeying parents) were cited by some people in connection with feelings of shame and by other people in connection with guilt.”\textsuperscript{14} These results do not, of themselves, undermine Lewis’s distinction, but they do alert us to the difficulties associated with clearly establishing the validity of the differential focus theory. If, as Price Tangney and Dearing found, “bright, well educated young adults” among the undergraduates they studied, “could not provide consistent, meaningful definitions of these common human emotions. . . .” and they could not articulate any consistent clear differences between shame and guilt,” then perhaps it is because there is, as Roberts suggests, no dissociation between self and act.\textsuperscript{15} The researchers note that college students aren’t alone in this regard. “A quick review of the psychological literature”, they suggest, “shows that the "experts" too, often use the terms shame and guilt inconsistently or interchangeably.”\textsuperscript{16}

In two sets of earlier studies she and her colleagues conducted, Price Tangney notes that there was very little to support Lewis’s distinction. "These analyses of phenomenological ratings didn’t find the hypothesised difference on the key dimension assessing focus on self versus behavior."\textsuperscript{17} This key dimension or ‘single critical item’ as the researchers also call
it, failed to register with the participants. Tangney and her colleagues then conducted a secondary analysis and found that "the rating for blaming self versus blaming behavior was uncorrelated with the degree to which participants wished they had acted differently". This leads them to conclude that "the students didn’t really understand the distinctions we were trying to make." Eventually the results the researchers expected to find were achieved by introducing ‘counterfactual’ thinking into the experiment - asking the students to imagine how past events might have otherwise unfolded if some aspect of the situation or one’s actions had been different. To their satisfaction, the counterfactual approach provided them with support for the Lewis distinction. "As it turns out,” they say, “shame and guilt differ not so much in the content or structure of the situation but rather in the manner in which people construe self-relevant negative events.”

Guilt for Price Tangney and Dearing involves internal, specific and unstable attributions. On the other hand, the shame experience is likely to involve internal, stable, and global attributions. In the construal of a ‘self-relevant negative event’ as fitting the description of guilt, Price Tangney and Dearing provide the following example.

A young woman may feel guilt for cheating on her boyfriend. Focusing on that specific indiscretion, she feels a sense of tension, remorse and regret over what she has done. She knows she’s responsible; she made the ill-advised decision to stray (an internal attribution). But she recognises that the causes of this transgression are fairly specific; she’s not generally a promiscuous or disloyal person (specific attributions to causes that affect only a narrow range of events). Moreover, the factors that led to her infidelity are unique to the current space and time; she sees the causes as variable (unstable attributions).

I shall have reason to return at the end of the chapter to this ‘attribution based’ distinction between guilt and shame; but for now I turn to the researchers’ example of the attributions in shame.

A young man in similar circumstances (cheating on his girlfriend) may construe the ‘self-relevant negative event’ as an acute sense of shame and therefore be “feeling disgraceful and small, wanting to hide, even disappear.” Focusing on himself, he knows he is responsible (an internal attribution). Moreover, he views the causes of this transgression as likely to affect many aspects of his life, as characteristic of the type of person he is - disloyal, untrustworthy, immoral, even reprehensible! In short, he makes attributions to quite fundamental features of himself that have much broader implications beyond the specific transgression at hand (global attribution). Finally, he views these
factors as persisting across time (stable attributions); he’ll be facing the same character flaws tomorrow, and the next day, and the next.22

As certain as the authors are that they have the formulation right for shame, “[t]he link between feelings of guilt and internal, unstable and specific attributions appear more tenuous . . . In our studies of undergraduates . . . the attributional style correlates of guilt proneness did not reflect the expected results.”23 They guess at why this might be and suggest that this set of attributions “can result in an even broader range of reactions, with guilt being only one such possible response.”24 Another possibility they consider is that “because of the specific and unstable nature of the cause, the person may very well instead downplay the importance of his or her role; for example, “well I did it but it was only one time...” That is, there will be little internal attribution, and as a result “little negative affect of any kind.” 25

The authors also consider “possible cognitive strategies for resolving feelings of shame”. A person may have learned to counter her shame experiences with, among other things, "corrective" self-talk, reminding herself that she isn’t, after all, a selfish lout of a person just because, for example, she declined to help a friend move last weekend. They conclude that

[fe]elings of shame pose the most serious threat to self-esteem because it is the self, not a specific behavior, that is the focus of negative evaluation. In contrast the guilt experience represents a less profound challenge to one’s enduring self because what’s at issue is a specific behavior somewhat apart from the global self.26

So what is to be made of these ‘findings’? Regarding the cognitive strategy for resolving feelings of shame, one must ask if this is not what happens when a person says she is feeling guilty? On this view, an admission of feeling guilty may simply be a cognitive strategy for the affects of shame she has felt in accepting her guilt. It is also possible that the "corrective" self-talk involves, to stay with the author’s terminology, the sort of distancing from stable and global attributions that they claim are indicative of shame, so
that when a person claims she is “not a selfish lout. I did one selfish thing”, she may be pleading guilty to an act over which she feels shame but which she does not wish to fully acknowledge as shame. Bypassed shame, as we saw in Chapters Four and Five, is an unacknowledged shame and one way of resolving feelings of shame, even when they are experienced only as a wince or jolt, is to claim that one’s feelings are those of guilt rather than of shame. This suspicion that confessed ‘feelings of guilt’ may involve unacknowledged shame is heightened when the authors also include in the coping strategies for shame, a “more affectively based strategy,” which might involve “engaging in a pleasurable and/or pride inducing activity, re-establishing a connection with more positive domains of self-esteem.”27 As it stands, this reconnection to self-esteem does not mean that shame is resolved by suppressing it, but the possibility cannot be ruled out that such a reconnection may well indicate an unacknowledged shame, even where there has been an admission of guilt. This last statement requires explanation, and I shall return to this point in due course; but it is to philosophical accounts of the self-act dissonance that I now want to turn.

The level of dissociation we have touched upon is related to how the ‘self’ or the ‘I’ has dropped out of the picture in many accounts of guilt. Bernard Williams says of guilt that it can

\[\text{direct one towards those who have been wronged and harmed, and demand reparation in the name, simply, of what has happened to them. But it cannot by itself help one to understand one’s relations to those happenings, or to rebuild the self that has done these things and the world in which that self has to live. Only shame can do that, because it embodies conceptions of what one is and of how one is related to others.} \]28

There is a different perspective on dissociation at the heart of Williams’s argument. The mere fact, he says, ‘that we have two words does not, in itself, imply there is any great psychological difference between shame and guilt. It might merely be that we set up an extra verbal marker within one and the same psychological field, in order to pick out some
particular applications of what would otherwise be shame.”29 What arouses guilt in an
agent, says Williams,

is an act or omission of a sort that typically elicits from other people anger, resentment, or
indignation. What the agent may offer in order to turn this away is reparation; he may also fear
punishment or may inflict it on himself. What arouses shame, on the other hand, is something that
typically elicits from others contempt or derision or avoidance.30

Here is an aspect of guilt, the full import of which Williams himself fails to take up for
closer examination. If, as he says of shame, that in essential ways, it "continues to work for
us . . . by giving through the emotions a sense of who one is and of what one hopes to be”,
and that “it mediates between act, character, and consequence, and also between ethical
demands and the rest of life,”31 then it is entirely possible that guilt is a verbal ‘marker’ to
pick up some particular application of what would otherwise be shame, and it does so in a
way to elicit from others the least demeaning response. If, as is commonly agreed, we have
some control over our emotions, then the possibility that ‘guilt’ as a verbal marker, denotes
a chosen and preferred form of presentation to others in the face of expected negative
reactions seems not only plausible but sensible.

It can be argued that it makes good sense to prefer facing anger and resentment rather than
derision and contempt. Knowing that an admission of guilt will more likely attract anger
and resentment rather than contempt, can we not present our feelings to others as those of
guilt rather than admit our shame? The important thing to note is that the distinction
Williams makes between what shame and guilt elicit can be better understood when we set
aside any preconceived ideas about a different feel or affective dimension to shame and
guilt, and attend to the benefits that accrue from being able, as an object of disapproval, to
elicit the least demeaning response. I would suggest that a confession of guilt elicits from
others a far less demeaning response than does an open display of shame. We treat those
pleading guilty as capable of returning to our moral community. In response to open and
uncovered displays of shame, however, there is a sense of contagion, and given our
vulnerability to ontological shame, not wishing to be ‘caught up’ in another’s shame is understandable, and such exposures bring shame to us.

Two philosophers who have ideas relevant to the idea that guilt has much to do with what response it will elicit from others, are Robert C. Roberts and Patricia Greenspan. Although Roberts retains the guilt/shame distinction, he disagrees, as already noted, with the notion of a differential focus between guilt and shame. "Like guilt, shame is a global negative self-assessment." He views emotions as concern-based construals, where basic or dispositional concerns ground a particular emotion from which then arises what he calls a ‘consequent concern. ’Guilt’s consequent concern “is to be free from blameworthiness.”

A sense of blameworthiness can come in either of the following forms: in particular acts (omissions), and in the accusatory power of others. This is to say that in addition to guilt over wrongful acts, guilt can also be experienced in face of the ‘accusatory power’ of others. "The power of anger judgements and punishment and rejection to induce guilt feelings explains why people who are innocent of any wrongdoing and know themselves to be so will sometimes feel guilty under questioning and accusation". While as ‘moral rationalists’, he continues, “we may feel uncomfortable allowing the sense of blameworthiness to be detached from an ascription of responsibility; but this does seem to be allowed within the concept of guilt as an emotion.” Here we are faced with the sorts of disapproval touched upon in the chapter on the approbative desire, and John Locke’s words are worth recalling: “he must be of a strange and unusual constitution, who can content himself to live in constant disgrace and disrepute with his own particular society.”

Roberts compares guilt to remorse, which unlike guilt does seem to require such an ascription to oneself of personal responsibility. On Roberts’s account responsibility obtains in both guilt and remorse, but only in remorse is the responsibility directly connected, we might say, to a blameworthy act or wrongdoing.
In light of Roberts’ argument about blameworthiness, one source of which at least, is the accusatory power of others, the possibility of guilt as a chosen response to the potential for feelings of acute shame becomes increasingly plausible. Roberts argues much along these lines when he says "[i]t is largely in virtue of this optionality of construal that one has emotional options,"38 so that one can construe a situation in such a way as to make guilt a preferable option to the emotion of shame. This notion of guilt as a preferred option, can be further strengthened by some of the ideas presented by Greenspan.39

According to Greenspan, both shame and guilt emotions “rest on the internalization of others’ reactions, but shame seems to involve a thought of being viewed by others with scorn, whereas guilt involves accusatory anger."40 The internalisation of others’ reactions seems to indicate that these external reactions figure prominently in the formation of one emotion over another. Guilt differs from shame, on Greenspan’s account, because guilt involves an emotional self-punishment on behalf of others.41 While she retains the standard definition, "guilt is a self-attributed responsibility for a wrong," Greenspan explains guilt as an identificatory mechanism, by which she means that "[t]he guilty agent is assumed to be emotionally at odds with himself as a result of the kind of identification with others. . . the agent identifies with the resentment of the person he harms or otherwise treats unjustly," so that “making up for a serious wrong . . . involves anticipating others’ reactions by inflicting punishment on oneself.”42

Anticipating others’ reactions and inflicted self-punishment can be understood as a process of appeasement aimed at eliciting the least demeaning reaction from others. Identifying with the resentment of another can be interpreted in two ways, or in fact have two motivational causes. It may simply be a matter of identifying with another for the other’s sake – yes she has every right to be righteously angry - or it could be an identification based on a recognition of the sort of negative reaction that is deserved and will be attracted
if one does not present oneself as taking responsibility for the harm or unjust treatment one has caused another. It is because Greenspan considers the reparative urge to be a part of guilt that she favours the first of these possibilities; guilt is an identificatory mechanism wherein one identifies with the justness of another’s anger. But if guilt does not, by itself, carry this reparative urge and empathy for others, then the identification will more likely be with the impact these reactions from others will have upon oneself, irrespective of the justness of the reactions. In either case, as Greenspan acknowledges in her own experience of “testing out the standard distinctions,” between shame, guilt and remorse, "it often seems clear that both guilt and shame are in play." Once more, in accord with Price Tangney and Dearing’s well-educated research participants and experts, Greenspan cannot easily distinguish and articulate any consistently clear differences between shame and guilt. But as she points out, Guilt "is essentially a made-up emotion term . . Its use in English for the sense of guilt, around the time of the Protestant Reformation arose originally as a mistake". In other languages, Greenspan notes, there is no such noun but instead a referring to feelings of being guilty - "which presumably can include feelings of moral shame."

An understanding of guilt as a made-up emotion term is greatly assisted, when, along with Taylor, we note that guilt is basically a legal concept. As Taylor says, guilt “has to do with having put oneself in a position where punishment is due and forgiveness possible.” It is not uncommon in matters of law that a person pleads guilty, for such a plea provides benefits to all the parties involved. For the offender the benefit resides principally in receiving a lighter sentence than would be given if a ‘not-guilty’ plea is entered. The courts are saved time, and often, but not always, the victim is satisfied with the justice obtained. So it may be with events that are not necessarily illegal but which cause harm or offence. To admit one’s guilt in these cases is to make public one’s responsibility for the
wrongdoing. The plea of guilt reduces the likelihood of being seen is as worthy of disdain, contempt and possible social exclusion.

All this suggests that pleading one’s guilt is a chosen strategy to alleviate shame as much as to confess one’s blameworthiness. As Janice Lindsay-Hartz, Joseph De Rivera, and Michael F. Mascolo suggest, guilt can be either a good or poor choice.

A ‘good’ guilt or ‘adaptive choice’ may be defined as one that leads a person primarily to focus on caring for some person or prospect other than the self (with the ego receding to the background), while a "poor" guilt or maladaptive choice may be defined as one that leads a person to focus on the ego (with concern for the other receding). This line of thought suggests that the experience of guilt is adaptive to the extent that it is congruent with a genuine caring for others who have been injured, and maladaptive to the extent that it is motivated by a fear of rejection or is used as a defense against the realization that one cannot control certain unwanted events (leading to a denial of certain limitations).48

Lindsay-Hartz, De Rivera, and Mascolo further suggest that “guilt often involves a clouding of one’s understanding of one’s motivations”, so that it is “easily enlisted as a defence that protects us from exploring potentially worrisome motives . . . Guilt enables us to avoid integrating the negative implications of our actions with our sense of identity.”49 It is this obscurity about our motives and our identity which differentiates guilt from shame, according to the authors. When shamed, they say, “we are quite clear about our sense of identity as a horrible, ugly, bad or awful person. We are who we do not want to be; we embody an anti-ideal. Indeed when guilty people become clear about their motives, then they often begin to feel ashamed instead of feeling guilty.”50

We are struggling to make headway with the differential focus theory of shame and guilt. At every turn it becomes increasingly clear that it contains improbable propositions about how we distinguish shame and guilt. There is, however, one final account of shame and guilt which might yet save the theory from collapse. A variation on the differential focus is provided by Michael Lewis. "If the shame remains unacknowledged,” he writes, “a person may decide to focus on another emotional state. I call this emotional substitution.”51
Although Lewis concentrates his attention on emotions such as anger, sadness, rage and depression as substitutes for shame, presumably he thinks guilt can be also be substituted for shame. “[I]ndividuals who are unwilling to experience shame”, he says, “deny their shame through the mechanism of focusing on their action rather than on their entire self. In other words, they practice specific, as opposed to global attribution . . . I think it reasonable to think that shame can be bypassed and transformed into guilt.” Unacknowledged shame has negative effects, so that if guilt is substituted for unacknowledged shame, it will not be entirely beneficial or an honest reflection of the affect of shame. There is another side to the story for Lewis. There are occasions when the denial of shame “may be adaptive, at least in part, since it protects the psyche from an intense and painful emotional experience.” This leads Lewis to claim that “emotional substitution for shame, within limits, is an absolutely normal process” because “no one likes to experience shame and we all try to dissipate the shame feeling once it occurs.” It is, however, he says, “important that we own at least some of our shame for at least some of the time . . so that we will know what we should or should not feel, think, or do”, for if we continue to allow shame to go unacknowledged it will ultimately lead to intrapsychic conflict.

To this point, in my view, Lewis makes perfectly good sense, but he then begins to vacillate over the relation between guilt and shame because he continues to treat guilt as a distinct emotion that can occur without shame; “guilt can exist in its own right,” he says, and “I . . . accept the idea that one is likely to begin by choosing one or the other.” This view of guilt as a distinct emotion creates difficulties for Lewis because he also says that, “If it is true that people often substitute emotional terms but not the feelings, then guilt without shame would be [an] example of pathology.” So which is it? Is guilt a distinct emotional feeling that can replace the feeling of shame or is it a substitute term for shame? Lewis appears to be in two minds here. He appears to be uncertain whether or not guilt is an emotional substitution for shame or merely a substitute term to denote feelings of shame.
He speaks of feelings of guilt and feelings of shame as if there are two distinct emotions with different affective components to consider and yet, as is so typically found, distinguishing them from one another proves a near impossible task. In a story about a friend who, with no one about and with no harm done to anyone else, runs a red traffic light, he says, "I do not know her full attribution and therefore did not know if she was feeling shame or guilt." So what is to be made of Lewis’s account? It would seem that either ‘feelings’ of guilt are not properly substituted for feelings of shame (and they should be to avoid intrapsychic conflict) or that guilt is merely a term used to denote feelings of shame. In the example above of the woman running the red traffic light, her statement “I feel terrible” can be interpreted to mean either ‘I feel guilty’, ‘I feel ashamed’, or ‘I feel ashamed, but I will describe what I feel as guilt.’

The Lewis account relies ultimately on a supposed difference in ‘attribution’ for shame and guilt – much along the lines outlined earlier and to which we shall return later in the chapter. This is a contentious hypothesis which, as we have seen, fails to convince Roberts. At the conclusion of this chapter I shall turn to some of the research data that Tangney and Dearing present which also casts serious doubt on the validity of the hypothesis. But the notion of different attributions for guilt and shame is not the only ground upon which the differential focus theory has gained acceptance. Much of the plausibility of the differential focus resides in the idea that guilt includes an urge to repair and to rectify – to set things right. This is Greenspan’s view, for example. The reparative urge is something clearly absent in acute shame for all one wants to do in such cases is hide. But does guilt always include a reparative motive? For Roberts this is not the case. In terms of a differential focus, the distinction Roberts makes is between guilt and remorse not guilt and shame. It is in feeling remorse that the focus falls on a particular act or omission. Guilt differs from remorse in “focussing less or not at all on a particular offence and more on the offender’s status of being guilty. . . In remorse one construes oneself as having committed an offence;
in guilt one who is morally spoiled." Remorse is a negative feeling over a specific bad or immoral act which one wishes to rectify or to atone for. It is remorse rather than guilt that includes the urge to repair and effect a recovery.

This perspective on remorse allows us to see guilt as impacting upon the self in a way many psychologists refute, for if the reparative urge belongs to feelings of remorse and not necessarily to the so called ‘feeling’ of being guilty, then we shall need to re-examine the role of guilt in self-conscious emotions. Likewise with remorse, for there is, I would argue, a ‘moral anguish’ that accompanies the reparative urge in feelings of remorse, and this anguish is directly related to feelings of shame over a wrongdoing. This is to say that there can be problems with remorse because of the associated anguish it carries. As Taylor points out, remorse is not always constructive. It is not constructive where the retention of shame becomes obsessive and “[f]ar from promoting repair work and bringing about a new and hopeful attitude toward the future”, such remorse “may just torment the sufferer.”

It is also possible, says Taylor, “that a person experience remorse but not guilt.” This is possible “where the agent does not see herself burdened or stained by her wrongdoing. The wrong done need not present itself to her who feels remorse as forbidden, she need not think of herself as having disobeyed a categorical command.” I think this is so in some circumstances but not in quite the terms Taylor sets forth. Because she sees guilt as associated only with something that the agent experiences as forbidden and not with every sort of wrongdoing for which we hold ourselves causally responsible, remorse without guilt can be felt over wrongdoings that are not in the strict sense forbidden. But the distinction between ‘feeling’ guilt over something forbidden and feeling remorse over more general wrongdoings that are not forbidden, seems an arbitrary distinction. More likely, I think, is that shame, at some level of intensity, will be experienced over all wrongdoing, forbidden or otherwise, and that remorse can be felt over any of these wrongdoings without there
being any requirement one also plead guilty to these wrongdoings. This is to say that
remorse can be felt without an intervening plea of guilt simply because the remorse has
arisen out of a feeling of shame over the wrongdoing and it possesses, in itself, a form of
responsibility that renders a plea of guilty redundant. Unless there is a specific reason for a
person to admit to the guilt of her wrongdoing, the feelings associated with shame and
remorse are in no need of any supplementary admission of ‘I feel guilty’.

We noted in the previous chapter that self-respect was the awareness of, and reconciliation
to, ontological shame. Now I want to apply this perspective on self-respect to our current
discussion on occurrent shame, guilt and remorse. A quick review is in order. As discussed
earlier there are at least three forms of living with and responding to ontological shame. We
can be reconciled to it, resign ourselves to it or refuse any acknowledgment of it. A
reconciliation to ontological shame is, to borrow a phrase from Desmond, a “deeply
affirmative acceptance” that involves not a “giving in” but a “giving up” of “an untenable
way of being.”63 An untenable way of being involves concealing from ourselves our
incapacity to self-admire and ignoring the consequences that flow from this fact. To
possess self-respect, then, is to give up the untenable way of being and reconcile oneself to
one’s own ontological shame. Roberts’s view is that the emotion of shame arises out of a
basic or dispositional concern to respect oneself: “I am or appear unrespectable (unworthy,
disgraced) in some way that is very important to be or appear respectable (worthy).”64 The
basic concern, we might say, is then: to respect oneself by not allowing ontological shame
to be exposed. When an event takes place that does expose ontological shame, the feeling
of shame is experienced and gives rise to a consequent or occurrent concern over how to re-
cover the exposed shame. The propositional content of the construal leading to shame
would be: it is important I not expose ontological shame, my own or that of others. Where
such exposure has taken place, and I wish that my shame or the shame of others be covered,
the plea of guilt will effect just such a recovering. To be able to effect a guilty plea so that
shame is covered requires a measure of control over one’s emotions, something not possible when assailed by acute shame, but certainly possible in less incisive forms of shame.

In Chapter Four, I introduced the notion that alongside the forms of anticipatory and acute shame, there was a form which I called blameworthy-shame. It is time to explain what I mean by this term, how blameworthy-shame differs from the other forms of shame and why it has particular relevance in matters of guilt. Anticipatory shame is an anxiety over one’s incapacity to self-admire which will be exposed unless one acts in some way to address or cover it. But for various reasons anticipatory shame can be ignored. There is a choice in whether one does or does not respond to the feeling of shame anxiety. It is possible to ignore or pass over it as if the anxiety was not such a bother. This is to say that anticipatory shame can be repressed. Where this occurs, the feelings of shame remain acknowledged and can slip away unidentified, only to find an outlet elsewhere in anger and other negative emotions. In acute shame, one is rendered powerless. It is irrepressible, and one must suffer the indignity of the experience until it passes. In neither case, I would suggest, is a confession of guilt likely or possible. It is unlikely in anticipatory shame because the shame anxiety is self-contained. No one else need know about it or how I deal with it. In acute shame, there is no possibility of pleading guilty because one cannot be guilty of being exposed in one’s ontological shame. Only to the extent that a person considers her incapacity to self-admire a blameworthy feature of her existence, will any thought of being guilty arise. Blameworthy-shame differs from anticipatory and acute shame in that while the manifestation of ontological shame is irrepressible (as in acute shame), there is a choice in how one can cover this exposure (as in anticipatory shame). This is to say that blameworthy-shame cannot be avoided where a person accepts her wrongdoing, yet in experiencing blameworthy-shame there is the opportunity through a plea of guilt to stave off the worst affects of acute shame.
When a person says that she is "feeling guilty" it is unlikely, on my account, that she is experiencing any particular and unique ‘feeling’ of guilt that is distinct from the affect of shame. I am suggesting that the feeling associated with admissions of guilt is in fact the affect of blameworthy-shame. Helen Block Lewis makes the relevant point that “[i]nsofar as guilt is a more articulated experience than shame, and a more dignified one, it may actually absorb shame affect.”66 It is therefore possible to explain why it is in cases of acute shame that claims to be ‘feeling guilty’ rarely succeed to convince either oneself or others. The affect of shame is simply too powerful to be absorbed by a confession of guilt. A confession of guilt may dignify the situation and even appease some people, but no one, least of all the shame sufferer, is fooled into believing that such a confession releases her from the shame exposed or that the shame has been adequately covered. Even the generosity of others in accepting the confession will not hide the fact that the person is grappling with blameworthy shame and the plea of guilt is accepted only on the proviso that a sufficient measure of this shame be retained and left disclosed. In this way a plea of guilt can be taken as a genuine acceptance of full responsibility; not just for the wrongdoing, but for the shame which the wrongdoing has exposed. This is where remorse plays its role. It carries with it a measure of this shame along with the motivation to repair, restore and recover.

With this understanding of how guilt can cover for blameworthy-shame we can see also the possibility of guilt covering-up and concealing ontological shame. A plea of guilt is an acceptable cover for blameworthy-shame where there is evidence of remorse. This is because remorse with its motivation to atone, and the retention of a measure of the shame of a wrongdoing, reveals a shared sense of humanity with those harmed. It displays an empathy with their vulnerability to shame and perhaps more in hope than in expectation, the person wronged understands that remorse may well motivate the offender to put as much effort into atoning as was put into the wrongful act. What she does expect, however,
is that because the offence has brought into full view her incapacity to self-admire, at the
least a disclosure of a like state of shame be clearly evident in the offender.

As I see it, remorse has two components – moral anguish or a modified shame in keeping
with self-respect, and the urge to atone. In remorse, the affects of shame are not dismissed
but identified so that one can be saved from the full wash of shame through the desire to
rectify and atone. There are advantages to dealing with exposures of shame in this way.
Because there need not be an intervening plea of guilt, remorse is imbued with a sensitivity
to the seriousness of the wrongdoing. For the wrongdoer to carry with her a persistent sense
of the shame of her action and to do all she can to rectify the matter is a far more
convincing measure of her fellow feeling or empathy than that which is communicated in
an intervening plea of guilt. No doubt, a plea of guilt can at times be all the person wronged
wants or needs to assist her to recover. There are occasions and events so shameful that all
the victim wants to hear is a confession rather than a full recount of the offence, say in
cases of rape and abuse, where she will have to relive the demeaning event. At other times
and in different circumstances a mere plea of guilt falls well short of what the wronged
person wants to hear and see.67

With what has been so far said about shame, guilt and remorse, it is now plausible to
suggest that there is one basic or dispositional concern that both shame and guilt share in
common; that it is important to act respectfully toward oneself and toward others. Where
there is a failure to respect another’s vulnerability to exposure, one will feel ashamed in
some form, dependent upon whether one has intentionally or accidentally shamed the other
and the contributions made by her to the event. The feeling of shame will then give rise to a
consequent concern over how to re-cover ontological shame. In the case of one’s own acute
shame, there can be, in the immediate, nothing much done to recover, except attempt to
hide. In cases of shame over disrespect for others, there is something that can be done and
done in such a way that one’s own blameworthy-shame will also be addressed. It is to respect them by empathising with their shame, and remorse is both this empathising and addressing of shame. To empathise is to acknowledge a shared human vulnerability to disrespect; a sensitivity to other’s inability to cover disrespect with self-admiration.68

So where does this leave guilt? Although I experience shame over disrespecting others, I can

adopt or choose to plead guilty to my offence and in doing so effect a self-recovery. In a genuine plea of guilt, one wants to say that one’s feelings of shame are in fact feelings associated with being guilty, and the clearest way of indicating one’s acknowledgment of both the shame of the act and one’s responsibility for it, is to tell others one is ‘feeling’ guilty. In doing so, one is not substituting any specific or unique ‘feeling’ of guilt for the feeling of shame, rather one is naming the feeling one has when accepting one's guilt as a feeling of guilt when in fact it is a combination of knowing one has committed a wrongful act and feeling ashamed of having committed it. This is to say that there is no distinct class of guilt feelings; rather we choose to use the locution “I feel guilty’ to indicate our feeling shameful over a wrongdoing.

Some offences admit of little hope of any adequate reparation besides the admission of guilt. We generally seem willing to accept pleas of guilt where there is not much more in the way of reparation possible. In many circumstances, then, a plea of guilt will suffice and even elicit forgiveness. This is a feature of pleading guilty that is worth noting: that pleading guilty often carries with it a hope of being forgiven. We are not responsible for being constituted in such a way that we are permanently vulnerable to bouts of shame. In
fact, it is considered a requisite of responsibility that one indeed be susceptible to feelings of shame; so seeking or offering forgiveness for exhibiting shame is meaningless. One can only be forgiven for one’s wrongdoing, not for how one feels about the wrongdoing and it is here that the differential focus theory gains some credibility. In pleading guilty, a person can elicit forgiveness over a wrongdoing for which she feels shame.

Forgiveness can therefore provide a means of covering over the shame exposed in the wrongdoing. To gain forgiveness is a powerful motivation for pleading guilty, but it is only important in relation to a specific act. One can forgive a person her wrong or bad action but still retain a dislike or wariness of her. The forgiveness one seeks in being remorseful is a qualified forgiveness, unlike the forgiveness sought when pleading one’s guilt. Often in guilt, it can appear that the person seeking forgiveness is demanding or at least expecting the victim to understand and accept the self-act dissonance theory, so that what the offender has done is one bad act and this one bad act is not indicative of who she is as a person. The forgiveness sought through remorse, however, does not have this expectation or demand of the victim, and hence the remorseful person will continue to feel appropriately shamed, even perhaps after she has received forgiveness. As already noted, because remorse carries with it a clear sense of shame or moral anguish along with the desire to atone, what is possible in remorse but not in guilt alone is the emergence of a greater sensitivity to our common vulnerability to disrespect. The retention of a sense of shame in remorse can greatly assist in support of these interpersonal relations. The sense of shame in remorse is not a carried over and modified version of blameworthy-shame. Blameworthy-shame passes and the sense of shame taken up in remorse is a direct and new disclosure of ontological shame which in fact displaces the potentially paralysing effect of blameworthy-shame. The shame carried in remorse addresses or covers-for blameworthy-shame. There is greater focus in remorse on how to atone and therefore on the other person than there is in blameworthy-shame where the focus is oneself. It is in this context that Bernard Williams
makes good sense when he says that shame and not guilt, “embodies conceptions of what
one is and of how one is related to others.”70

To summarise what has been said so far: a specific act for which one feels responsible does
not give rise to ‘feelings’ of guilt but to a feeling of being guilty. This feeling-of-being-
guilty is a form of shame – what I have called blameworthy-shame. A person may or may
not accept the shame that inheres in the feeling-of-being-guilty. She may plead guilty in
order to either cover for or cover-up ontological shame. To the degree that she does accept
her feelings of shame, the plea of guilt will generally be considered an acceptable cover for
ontological shame. If the affect of shame is completely absorbed in the plea of guilt then,
without any accompanying feeling of remorse, the guilt will be shameless and either an
unconvincing cover for ontological shame or a blatant concealment of it. A remorseless
admission of guilt is liable to be a cover-up of ontological shame because in pleading guilty
to a specific wrongdoing (act or omission) the shame of the wrong can remain
unacknowledged. There can be a dissociation in remorseless-guilt of the person from her
actions and this dissociation can become a relatively comfortable way to conceal or cover-
up ontological shame. On the other hand, genuine guilt involves an acknowledgment of the
shame one has exposed but which now, through remorse, one wants to address. Genuine
guilt carries strong and identifiable traces of blameworthy-shame and allays any suspicion
of a dissociation of the person from her wrongful act. We expect remorse to accompany
wrongdoing-guilt, to outlast it, and reveal more of a sensitivity to the impropriety of a
person’s action. It is something we expect the wrongdoer to not rid herself of too quickly.71
This, I suggest, is precisely because we know that wrongdoings are shameful, and that
admissions of guilt can conceal or shield a person from the shame of these wrongdoings.
Where pleas of guilt are forthcoming without an accompanying sense of shame, there is no
recognition of, and therefore no reconciliation to, ontological shame.
What then of cases of so called guilt that occur without any wrongdoing to others? These are occasions where disturbing feelings are evoked by thoughts that one has wasted one’s talents and opportunities have gone begging. Some years ago, Paul Tournier provided insights into this sort of situation when he wrote:

Jean-Paul Sartre forcefully affirms that our life is nothing else than what we have made it. For my part, I believe on the contrary that all we should have liked to make of it and all the nebulous potentialities which we bear within us count. Even then, truly enough, the brutal contrast between the dream and what came out of it weighs upon us as a mass of guilt.72

I would suggest that the feelings described here are unsettling revelations of ontological shame - our incapacity to self-admire. The same can be said of the negative self-related feelings that sweep over us because we have failed to do what we thought at some time we ought to have done. Again, Tournier captures this idea in his description of what he calls capitulation guilt, but which for the moment, I will refer to as self-betrayal.73 What he is referring to is our capitulation to expedience or adopting the least line of resistance instead of acting to uphold our values. These capitulations are a shame to us, which can only be dismissed or repressed for a time, but which eventually creep up on us as a thousand quiet feet “always echoing behind us,” to borrow a phrase from Morano.74 There is “a subtle siege, an unrelenting surveillance of us - a surveillance that we can never escape [and] our psychological state is one of a constant, dull, gnawing enervating dyspepsia.”75 These experiences manifest within us, unwanted and feared because we are confronted with having failed to come anywhere near to being as admirable to ourselves and to others as we are capable. We have had ideals but not the willpower to live by them, or we had the dreams and let petty jealousies and resentment stand in our way.

Wasted opportunities are missed chances to establish self-worth, and capitulations are a betrayal of self-respect. Both, therefore, are causes for feeling ashamed. But recognising ourselves as having failed to create self-worth or to act in accord with our self-respect is often too difficult to face squarely.76 In floundering after a way to dissolve our distress we
often turn to a strategy that works exceptionally well when our acts have wronged another. We turn to the idea of confessing our guilt. We attempt to ‘edit’ our account of the experience to present it as an occasion for ‘feeling’ guilty when in fact it is an occasion for and of shame. By adopting a guilty stance toward these wasted opportunities and self-betrayals, we hope to be able to dissolve such alarming and threatening revelations. The problem is that what can work effectively where wrongdoing against another is at issue, does not work well in matters of failures to capitalise, so to speak, on opportunities to bolster self-esteem and self-respect. It is here that ontological shame reveals its uncompromising tenacity. Where harm has been caused to others, a plea of guilt and evidence of remorse can assist us to recover from the stinging shame of wrongdoing. But in these sorts of failures-to-capitalise we discover that we are unable to effect a self-covering. The acceptance by others of our guilt and remorse provides this covering for us in wrongdoing; but in self-contained failures, we are left to our own devices and our incapacity to self-admire becomes patently clear.

This suggests a reason for why we often lapse into a melancholy mood over such failures. Such moods testify, I think, to our inability to self-cover for our own mistakes. As admiration is the finest covering for our ontological shame, and we cannot self-admire, there can be no satisfactory cover-for failures to render ourselves admirable. Capitulations and missed opportunities are occasions for failing to be, at some level, as worthy of admiration as we know we could be or could have been. In matters of wrongdoing to others, one’s plea of guilt can be seen as an admirable or virtuous acceptance of one’s responsibility. There is, in such an acceptance of responsibility, a form of self-affirmation, not the self-glory of pride but the simple self-approval of acting as a human being is expected to act when having done something to harm another. However, to self-approve and treat oneself as admirable for accepting responsibility for failures that are solely self-referential, strikes most of us I think, as perverse.
I would suggest it is only the person in a permanent state of pride, the person we call proud, who can seemingly ignore and think foolish and inconsequential such past failures. She has, in her mind at least, left nothing of importance undone. All the ‘nebulous potentialities’ and ‘moral self-betrayals’ are merely a distraction from the real business at hand, which is to retain pride in herself. But for those of us who cannot so easily dismiss these past failures and who recognise the irrepressibility of the shame that attaches to them there is always the susceptibility to the onset of moods. It is because one has thought that by taking responsibility in admitting guilt for the shame of these failures-to-capitalise, that one would be spared the ongoing relentless hounding of shame. But accepting responsibility in the form of guilt does not effect the desired coverage of ontological shame and leaves us at the mercy of a “gnawing enervating dyspepsia,” as Morano describes it. This is to say that ontological shame is revealed at its most uncompromising in our moods of despondency, for nothing we do seems to effect a covering for it. If we turn to pride to dispel the dyspepsia, we find our reasons for self-affirmation powerless against our ontological limit. We are reminded in such moods that no matter how successful we may be, being unable to call upon a sense of self-wonderment leaves us defenceless against our inherent shame.

I will conclude this chapter by returning to an issue canvassed briefly in Chapter Four - the social implications of shame, guilt and remorse. In Chapter Four I discussed the concern some writers have expressed over the call for more shaming in society. The issue is aptly described by Stephen Pattison when he states;

[w]hat is needed is probably a greater sense of guilt with its associated notions of responsibility and efficacy. Shame needs to be superseded by guilt if people are to live together in a way that enhances mutual life and well-being. What is required for society to be moral, in the sense of being more respectful and other-regarding, is more guilt and less shame. 78

I agree with this view but with one major proviso. Approving of more guilt and less shame is certainly appropriate where guilt retains a sense of shame; that is, where one’s guilt is
grounded in the affect of shame and acknowledgment of this affect. The way in which guilt can retain an acceptable sense of shame is through remorse where one’s shame is openly on view to demonstrate the level of responsibility being taken for the wrongdoing. Remorse is required so that one’s plea of guilt does not lose touch with the original feelings of shame. So when Pattison goes on to say that “guilt may have a very constructive role in creating and maintaining social relations and moral responsibilities, [whereas] shame has a much more dubious effect,” there is little reason to disagree.79 We are well aware of the benefits for all concerned in accepting responsibility, not just for a wrongdoing, but for the shame of the wrongdoing. Again, he is right when he states that, “[i]nsofar as shame is a condition of exclusion, isolation, and self-preoccupation, it is likely to exercise a negative rather than a positive effect, diminishing possibilities for effective responsibility and action.”80 But this only applies when the comparison is made between chronic shame and proper remorseful guilt. Where it is blameworthy-shame and remorseless guilt at issue, the preference for more guilt and less shame is not so appealing. Suspicions are aroused that in such cases, the person pleading guilty is refusing to accept her shame and is covering-up her ontological shame – that is, she is denying her ontological condition and setting herself above her victim.

An example provided by Nathanson explains this sort of shameless guilt and its prevalence in Western societies.

The most powerful among us feel the most free to undertake courses of action that violate all sorts of rules. Fear of retribution seems unimportant to those who can afford unlimited legal representation or against whom no one has power. Since lawyers can protect us from real damage, with maturity comes relative disdain for civil retribution. Shame is by far the more commanding affective experience in the life of mature, successful people. It is the fall from grace, the loss of face, the forfeiture of social position accompanying exposure that we fear most.81

Nathanson considers feelings of guilt to be among the family of shame emotions. “Try as we might”, he says, “we have been unable to find a physiological mechanism, an innate affect, that would explain guilt in any way other than its relation to shame,” and that, “it
appears that guilt involves, at the very least, shame about action."82 Moreover, says Nathanson, “[e]mpirically we know that guilt often involves both shame that lies latent in hidden action and the fear of retribution.”83 He considers that a moment of discovery or exposure is included in the guilt experience (a feature typical of shame) and that guilt “seems to contain some degree of fear of retaliation on the part of whoever has been wronged . . so that we might say that guilt often involves a co-assembly of the affects of shame and fear.”84

While this account is insightful, some modification of it is required. I would suggest that the type of fear involved here is fear of demeaning treatment which comes from being exposed in one’s shame. The fear of retaliation, therefore, is not associated with guilt as distinct from shame – a point Nathanson has already made in his example of the powerful in our society - it is a fear of demeaning treatment if one does not dignify oneself or pass oneself off as dignifying the shameful wrongdoing through pleading guilty. The fear of retribution cannot be fully erased or overcome in a plea of guilt but clearly, where others are aware or deeply suspicious of one’s wrongdoing, one has less to fear in admitting one’s blameworthiness than in not doing so. Guilt attracts anger and resentment but not derision, scorn or contempt.

We now have an explanation for why guilt (and ‘guilt-proneness’– a term used often by Price Tangney and other psychologists ) – is associated with personal redemption and “better psychological functioning” than shame and shame-proneness.85 When Price Tangney and Dearing discover that “students had no difficulty recalling positive guilt experiences” and “they knew . . . that guilt can serve adaptive functions”, it comes as no surprise, for in admitting as much they have recognised the usefulness of pleading, admitting or confessing guilt in providing a covering for shame. Difficulties in the researchers’ account arise, however, when they interpret this finding in the following
manner. “We believe that guilt is most likely to be maladaptive when it becomes fused with shame. And it is the shame component that creates the problem”. I would suggest they have erred in their understanding of the nature of guilt and shame, and that it is shame-free guilt or guilt without acknowledgment of shame, that as Lindsay-Hartz, De Rivera and Mascolo suggest, is maladaptive or poor. As I hope to have shown, guilt is not maladaptive where the shame of a wrongdoing is taken up in a remorseful acceptance of one’s wrongdoing.

Earlier in this chapter I quoted passages from the work of Price Tangney and Dearing on the difference in attributions they consider vital to an understanding of the differential focus between shame and guilt. I will end this chapter with some final comments on this aspect of their theory. In spite of suggestive data to the contrary, Price Tangney and Dearing pressed on until they found what they “expected to find”; that there is evidence of a difference in focus between shame and guilt. In guilt, the attributions are internal, unstable and specific; in shame, internal, stable and global. Upon this foundation much of the differential focus theory is constructed. The question is: do these ‘theoretical attributions’ hold good in the face of the difficulty almost everyone has in separating guilt from shame? Here is what the researchers themselves say in relation to their own hypotheses regarding proneness to guilt and shame. “The belief that the self is fixed was negatively correlated with guilt proneness. That is, people prone to feelings of guilt about specific behaviours (somewhat apart from the self) tended to view the self as relatively flexible and amenable to change”. There is nothing surprising in this finding. However, contrary to expectation the researchers then found that “there was no relationship between self-behavior congruence beliefs and proneness to guilt,” which means that “[p]eople prone to guilt were no more or less likely to believe that there can be a disjoint between who you are and what you do.” Indeed; this is in accord with Roberts’s notion that both shame and guilt are self-assessment emotions. The researchers are then startled to find that
[r]egarding proneness to shame, we were really off the mark! Neither set of beliefs was correlated with tendencies to experience shame in the face of failures and transgressions. Shame-prone people were no more or less likely to view the self as fixed, and they were no more or less likely to believe “[y]ou are what you do. . . Such cognitive beliefs are apparently insufficient by themselves to render people vulnerable to affective shame reactions 90

What is meant here, presumably, is that in at least some cases of guilt, ‘cognitive beliefs’ are sufficient to render people vulnerable to affective guilt reactions. The one cognitive belief that seemingly makes this possible is the belief that one is amenable to change, and this is an attribution considered unique to guilt and not present in shame. Yet there was no ‘global’ or fixed attribution found among those who were thought to be (or assigned as) prone to shame. In light of this sort of data, none of which would seem surprising or unexpected to the layperson, it is difficult to conclude anything other than that the differential focus theory is not tenable. It does not capture the key differences between shame and guilt, and consequently it fails to account for the real value of both guilt and shame in our ongoing, daily struggles with ontological shame. As Pattison says, it is “unfortunate that the role of shame in morality has been neglected. This has impeded the development of understanding useful social guilt, while the labelling of shame as guilt has impeded the recognition of shame”.91
ENDNOTES

1 Williams 1993, p. 93.
2 Pattison, 2000, p. 85.
5 Tangney and Dearing. 2002. p. 19
7 Taylor, 1985, p. 135.
8 Ibid., p. 92.
9 Ibid., p. 135.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., p. 89.
13 Ibid, p 225. Roberts goes so far as to suggest that it is not strictly right to deny even that remorse is an emotion of self-assessment. “It is not an emotion of general self-assessment, “ but, “its defining proposition makes evaluative reference to what “I” have done; its consequent concern is not just that a wrong be righted, but that the “I” alone for the wrong.” p. 223. On the issue of dissociation, J. Ray Wallace 1994, suggests that ‘this is presumably part of the appeal of the psychoanalytic account of the dynamics of guilt, which postulates a substructure in the self - the super I - that is, or at least can be, set over and against the delinquent I”.*Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. p 241-2.
14 Price Tangney and Dearing 2002, p. 11.
16 Ibid., p. 17.
17 Ibid., p. 22.
18 Ibid., p. 11. My italics.
19 Ibid., p. 22. I think there are some problems with this approach but I shall not take them up for discussion since they do not directly impact upon the main ideas I am proposing in this chapter.
20 Ibid., p. 24.
21 Ibid., p. 53.
22 Ibid., p. 54.
23 Ibid., p. 55.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid. This is typical of the findings when using the ASQ - Attributional Style Questionnaire. The authors consider the ASQ inadequate because it lacks a richer description of events, including specific behaviors “which would probably be more sensitive in detecting the hypothesized relationship between guilt experiences and internal, unstable and specific attributions”. Ibid., p. 56.
26 Ibid., pp. 59, 60.
27 Ibid., p. 62.
28 Williams 1993, p. 94.
29 Ibid., p. 89. I think Williams is closer to the mark here than perhaps he has understood, for when he also says that there are “differences in the experience of shame and guilt [which] can be seen as part of a wider set of contrasts between them,” he has undercut the force of his original insight. Ibid.
30 Ibid., p 89, 90
31 Ibid., p. 102.
For Roberts, concerns are denoted by aversions and desires, and are either occurrent or dispositional. The former concern involves a current high focus of attention, the latter provides the background concern that will generate the occurrent concern or desire (in most cases) when the situation calls for it. 2003, pp. 142,143.

Ibid., p. 224.


Roberts considers that “one can feel guilty for one’s father’s misdeeds or bad attitudes”. Roberts 2003, p. 228. I disagree, and think, as Taylor does, that “guilt is not vicarious and cannot arise from the deeds of others”. Taylor 1985, p. 91.

Roberts 2003, p. 103. There seems to be a circularity is this statement, but as emotions are essentially construals for Roberts, his statement makes logical sense, at least to me. For Roberts, “[e]motion types are defined not by the types of actual situation to which they are responses, but by the kind of terms in which the subject construes them.” fn 37, p. 228.


Taylor 1985, p. 85, 89.


Ibid., p. 121. My italics.

Ibid., p. 126.

Ibid., p 140

Ibid., p 120, p 141

Ibid., p 121

Ibid., p 141. My italics.

Roberts 2003, p 223

Taylor 1985 , p 102

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 100.

Ibid.

Desmond 1988, p 299.

Roberts 2003, p 230

The possibility here is that one’s incapacity to self-admire can be mistaken for an inability to admire oneself. Seen this way, a person may well feel blameworthy because she sees her condition as one brought on by her own abilities rather than by the inborn or inherent nature of ontological shame.

Lewis 1971, p. 42.

Guilt is associated with hearing, shame with sight. There appears to be no clear visible sign for guilt, but clearly recognisable signs of shame in the covering of the face, etc.
Of course, such sensitivity involves more specific forms of attentiveness in particular cases, for example, empathising with someone who has lost a loved-one.

This is a key issue in debates about the value of forgiveness. Forgiveness therapy, as it is known, has become a source of contention. What concerns philosophers like Jeffrie Murphie and Norvin Richards is that the strategy for forgiveness fails to take account of the moral value of resentment. Norvin Richards sums up the problem with this therapeutic approach when he says, “[w]hat forgiveness therapists want the patient to do is not just stop resenting the wrongdoer so fiercely for treating her as he did, while perhaps retaining hard feelings of some more manageable kind. They want all hard feelings abandoned, and that is not all: they want the patient to come actually to have positive feelings toward the person who did her wrong, feelings of compassion, generosity, and even love.” Norvin Richards, 2002, “Forgiveness as Therapy”, in Before Forgiving. ed. Sharon Lamb and Jeffrie G. Murphy. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 73,74. (my italics).

Jeffrie G Murphie, 2002. “Forgiveness in Counselling: A Philosophical Perspective”, in Before Forgiving. ed. Sharon Lamb and Jeffrie G. Murphy. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp 41-53 This is the position of Margaret Holgrem, who states that forgiveness is “always in the best interests of the client” and that it is “always appropriate and desirable from a moral point of view.” Margaret Holgrem, 2002. "Forgiveness and Self-Forgiveness in Psychotherapy", in Before Forgiving. ed. Sharon Lamb and Jeffrie G. Murphy. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p 124. Some people forgive easily, too easily perhaps, and this may relieve the offender too quickly from the impact her shame ought to have on her future conduct. For further discussions on forgiveness, see Jeffrie G. Murphy and Jean Hampton. 1988. Forgiveness and Mercy. ed. Jeffrie G. Murphy, and Jean Hampton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Interestingly, Janet Landman refers to three biblical Hebrew words that denote forgiveness; 1) kipper, to cover 2) nasa, to lift up and carry away, and 3) salach, to let go; the first two of which can be directly associated with shame. Janet Landman, 2002. “Earning Forgiveness: The Story of a Perpetrator, Katherin Ann Power”, in Before Forgiving. pp 232-264.


For Heinz Kohut, 1977, the realisation that one cannot remedy these past failures in time and with energies still at one’s disposal leads to ‘dejection of defeat’. He calls this a ‘nameless shame’a ‘guiltless despair’. The Restoration of the Self. New York: International Universities Press. p. 36. Capps 1993, calls it a “sense of mortification for having failed to live lives of significance and meaning”. p. 98.

Pattison 2000, recounts the time he wanted to help the oppressed people of the world but ‘capitulated’because of his fear that his actions would offend most of his parish. He felt ashamed that he had failed to live up to his ideals, and to do the morally right thing. p. 125.

Morano 1973, says, “[w]e are outcasts to our true selves . . . Each of us is self-alienated; each of us is a persona non grata within his own being.” p. 76.
Pattison 2000, p. 129.
Chapter Seven: Resentment and Envy.

[W]hat we cannot deliberate over is whether or not to feel resentment but rather whether or not the resentment felt is justified in the circumstances. 

Wendell Stephenson

[I]t would seem that many traditional cases of envy have particularly rich moral overtones. 

Richard H. Smith

Envy is not a moral feeling. No moral principle need be cited in its explanation. 

John Rawls

In the preceding three chapters I have claimed that our incapacity to self-admire, our ontological shame, is the source of our many different shame experiences. In this chapter I will argue that the primordial resentment associated with our ontological shame underlies both moral resentment and envy, and that any attempt to distinguish envy from moral resentment must take into account their common source in primordial resentment.

The feeling of resentment is often presented as a feeling of ill-will toward others that is no different from and just as undesirable as the ill-will generally associated with envy. Ronald de Souza, for example, describes resentment as “a wholly nasty emotion.”

There are others, however, particularly moral philosophers, who insist that the ill-will in resentment is different to envy, that it is ‘moral’ because it has to do with matters of justice, injury or offence, while envy “need have no moral principle stated in its explanation.”

Two questions arise: is resentment a natural reaction to injustice or merely a form of anger over anything interpreted as offensive? Is there no sense of a similar ‘injustice’ in feelings of envy? This brings into focus the ideas of two psychologists Richard H. Smith and W. Gerrod Parrott. “It would seem impossible”, says Smith,

to eliminate entirely the experiential and conceptual similarity between the sense of injustice found in envy and resentment proper. Furthermore, as the line between what legitimate grievance (producing resentment) and an illegitimate grievance (producing envious hostility) becomes obscure. The quality of these feelings may be much the same. Indeed, there may be instances in which the envious person’s sense of injustice borders on legitimacy.
Here is a direct challenge to the idea prominent among moral philosophers that the ill-will of resentment differs from the ill-will of envy because in the former but not the latter there is a clear and recognisable issue of injustice. As Rawls puts it, “[t]hose who express resentment must be prepared to show why certain institutions are unjust or how others have injured them.” But this conceptual approach does not overcome the murky ground that exists in the actual experiences that we have when feeling displeased with another person, group of persons or even an institution. One can be resentful, for example, of having one’s self-esteem deflated and treat such deflation as an act of disrespect. As I hope to show later in the chapter, resentment can only be justified in matters relating to self-respect, not in matters of self-esteem; but until this distinction is made, almost anything over which one feels deflated or at a disadvantage can arouse resentment.

There is an essential link between envy and resentment that defies any straightforward distinction between them based on the notion of injustice. In this chapter I shall present three different versions of the resentment-envy relationship, each of which reveals just how difficult it is to avoid conflating the two emotions. I begin with John Rawls’s account, examine the challenge presented to the Rawlsian view of envy by the psychologists Smith and Parrott, and conclude the first section of this chapter with a review of the ideas presented jointly by Andrew Ortony, Gerald Clore, and Allan Collins. In the second half of the chapter I will provide an account of why there is this problem of a similar negativity in both emotions and how we might begin to understand how resentment is a more respectful form of ill-will than envy. This is to say that I hold to the view that there is a difference in the nature of the ill-will expressed in resentment from that which is experienced in envy, but that there a reason for the similarity of negative affect and until this similarity is accounted for, there will continue to be either a conflation of the two emotions such that we shall not be able to tell them apart or the distinction between them will continue to be made on grounds that are far from convincing.
For Rawls, the problem is overcome by simply describing envy in such a way that any similarity of ill-will is excluded by definition. “If we resent our having less than others”, says Rawls, “it must be because we think their being better off is the result of unjust institutions or wrongful conduct on their part.” Envy proper differs from resentment for Rawls in that it is not a moral feeling. No moral principle need be cited in its explanation. It is sufficient to say that the better situation of others catches our attention. We are downcast by their good fortune and no longer value as highly what we have; and this sense of hurt arouses our rancour and hostility. Thus one must be careful not to conflate envy and resentment. For resentment is a moral feeling. If we resent our having less than others, it must be because we think that their being better off is the result of unjust institutions or wrongful conduct on their part. Those who express resentment must be prepared to show why certain institutions are unjust or how others have injured them. What marks off envy from the moral feelings is the different way in which it is accounted for, the sort of perspective from which the situation is viewed.

There seems nothing objectionable in this description for it seems to establish clear grounds for distinguishing resentment proper from envy. Problems surface, however, when Rawls also posits a form of envy that includes features that are strikingly similar to moral resentment. Rawls claims that there is ‘excusable envy’ which is “a reaction to the loss of self-respect in circumstances where it would be unreasonable to expect someone to feel differently.” It is unreasonable, according to Rawls, because “sometimes the circumstances evoking envy are so compelling that given human beings as they are no one can reasonably be asked to overcome his rancorous feelings.” The circumstance to which Rawls is referring most clearly is the loss of self-esteem, over which, presumably, “we can resent being made envious.” A conflation of the two emotions which Rawls insists we avoid seems to have entered into his theory of justice; not in envy proper, but through the back door, so to speak, in excusable envy.

This is to say that Rawls’s attempt to distinguish resentment from envy is not entirely satisfactory, and it leaves his theory open to criticism on three separate fronts, each of which we shall examine in this chapter. On one front, there is the question of whether envy does so clearly lack any connection with moral principles, for if envy is sometimes excusable and it shares certain recognisable features of envy proper, (as we would
expect it to do as it is envy of a particular type) then envy proper may also include traces of moral feeling. This is the basis of the account presented by Smith and Parrott; that there are “rich moral overtones” in envy, and not just in envy which might be construed as excusable but in envy proper. Criticism on another front is mounted by Walsh who sees in Rawls’s account of envy, various ‘definitional’ oddities that so alter the concept of envy that it is not what is typically understood as envy and which appear to be specifically designed to ensure his theory is free of the taint of envy.14 And a third challenge comes from Scheffler who sees in Rawls’s account of resentment and envy, and the reactive attitudes in general, an “unwillingness to accept [that] pre-institutional desert gives rise to a reduced conception of individual responsibility.”15 He argues that the notion of ‘pre-institutional desert’ with its emphasis on personal responsibility is a deeply ingrained psychological proclivity and that deservedness cannot be discounted in judgements related to resentment.16

Rawls makes it clear that his primary concern is institutional justice when he writes

> [g]iven just background institutions and the provision for all of a fair index of primary goods (as required by the principles of justice), citizens are capable of adjusting their aims and ambitions in the light of what they can reasonably expect and of restricting their claims in matters of justice to certain kinds of things. They recognise that the weight of their claims is not given by the strength or intensity of their wants and desires, even when they are rational.17

It is because “society may permit such large disparities between [objective primary] goods that under existing social conditions these differences cannot but help to cause a loss of self-esteem,”18 and this, as we have noted, is something over which a person can become resentful. Rawls claims that where his principles of justice (or perhaps something like them) are not implemented, it is understandable that some people will feel envious of those better off. Why this sort of ‘understandable’ reaction to inequalities is not included as resentment proper is difficult to fathom, particularly as Rawls’s definition of resentment covers precisely this sort of ‘institutional injustice’.19
To this problem Scheffler replies, “Rawls’ argument in this passage is that people have the capacity to adjust their aims and aspirations in light of their institutional expectations, provided the institutions in question are just.” At the pre-institutional level, the actual practices of praise and blame, besides having social utility, “serve to express [resentment] liability which is essential to participation in most of the types of human relationship that we value most deeply.” There is concern that, in spite of Rawls’s efforts to match the reactive attitudes with institutional justice, there is little or no acknowledgment of the role of desert. This is to say that there is the suspicion that liberalism relies on a purely institutional conception of desert, and that “at the level of political interaction, the liberal account is “an individual psychology of bland impartiality; a psychology that is thoroughly unrealistic.” The problem with connecting resentment to an institutional concept of justice is to significantly discount how “our practices of praise and blame [give] expression to our reactive emotions.”

Walsh’s criticism, by contrast, is directed toward Rawls’s overall theory. For Rawls “the content of the principles is antithetical to the characterisation of envy.” Envy will make the social system “unworkable and incompatible with human good”. The feature of most concern to us at the pre-institutional level is the inclusion by Rawls of the envier’s willingness to deprive herself or accept a loss to herself in order to bring a rival down. “The individual who envies another is prepared to do things that make them both worse off if only the discrepancy between them is sufficiently reduced.” Walsh thinks that this is not an essential feature of envy, and that Rawls’s definition of envy is tailored to his difference principle. To circumvent the criticism that the difference principle is ‘based’ on envy, Rawls insists on defining envy in such a way that it could not serve as a motive for choosing that principle. Rawls resorts, says Walsh, to a “tendentious process of redefinition of envy.” I shall leave further debate on Walsh’s criticism of Rawls’s account of envy for political philosophers. My concern is to show that Rawls may well have skewed his account of envy in such a way that we cannot refer to it in order to make secure the distinction between envy and resentment.
The language of justice, or more precisely injustice, is heavily imbued with notions of morality, so that it must be expected that everyone feeling envious will at least attempt to gain moral support by claiming that what they are experiencing is resentment not envy. If a person can show that there is an element of injustice or unfairness in her case, then, upon what grounds can we confidently claim she is being envious and her case for justice dismissed? Richard. H. Smith and W. Gerrod Parrott have jointly and in separate articles, tackled Rawls on precisely this point. For the two psychologists, resentment and envy share features that make any sort of clear distinction along Rawlsian lines impossible to maintain. Smith poses the question: “[i]s Rawls correct in removing so thoroughly any trace of moral feelings from envy?” In the earliest of his papers Smith argues “that the envying person, if the feeling is hostile envy, will actually see his or her feelings as a form of resentment . . . I am arguing that because the envious person’s complaint must usually remain private, the actual experience of the feeling will be distinct from more open, sanctioned forms of resentment proper.”

Parrott is of much the same mind when he adds that the envying person “will see themselves as justifiably angry and irritated” (as in resentment) “but they will not see themselves as envious.” It is the ‘objective social facts’, says Parrott, that tell us a person is experiencing envy even though the person herself is convinced it is not envy she is experiencing but resentment. The way in which the envious person sees herself, according to Smith and Parrott, is not as envious but as ‘justifiably angry’. As Parrott writes:

In some cases judged by objective viewers as malicious envy, envious people may perceive themselves to be righteously indignant, not envious. They will be wrong in one sense, since the objective social facts will not support their claims of transgression or injustice, however, in such cases they will see themselves as justifiably angry or irritated, not as envious.

Smith concedes there is “[a] troublesome problem with including a sense of injustice in envy” and that “one must now contend with the conceptual blur between envy and resentment that Rawls guards against.” He resolves the problem by suggesting that “[w]hat makes envy different from righteous indignation, or resentment proper, is the
subjective, unsanctioned nature of the sense of injustice in envy.”34 The feelings of resentment that an envying person experiences are not resentment proper, he claims, only because these private feelings of resentment fail to gain public approval. The public approval or ‘social validation’ of resentment means it is a ‘legitimate, publicly sanctioned’ emotion, while the ‘subjective sense of injustice’ in envy lacks legitimacy and is consigned to the private realm. Is this explanation of what Smith calls a ‘qualitatively different’ sense of injustice experienced in envy sufficient to retain the envy-resentment distinction? Smith himself, in the earliest of the articles under review, seems to be uncertain that his own criteria for the distinction will do the job.

Smith makes it clear that he thinks the key feature of envy is its hostility. It is “the defining component of envy. Without it, the emotion might better take another label such as ‘admiration’.35 The only thing distinguishing envy from admiration, on his account, is the propensity of the envying person to be hostile rather than edifying or congratulatory as one is in admiration. He also thinks that “including a justice component to envious feelings” provides a good explanation for the hostility typically found in envy. “[I]f the feeling is hostile envy, [the person] will actually see his or her feelings as a form of resentment.”36 The hostile feelings in envy, for Smith, remain private and unexpressed “because they have an unsanctioned, illegitimate character.”37 This differs from the hostility in resentment, for in the clearest cases of injustice, the person feeling resentment, Smith, Parrott, Ozer and Moniz say, “will express these feelings without fear of social reprisal, precisely because they are sanctioned.”38

Smith wants to distinguish envy and resentment on the basis that “the sense of injustice in potentially explaining the hostile feelings in envy is distinct from the sense of injustice leading to hostility in obvious cases of unfair treatment.”39 Yet he also says that such “hostile feelings are an immediate, natural response to felt injustice,”40 so that wherever one feels unjustly treated, it will be natural to feel hostility. The obvious question arises: does this mean that if hostility becomes legitimised that it is
automatically associated with resentment proper and never with envy? There may be occasions when publicly sanctioned hostility is in fact clearly motivated by envy. So when Smith, et al., say that an “envying person has been dealt an unfair hand in life,” is “unfairly treated by life” and experiences “resentment over the unfairness of life itself,” it is difficult to know where they wish the line to be drawn between a wholly ‘subjective’ and illegitimate sense of injustice from which a natural hostility will emerge, and the justifiable hostility or ill-will of proper resentment. “Unfair advantages, judged by objective standards”, Smith says, “create indignation and resentment proper rather than envy.” But envy also “appears to have a sense of injustice allied with it – a sense qualitatively different from that found in indignation and resentment proper. The envious individual does not quite believe the envied person’s advantage is fair.”

Smith’s view, here, is in accord with the perspective on envy expressed in the following passage from Parrott. “When envious people focus on the unfairness of life itself, of the circumstances in which fate has placed them, then their experience is also one of anger and resentment.” However, Parrott takes the idea of unfairness a step further when he claims that

> [t]here is a difference in the object of the emotion, so this resentment is of a different type than ‘agent-focused’ resentment – what I call ‘global resentment’. Global resentment is experienced as anger about the unfairness of life itself.

Parrott is here going well beyond Rawls’s notion of excusable envy; beyond issues of institutional injustice to something that, he thinks, resides at the core of our being, or at least at the core of the person who is envious. As we proceed through the chapter I will refer to Parrott’s global resentment or anger against life itself and interpret it as his way of explaining what I mean by primordial resentment against ontological shame.

In his early papers Smith emphasises natural inequalities and adopts a similar line to Rawls regarding the moral insignificance of natural endowments. In a sense Smith is applying Rawls’s envy as excusable argument at the personal or pre-institutional level.
The arguments are similar. For Rawls excusable envy is ‘understandable’ since it would be unreasonable to expect otherwise under institutional conditions that are unlike those that Rawls himself proposes. Smith writes:

The fact that many envy-producing comparisons between people are due to uncontrollable factors (differences in family resources, educational opportunities, etc.) introduces a moral element into the way such differences are appreciated by the disadvantaged. The disadvantaged need not blame themselves for what is beyond their control and may have better and more persuasive cause to resent the notion that the envied person deserves his or her advantage, even if societal norms dictate that one should not begrudge such an advantage.46

Smith’s indebtedness to Rawls is obvious, and as he himself says, “[e]ven Rawls makes the point that the distribution of natural abilities, even those attributes that may enhance motivation and effort, is arbitrary from a moral point of view.”47 This means for Smith, that a subjective sense of justice is also understandable, even if it is not socially sanctioned.

The ideas so far canvassed regarding the subjective sense of injustice in envy, I will, in the remainder of the chapter, refer to as the Smith-Parrott hypothesis. In his more recent work Smith shifts his attention away from the subjective injustice inherent in being subject to ‘natural inequalities’ and places far more emphasis on the part shame plays in envy, on the ‘abhorrent nature of envy’ and the dangers of its transmutation into resentment proper. He has curtailed the enthusiasm he expressed in earlier writings, for the ‘rich moral overtones in envy’. It is perhaps due to the influence of the writings of Jon Elster and P. Glick that Smith has shifted his ground from his earlier position to a clearer disapproval of the use the envying person makes of her ‘feelings of unfairness’.48 Smith now considers it important to highlight “[t]he repugnant nature of envy”, and its “protean character [and] talent for disguise”, features that he did not highlight in earlier papers.49 “The self-threatening, abhorrent nature of envy works against its emergence in anything but an altered form.” These feelings are simply not justified and must be brought to light as a “transmutation of envy”, for

[once hostile feelings are legitimised, and residual envy becomes transmuted into righteous indignation and resentment proper, giving free licence for direct and open actions designed to undermine the advantaged person’s position. An observer might still try to attribute the
envying person’s behavior to envy, but this claim will be rejected as preposterous by the
envying person – so far removed is the indignation from its invidious origins.50

We can now see that envy’s ‘talent for disguise’ accounts for these feelings of envious-
indignation. There is a transmutation of envy into resentment in order for the envier to
legitimise her envious feelings. But is it only because resentment proper has legitimacy
that the envying person will disguise her envy? While this is an important strategy, I
think the envying person is also avoiding the shame of her envious feelings. Smith
himself seems to have realised this for in his most recent work, while he continues with
the theme of hostility in envy there is much more attention paid to the links between
envy and shame. An explanation for the hostility associated with envy, he says “stems
from the affinity between envy and shame and the frequent co-occurrence of these
emotions.”51 Commenting on the association that Tangney has found between shame
and anger, Smith states that, “[t]his link is surprising, at least in one sense. A consistent
focus on one’s defects and failings should produce nonhostile, depressive responses
rather than anger. . . When we think of someone in shame – wanting to hide or
disappear, it is indeed surprising to find shame associated with anger.”52

As discussed in Chapter Six, we have an explanation for this ‘surprising’ feature of the
shame-hostility nexus, which in turn connects envy to shame. It is not acute shame or
shame that is “owned” that will flare up in anger and hostility, but shame that is
disowned and bypassed. So when Smith claims that “[s]trictly speaking . . . part of
invidious hostility can be shame-based, rather than envy-based alone,”53 he is drawing
close to an understanding of how bypassed shame is related to envy, and how it
accounts for much of the hostility in envy. It is also plausible that envy is a cover-up
and concealment of shame; a means of escaping from the reality of ontological shame.
Taylor speaks of envy as a way of warding off possible feelings of shame and
humiliation.54 And as Joseph Berke puts it, the envier will often

use powerful projective processes – that is, the very mechanism of envy – to dissociate himself
from a major part of himself, his own destructiveness. In these circumstances an individual
may project a malign spirit, badness, not just to attack an envied object, but to get rid of an
anguished and shameful side of himself, the side that initiated the attack in the first place.55
And Smith suggests that “[s]hame enters into an explanation for the hostility associated with envy in another way. Envy violates a powerful social norm requiring that we be happy, rather than displeased and hostile, when others succeed. Thus when we feel envy we tend to be ashamed of it.” Moreover, “it is certainly improper, in most cultures, to openly express envious hostility. It is shameful. Thus, people find ways to reframe or relabel these hostile feelings as well.”

I would suggest that the shame we feel in response to our envy goes much deeper than merely not being pleased at another’s success or because society expects us to act in a certain way. I think we need to grasp two features about shame: one, that it admits of degree; so that acute-reaction shame differs in affect from the mere ‘wince’ that occurs when shame is bypassed, and two, that there is as much to be gained from the view, attributed to Hegel, that shame is anger over “what ought not to be.” With these aspects of shame understood, it can be said that the notions of ‘subjective injustice’ and ‘unfairness of life” can be interpreted in terms of ontological shame or what ought not to be, as the unfairness of being incapable of self-admiration. We can then understand the connection between hostility and shame. The affects of shame, if owned and not bypassed simply do not engender hostility. But in bypassing shame, in suppressing the reality of ontological shame, the resentment against life itself will ground the hostility. To put it simply, shame is associated with envy through primordial resentment over our human incapacity to self-admire.

The hostility in envy is explained through bypassed shame and the person most likely to bypass shame is the person with a certain sort of highly favourable opinion of herself. In the pursuit of self-esteem and in the attainment of high self-esteem there is likely to be, as we saw in the opening chapter, an increase in hostility. I would suggest that we are far more ashamed of envious feelings than we are of our resentment. This suggests that an understanding of ontological shame reveals to us the difference between feelings based on resentment and feelings of envy. We are not normally ashamed of the ill-will
we direct at others in resentment because it is a response to actions or attitudes that betray a disrespect for oneself or for others. There is, however, a shame attached to feeling envious, and this shame in envy reveals our resentment at being unable to see ourselves as wonders in the world. We cannot escape the disclosure of ontological shame in envy because we are confronted with the disturbing evidence that it is another and not oneself who has the means to feel proud and cover for her ontological shame. In the final chapter I elaborate on these features of envy at greater length. For now, suffice to say, that where envy is experienced and then acknowledged there will have been an acceptance also of the shame attached to feeling envious. Smith, following the lead from Elster, says of envious persons, that “[e]ven if they feel a private sense of injustice, this sense is quickly discounted as an appropriate avenue for coping with the feeling. Any shame that arises works to diminish hostile feelings rather than aggravate them.”

What the Smith-Parrott hypothesis foregrounds is the necessity of finding a better way of accounting for the type of resentment that is found in envy and distinguishing it from resentment proper. Their argument is that there is in envy the feeling of resentment based on the notion of having been treated unjustly. Most attempts to distinguish envy and resentment proper depend on notions of justice, either at the institutional level or at a more personal level where injury and offence are cause for resentful reactions. But there is a sense of injustice in the psychology of envy which effectively undermines any hard and fast rule concern principles of justice. The sense of injustice in envy, I suggest, ultimately resides in our incapacity to self-admire. We cannot depend, therefore, on Rawls’s distinction between resentment proper and envy proper, for in spite of his insistence that we not conflate the two emotions, his category of excusable envy does precisely this. In tandem with the inclusion of a contentious ‘willingness to suffer’ component in his definition of envy proper, we are left with an incomplete and skewed account of envy that ultimately fails to establish the sort of distinction between moral resentment and envy that we are looking for.
An interesting account of envy and resentment is presented by Andrew Orton, Gerald Clore, and Allan Collins. To these researchers, not only is envy not separable from resentment, it is a “more specific example of resentment.” This is because envy is an emotion that the authors include in the more general category or class of ‘Resentment Emotions’. This general class of emotions is characterised by ill-will toward others and results from being “displeased at an event presumed to be desirable for someone else.” Under this general class of Resentment Emotions, the researchers describe “resentment as a reactive attitude” that arises when

one views the desired event for the other to be undeserved . . . Where another is assumed to have desired a particular outcome and has succeeded in attaining this outcome undeservedly, resentment as a reactive attitude will surface as the appropriate response to seeing justice prevail.

To distinguish the reactive attitude of resentment from envy, Ortony, Clore, and Collins, suggest that there is a requirement that the envying person “focus on the fact that he or she (also) wants the object, whereas in the case of resentment, the resentful person may focus on the undeservingness of the other person.” The authors make a further important observation, that there is no requirement or necessity that the resenting person “must either lack or desire the outcome enjoyed by the other, because some instances of resentment involve neither.” It seems, then, that there is no necessary connection between resentment as a reactive attitude and envy; for if envy is taken to be the experience of lacking and desiring something someone else has, and reactive resentment need not involve such a sense of lack, then all that holds the two ‘emotions’ together is the simple fact that both exhibit a displeasure ‘at an event presumed to be desirable to another’, and this it can be argued applies to any number of negative emotions.

The distinction, therefore, is tenuous because anger, hatred, and perhaps even contempt can all fit this description of the displeasure associated with the ‘Resentment Emotions’. It seems that the authors’ inclusion of all the possible negative emotions that involve ‘being displeased’ under a general class of ‘Resentment Emotions’ is far too broad for our purpose in clarifying the distinction we want to make between resentment as a
reactive attitude and envy. For example, after making the important distinction we have noted above between resentment as a reactive attitude and envy, the authors revert to the breadth of the class of ill-will emotions and effectively disavow this distinguishing point by saying, “nevertheless, these factors (of a sense of lack and of desire) are probably more often present than absent when resentment occurs, and that they clearly intensify the emotion.”67 The significance of the insight into the key difference between resentment and envy, however, should not be lost. It is the feelings of ‘lack of’ and ‘desire for’ which are the emotional mainsprings of envy. That these emotional mainsprings are absent in cases of reactive resentment indicates a possible ground for maintaining an envy-resentment distinction.

This is not to overlook the importance of the Ortony, Clore and Collins classification, for in one clear sense, I think it can be said that the class of ‘Resentment Emotions’ accurately describes the range of ill-will emotions in general. It is a classification that accords with much of what I have alluded to in earlier chapters about primordial resentment against ontological shame. If, as I am claiming our human existence is marked by the impossibility of experiencing high admiration for ourselves, wherein we are denied the blessed assurance of our worth that self-wonderment would bring, what might our natural response to this ontological limitation be? As beings capable of admiration for others but not of self-admiration there is a primordial resentment against this ‘existential’ unfairness. In one important sense, then, all of the negative emotions are indeed resentment emotions where this class of emotion is understood as being grounded in a primordial resentment against ontological shame.

Our vulnerability to shame carries with it a resentment - what I have called primordial resentment. It is along either of two different pathways that primordial resentment can be manifested and find expression. I believe the clearest example of the negative manifestations of primordial resentment is envy. There may be some individuals who have never felt even the pangs of envy, but I suspect that most of us have experienced
such pain and that there are some people for whom envy is much more than a passing
twinge or stabbing pain; for some it has become a state of being. The Ortony, Clore and
Collins observation that in envy of, and not in reactive resentment toward others, there
is a sense of lack tied to a desire to enjoy something for oneself that another has, is
significant. In the deepest sense I think it is possible to say that what the envious person
senses she lacks and desires for herself is not just individual and particular goods, one
thing here and another thing there, but what these things enable the person in possession
of them to secure for herself, which is esteem - the admiration of others and pride in
herself. More will be said on this feature of envy in the final chapter; suffice to say here
that covetousness is a component in envy but not in resentment.

The second pathway along which primordial resentment can be manifested and
expressed is resentment proper or moral resentment.68 This is to admit that both the
resentment in envy and moral resentment have a common source in primordial
resentment. Because primordial resentment is a fundamental displeasure over being
subject to ontological shame, there is an onus which falls on the person claiming
justifiable resentment to ‘show’ why her resentment is not simply the reaction to having
her ontological shame brought to light. This onus on justification is taken seriously by
moral philosophers. The standard account is perhaps best exemplified by Joseph Butler
who describes resentment as “a necessary weapon, put in the hands by nature, against
injury, injustice and cruelty.”69 It as a person’s response to “what is perceived as a
morally wrong injury.”70 It is justified because “benevolence desires the absence or
eradication of injustice, cruelty, wrong, etc., and resentment functions to produce
this.”71 Peter Strawson continues along the same lines when he says that resentment is
“a certain sort of demand for interpersonal regard” and entails a “partial withdrawal of
good-will”, the consequence of which is to continue to view the person “as a member of
the moral community, only as one who has offended against its demands.”72
Although Butler’s assessment has intuitive appeal, it is not at all obvious that resentment as a weapon against actual injury, injustice and cruelty, is clearly distinguishable from envy as a weapon against perceived injustice; the sort of perception typical of the envious person. The concept of ‘injustice’ remains a troublesome concept, particularly since, as Smith and Parrott show, the person experiencing a negative reaction to perceived injustice, will frequently insist upon claiming the reaction is imbued with moral content. So Butler’s criteria of injustice on a personal or societal level seems as open to dispute as Rawls’ criteria for justice at the institutional level.

What remains for us to decide is whether it is possible to find a way of keeping the envy-resentment distinction while at the same time acknowledging that there is resentment in envy. As noted at the outset of the chapter we are confronted with two different views on resentment, one is negative, captured succinctly by de Sousa, who claims that it is a “wholly nasty” emotion, the other by Butler and many since, that it is a necessary for a defence of self-respect. Perhaps other accounts might assist and clarify the distinction. Stephenson, for example, says that appropriate resentment brings about the suffering or unhappiness of someone whose state of mind or will toward me (or others) is evident by the harm done. There is not a problem with resentment, he says, but with the tendency of people “to believe that they are wronged when they aren’t . . . people are too prone to wear their honour on their sleeves,” and “make no distinction between the gravity of offences against them.” The feeling most people have, suggests Stephenson, “is that the pleasure of resentment gratified is actually good”. It is the other’s wrongful will that one wants altered, and “wanting the will to be defeated is in no sense wrong or unvirtuous, and joy in its defeat is not wrong or unvirtuous either.”

The term benevolence has generally fallen into disuse. But the idea of good-will and respect for others is still in currency, so that the argument would run something like this: resentment is a positive response to an act or attitude that exhibits a disrespect for a
person or serious disregard for her well-being. The form of resentment that has traditionally been described as resentment proper or moral resentment can, I suggest, be called *respect-focused* resentment and is in no way connected to envious interpretations of perceived injustice or unfairness. Respect-focused resentment arises where justice, understood specifically in terms of respect for oneself and for others, is sought and defended. Importantly, resentment of this kind does not seek to shame only for the sake of shame, but for the sake of exacting a response that will enable the wrongdoer to recover and be returned to society. What is expected is remorse with its retention of shame and the motivation to atone. A person in deep shame is a reproach to everyone, so much so we look away, avoid contact, and generally disassociate ourselves from her as if shame is contagious. The person left in shame is effectively excluded from the community, so that resentment that seeks to reduce a person to this level of reproach bespeaks a sense of bitterness against life itself. It is a refutation of ontological shame and a disavowal of fellow feeling or empathy.

Respect-focused resentment is the displeasure one feels over some act thought to have been disrespectful. It is a reaction against injustice understood as personal disrespect suffered either at the hands of another individual, group or institution, and the disrespect I have specifically in mind is exposure to ontological shame. Because we are beings who cannot self-admire, and this means we are unable to effect the perfect covering for our ‘naked shivering’ selves that self-admiration would provide, a ‘show’ of disrespect is the needless exposure of others to their shame or the intention to expose others to their shame. Acts of disrespect can range from taunts and insults to physical violence and brutality. In fact any action which highlights and leaves open to view the human incapacity to self-admire, as I’ve described in terms of exposure rather than disclosure in Chapters Five and Six, is an act of disrespect. Resentment against disrespect, either to oneself or to others, reveals a reconciliation to ontological shame and a preparedness to act ‘justly’ to ensure this shame is only ever disclosed where it needs to be disclosed.
and will be covered, and never exposed. It is an appropriate or proper resentment to unfairness of a particular sort – the disrespectful exposure of ontological shame.

I am suggesting that there are two forms of resentment, one of which is associated with envy, the other with respect for oneself and for others. There is resentment in envy, but it is not a resentment founded on mutual respect. It is a resentment born out of a concern over esteem, particularly self-esteem. But resentment over not getting the praise, accolades or credit for something one has done, though it may well feel unjust and unfair, is unjustified because there is no imperative that one must be admired and esteemed and therefore there is not, in the absence of these forms of approval from others, a disrespectful exposure of ontological shame. There may well be disappointment and hurt, but as there is no compulsion on anyone’s part to feel admiration for another and failure to feel this way is not an occasion for shame, it is not therefore an occasion of disrespect. The claim, here, is that justifiable moral resentment is tied to self-respect and respect-for-others, and not to matters of esteem. In resentment proper one thinks the other deserves to feel ashamed because she has, in some way, shown others disrespect in exposing them to their shame.

As noted earlier, one feature of moral resentment that helps us to distinguish it from envy is that there is no covetousness involved. This is to say that one way to distinguish resentment from envy, is not as Rawls and others have argued, on the basis that resentment is a moral feeling while ‘no moral principle need be cited’ in the explanation of envy, but rather it is that in one and not the other there is covetousness. This may not have the moral content that we want to attribute to resentment and not to envy, but it accords with the natural reactions that Scheffler and Strawson remind us, are an essential part of our interactions with others. Where one is envious of another there is concern over what the other has, or, as I shall argue at greater length in the final chapter, there is concern over what this ‘having’ is thought to provide for the person envied; in the admiration and esteem of others. Resentment does not have this concern about the
other person being or becoming an object of admiration. The person resenting the actions of another attributes a very slim probability to the fact that the other’s actions will be seen by anyone as admirable; at the least not by those whom she herself admires.

Why does resentment proper not include covetousness? I would suggest it is because moral resentment is not over issues of disesteem but over matters of disrespect, and unlike self-esteem, self-respect, is not something one earnestly desires or covets. From our earlier discussions in Chapters Four to Six, it can be seen that self-respect can be understood as a special comportment toward one’s own existential shamefulness. While it is necessary for the defence of one’s dignity in the maintenance of self-worth, self-respect does not, as Taylor reminds us, include any ‘favourable opinion of ourselves’, and is therefore, at least in its healthiest form, not something that is earnestly desired but rather taken on-board as a necessary guard against situations and events that can expose us in our shame. Self-respect is the source of self-worth primarily concerned with living in accord with ontological shame in such a way that one retains a susceptibility to the affects of shame, when such feelings are appropriate. When self-respect is functioning well, most shame will be anticipatory and one can adjust oneself to the likelihood of acute shame by reflecting on what one can and should do to avoid it.

The displeasure experienced in moral resentment is over another acting in a way that shows disrespect – a disrespect for our human vulnerability to ontological shame. The motivation in resentment proper is to reprove a person for acts and attitudes that needlessly expose our shame. The displeasure of moral resentment is not accompanied by any covetous desire to possess the same level of self-respect that another has. It is different with another’s self-esteem; this I most certainly can covet so that I too can have feelings of pride, but I am indifferent to another’s level of self-respect. So while both envy and resentment include displeasure and ill-will toward others, only in envy is this displeasure associated with what the other has and what one wants for oneself. The role of covetousness in envy is related to matters of self-esteem. As Gabrielle Taylor
comments in regard to what she calls ‘sophisticated envy’, the concern in such envy is “the person’s self-esteem, and it is this which is here the coveted good to be achieved at all costs.” Another way of stating this is to say that resentment is properly enacted where there are or have been needless exposures of shame, and is improperly enlisted in the service of envy when the matter at issue is one of pride and esteem. Where resentment or displeasure is experienced over esteem related issues, it finds its emotional outlet in envy. The displeasure is envious because the primordial resentment over ontological shame is interpreted as an unfairness in life; in fact the unfairness of life itself.

It is now possible to refine our understanding of the two pathways of primordial resentment mentioned earlier. It can be nurtured in envy where the central concern is one’s self-esteem or it can be utilised in moral resentment where it supports both respect-for-others and self-respect, and is alert to the power of shame to strip human beings of their dignity. Where it is respect-focused displeasure at issue, there is resentment over shame having being exposed and we want the person or persons responsible for this exposure to cover this shame in some act of atonement. Our displeasure is directed at the other’s action – what she has done is wrong because it is disrespectful to expose ontological shame without good cause, and without adequate covering. Where resentment is esteem-focused anything that threatens a person’s pride will be cause for anger and indignation.

There are two categories of esteem-focused resentment; one relating to one’s own esteem, the other to another person’s esteem. Resentment over one’s own esteem will arise because one believes one has not received from others due praise or esteem for something one thinks is praiseworthy. While not receiving esteem from others may be disappointing, it cannot be the grounds for resentment because others’ admiration cannot be expected. It may be hoped for, desired, but not expected, and so the belief in being justifiably resentful for not being admired is misguided. As disheartening as it is
to not receive praise where one thinks one’s qualities or actions praiseworthy, the harsh reality of life is that others need not find one’s qualities or actions worthy of merit, and their failure to do so, while perhaps reflecting a lack of sensitivity to the importance of our endeavours to cover ontological shame, does not in itself, amount to an exposure of our shame. Any sense of injustice we may experience here will therefore have no ‘moral’ basis.\textsuperscript{81} It is where esteem-focused resentment arises over another being admired and esteemed, or at least where another is thought entitled to such praise, that envy intervenes to render one’s claims to justifiable resentment highly suspect.

There are also two forms respect-focused resentment; one to do with a person’s self-respect, the other with a more general respect for other people.\textsuperscript{82} In terms of self-respect, there are two major pitfalls. Firstly, it can become a sickly self-righteousness when minor events and mishaps are seen as occasions where one’s shame has been exposed: for example, the person who takes offence at a mere glance from another or who thinks another has deliberately trodden on her toes, etc. While the resentment of esteem-focus is strewn with baseless protestations about one’s own relative merits to the admiration and esteem of others, which can sometimes, paradoxically, strike observers as undignified and even demeaning, resentment over disrespect is vulnerable to an over-sensitivity to minor slights. We speak of the person who ‘wears her honour on her sleeve’ and takes offence at the slightest provocation. One can be too protective of one’s self-respect, too focused on one’s vulnerability to being shamed. Secondly, much of this over-reacting is founded on a conflation of self-esteem and self-respect, such that what appears to be an issue of disrespect, is in fact a matter of failing to be esteemed, and this is no justification for feeling resentful. The human propensity to read into every event and reduce everything down to a matter of respect and disrespect allows the baseless protestations of esteem-focused resentment to seep into what is not an issue of respect but which takes on the appearance of disrespect. Take for example, an aging movie-star, who is upset because she is not receiving the esteem she thinks she deserves and is resentful of this lack of appreciation. Because her self-worth consists entirely in the
esteem of others which she subsumes under her own self-esteem, she treats the lack of appreciation of her talents as grounds for justifiable resentment when in fact there is ground only for frustration and disappointment.

I am inferring that the moral status of resentment can be used to defend either one’s self-esteem or one’s self-respect and that only where there is an overall sense of self-worth can resentment proper enable one not to fall into one or other of the pitfalls. Neither an overly indignant posture over one’s worthiness to be admired, nor an oversensitivity to one’s own self-respect, will allow a person the proper judgement as to the appropriateness of her resentment. This is to say that there can be an over-sensitiveness to ontological shame wherein every event is interpreted as an offence against human dignity. This is a resignation to ontological shame, allowing it to dictate one’s comportment toward life. It can lead to a timidity in life and an unhappiness about having to create one’s own self-esteem through genuinely admirable actions. There is an ultra-defensiveness against ontological shame ever being open to view, an attitude that undermines the very basis of self-respect which, in true measure, includes a susceptibility to disclosures of shame.

Envy, in its most basic form, the form to which we are all subject, is tied to matters of esteem, and resentment to concerns over disrespect. But this most basic form of envy is not what the critics of envy have in mind when claiming envy is spiteful and destructive. What this suggests is that there are two levels of envy; one based on esteem-focused resentment (for there is nothing immoral about failing to esteem someone; no ‘ought’ attached to admiration), and there is destructive or spiteful envy, which, while it shares features with esteem-focused resentment involves a particular taking up of primordial resentment in bitterness against life itself. Bitter resentment is different from esteem-focused resentment because while both have a concern over being admired and esteemed, the former also includes an active belief in the possibility of self-admiration. This belief in the possibility of self-admiration need not be present in
basic or common envy. It is sufficient that one’s displeasure will be over another having an entitlement to feel pride and knowing that, in spite of one’s wishes, one is not entitled to this pride. But belief in the possibility of self-admiration, even if unacknowledged, will be present in an envious disposition. In spiteful envy, it is not simply another’s pride at issue, but this pride being seen as entitling the other to self-admire, and this, for the spiteful and bitter envier is unbearable.

In light of our understanding of ontological shame, it is now possible to see that the person most vulnerable to feelings of bitter resentment and therefore to spiteful envy is the person who is unreconciled to her shamefulness. To be unreconciled is to live an untenable way of being which has at its root, the belief in the possibility of self-admiration. One of the consequences of living the pretence of self-admiration is that it renders one powerless against the pride of others. The pride of others is seen as either an exhibition of, or an entitlement to, self-admiration, and this exalted state is what the envier most wants for herself but cannot attain. The desire for it is strong but the means of attaining it seem constantly undermined by the ‘better’ performances of others. In basic envy, when one grasps that feeling resentful over another’s entitlement to esteem is inappropriate, there is a sense of shame. It is in feeling ashamed of one resenting another’s justification to esteem that allows envy to be controlled and subdued. The shame of one’s envious displeasure can be accepted without it rendering one utterly disconsolate. Unless there is ‘ownership’ of the shame in envy, the feeling of envy will deepen, and an envious disposition will emerge. This is where, as Russell says, “[i]f I am of an envious disposition, the satisfactions to be derived from what I have grow dim, and I begin to be eaten up with a sense of injustice.” This sense of injustice sounds similar to Smith’s subjective sense of injustice, which, I have argued, is traceable to primordial resentment against ontological shame. The envying person draws on this primordial resentment to feed her sense of injustice.
Spiteful envy differs from esteem-focused envy, not only in intensity of displeasure – from dislike and annoyance, degenerating into hatred - but in the depth of the belief in self-admiration. Bitter resentment against ontological shame is a resentment against life itself, and the person snared in this bitterness seeks to escape it through the pretence of self-admiration. Where she is confronted with another whom she thinks is entitled to self-admire, her bitter resentment boils over into spiteful envy. And the person feeling or entitled to feel pride need not be making a show of her feelings, rather, what is being exposed to the envying person is that the other has justifiable reason to feel pride and this the envier can experience as an exposure of her shame. This is to misinterpret things, of course, for another having reason to feel pride is not an exposure of the envier’s shame, it is a covering for the envied person’s own shame. But to the envious person, another’s entitlement to feel pride represents an exposure of her shame and this is sufficient ground, in her own mind, for her to insist that her feelings are those of moral resentment rather than envy.

Returning for one final comment on the Smith-Parrott hypothesis that there are feelings of injustice in envy. While the account provided by the two psychologists undermines the traditional distinction between the two ill-will emotions, it has brought to light the difficulties attached to making such clear distinctions on the basis of abstract principles of justice which are suspected of ignoring or overlooking the importance in moral life of the natural reactive-attitudes. By examining their views on resentment in envy we have been able to come to understand that it is not a matter of the envying person actually feeling unable to express her resentment because it is socially unacceptable to do so, but because to express honestly her feelings of envy would be to put on display her own ontological shame. As we saw in the chapter on self-worth and Deigh’s account of shame, there is the prospect of ridicule where one’s shame is exposed, and for the envious person to be open to ridicule is more than she can bear. Just as ‘guilt’ is a cover for the affect of shame, so too is the claim of injustice and resentment a cover for envy. Unlike guilt, however, which is in the main, or at least very often, an appropriate cover
for a shameful act, the claim of resentment based injustice is a cover-up of envy and of the shame associated with envy.

In this chapter I have suggested that the nature of this harm, injury, offence, or in short, injustice at a pre-institutional level, is anything that exposes a person, or group of persons to their ontological shame – their incapacity to self-admire and see themselves as wonders in the world. The Smith-Parrott hypothesis – claiming one feels a sense of injustice in envy – has mistaken a bitter resentment against ontological shame as resentment against the unfairness of one’s situation. This is why we are not fooled into publicly sanctioning envy, and why claims of injustice are poorly disguised exclamations of “unjustified exposure of my shame!” by the envier. Where another is envied, she is disliked, even hated, precisely because she has the right to feel the pride which the envier wants for herself. There is a sharp sense of shame in envy – the shame exposed in one’s comparative weakness compared to another.

To summarise the main themes of this chapter: resentment, both moral and bitter, both in envy and as a defence against disrespect, is derived from the displeasure or annoyance in primordial resentment against being constituted as we are, as beings who are incapable of self-admiration. We possess a basic and fundamental disposition of resentment against ontological shame which can either, through a balanced and robust sense of self-worth, find expression in opposition to needless exposures of our shame, or it can, in combination with a failure to reconcile and to give up an untenable way of being, find ample opportunity for expression in spiteful and bitter envy. This is to say that there is a primordial resentment against our incapacity to self-admire from which is derived both a moral resentment that seeks to address ontological shame and a bitter and other-destructive resentment that seeks to expose it wherever possible. It is from this common source of resentment against being constituted in ontological shame that both the moral and bitter forms of resentment emerge. I have also argued that there is a basic common envy to which we are all subject and a spiteful envy to which those who hold a
certain view of themselves are prone. Those with a self-view that includes belief in the possibility of self-admiration are prone to an envious disposition because they see in others whom they envy an entitlement to self-admire, which they themselves desire. To avoid envy deepening and becoming an envious disposition of malicious ill-will, the individual must accept the shame of her envy and retain the hope of ‘emulating’ the other. It is the relation between envy and emulation that we turn to in the final chapter.
ENDNOTES

3 John Rawls. 1971, p. 533.
6 Smith 1991, p. 89.6
7 Rawls 1971, p. 533. Although I use Rawls’s account of resentment and envy which is developed in the context of issues concerning institutional injustice, I restrict most of my arguments to the issue of personal injustice rather than enter fully into the issue of ‘institutional injustice’ which I shall leave to political philosophers.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid, p. 534.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid. Rawls uses the term self-respect rather than self-esteem, but as previously discussed, these are synonymous for him, and I have chosen the term self-esteem, here, so as to not confuse the issue when I later refer to self-respect, which along with Gabrielle Taylor I see as distinct from self-esteem.
13 Ibid.
16 Ibid., p. 314.
17 Rawls 1971, p. 545.
18 Ibid, p. 534.
19 While Rawls says that “[e]nvy both in perspective and in action is blind to right and justice”, he considers it excusable where it is “a reaction to the loss of self-respect.” Ibid.
21 Ibid., p. 312.
22 Ibid., p. 319. Scheffler is himself a liberal. His aim was merely to call attention to the extent of skepticism about the liberal notion of responsibility and “the underlying tension between liberalism and the reactive attitudes”. Ibid., p. 316.
23 Ibid., p. 316.
25 Ibid., p. 531.
26 Walsh 1992, pp. 7, 12.
27 Ibid., p. 15. Walsh considers that the “demands of envy in the ordinary sense are satisfied and promoted by Rawls’ principles.” 1992, p. 18. He notes that Rawls was conscious of the sorts of criticisms that could be directed at his Theory of Justice, and it seems Rawls was acutely aware of the sort of thinking enunciated by Helmut Schoeck when the German sociologist wrote that, “[e]nvy is an inescapable and unappeasable drive in man. Hence it is utterly hopeless to strive for a society which could be freed of envy by social reform.” Schoeck 1969. *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior*, trans. Michael Glenny and Betty Ross. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc. p. 21. And Rawls seems to have taken to heart Schoeck’s statement that “[t]he utopian desire for an egalitarian society cannot. . . have sprung from any other motive than that of an inability to come to terms with one’s own envy, and/or with the supposed envy of one’s less well-off fellow men.” Ibid., p. 105.
28 Richard H. Smith 1991, p 81. The philosopher Marguerite La Caze goes further to suggest that “some forms of envy are not only excusable but morally valuable”. Marguerite La Caze, 2001. “Envy and Resentment”, *Philosophical Explorations*. Vol 4, No. 1, p 32. She considers envy “increases our capacity to properly recognise and respond to injustice”, and that, “a person incapable of feeling envy has detached themselves from their community and must have difficulty in properly recognising injustice.” pp. 43,44. Smith 1991, p. 95.
29 Ibid.
31 Ibid., pp. 11,13.
32 Ibid, p. 11.
33 Smith 1991, p. 84.
34 Ibid., p. 85.
36 Smith 1991, p. 95.
37 Ibid, p. 87.
39 Smith 1991, pp. 82, 84.
40 Ibid., p. 82.
41 There could a number of examples given here to illustrate this possibility. I shall refer only to one of the more recent accounts along these lines: P. Glick’s 2002 paper on the envious prejudice by Nazis in their treatment of Jews; a paper which I shall suggest has impacted upon Smith’s later writing. P. Glick, 2002. “Sacrificial lambs dressed in wolves clothing: Envious prejudice, ideology, and the scapegoating of Jews,” in What Social Psychology Can Tell Us About the Holocaust. eds. L. S. Newman and R. Erber. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 130-134.
43 Smith, 1991, p. 82.
45 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Smith 2004, pp. 58, 59. As mentioned in footnote 41, this chapter, Glick 2002 provides a historical example of ‘envious prejudice’ in the treatment of Jews by Nazis, and this account seems to have led Smith to a more sober view of the resentment that feeds envy. He may have also been influenced by account of the malice in envy by Jon Elster, 1999. Alchemies of the Mind. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, particularly pages 165-203.
50 Ibid, p. 58.
51 Ibid, p. 51.
52 Ibid, pp. 52, 53. Smith is referring to Tangney 1995, and to Tangney and Dearing 2002.
53 Ibid, p. 52.
55 Joseph H. Berke 1988. The Tyranny of Malice. New York: Summit Books. p. 63. Stephen Pattison also thinks envy conceals shame. The shamed person, he writes, “turns from their own inner sense of inadequacy towards the full powerful object that is the focus of envy. Envy then distracts itself and others from the reality of inner depletion even if it is also accompanied by powerful feelings of anger and rage against the envied object.” 2000, p. 116.
56 Smith, 2004, p. 54.
61 Ibid., p. 99.
62 Jealousy is also included. Ibid., p 99.
63 Ibid., p. 102.


Ibid., p 102. This is among the objections Stan van Hooft has outlined against La Caze’s account of the moral tone of envy. La Caze, 2001, has confused envy with what van Hooft calls righteous indignation, or what I am calling proper moral resentment. Stan van Hooft 2002. “La Caze on Envy and Resentment”, Philosophical Explorations Vol 5, No. 2. While it is true, says van Hooft, “that envy involves feeling displeased at another gaining a benefit by whatever means . . . it does not follow that all forms of being displeased are cases of envy. . . If one feels indignant then it is one’s sense of fairness which is coming to expression.” The displeasure of envy is “motivated by greed and self-dissatisfaction . . . and La Caze confuses the two forms of displeasure”. p 145. La Caze conflates envy and moral resentment, I would suggest, because she does not distinguish envy and resentment proper on the basis of covetousness, an issue I introduce in this chapter and take up for detailed discussion in Chapter Eight. As van Hooft says, “an obvious factor that La Caze ignores is that the good or success is actually desired by the person who feels the envy.” p. 144.


Joseph Butler 1970. p 76

Ibid, p. 75.

Ibid., pp 76, 83.

Strawson, 1982, pp. 68 and 77.

de Sousa 1987, p. 317. Wallace, 1994, follows a similar line. Wallace seeks to refine Strawson’s class of reactive attitudes to include only those for which we have certain ‘expectations’ of others, and resentment in response to these ‘expectations’ are moral and appropriate.

Stephenson 1989, p. 54.

Ibid., p. 56.

It would seem that Jeffrie G. Murphy, 1988, has much the same idea in mind when he suggests that “the primary value defended by the passion of resentment is self-respect, that proper self-respect is essentially tied to the passion of resentment.” p. 16.


Rawls 1971, p. 533.


The connection between resentment and ‘moral’ obligation is argued most cogently by Wallace 1994. Resentment, as Wallace argues, is the reactive attitude to which we are susceptible where there has been a breach of moral expectations. These expectations or demands are specifically moral because we can ‘hold’ people to them. To become resentful over a poor quality painting or an awful recital of Bach’s fugues is out of place because we do not ‘hold’ people responsible in any obligatory way for such poor performances. This is the flip-side, so to speak, of the difference between esteem- and respect-focused resentment, where the poor painter and musician have no grounds for ‘expecting’ others to admire and esteem them.

We may want to include ‘other living beings’, animals, birds, etc. particularly in light of the human propensity for cruelty. One difficulty to overcome, however, if we are to have respect for ‘other living beings’, is the fact that as far as we know they are not constituted in the same ontological shamefulness that I am claiming grounds our respect for human beings. This might suggest we require a different concept of what it means to respect their existence and in turn a form of resentment that takes into account the specific vulnerabilities that these living beings have in a world occupied by humans who often seem to delight in mistreating them.


Russell. 1930, p 89.
Chapter Eight: Envy, Admiration, and Humility.

Whoever wishes to increase human happiness must wish to increase admiration and to diminish envy.

Bertrand Russell

A person may envy another in the sense that she admires and herself wants the qualities or possessions another has.

Gabriele Taylor

Humility . . . has to do with what an individual’s attention is focused upon, the extent to which his mind keeps dwelling on various human merits, talents, and achievements.

George N. Schlesinger

In this final chapter I want to explore one of the more positive sides of ontological shame. The chapter is divided into two main sections; the first is a expansion of the negative implications of envy which were partially covered in Chapter Seven, but which will now include an emphasis on the relation between envy, admiration of others, and emulation; and a second section where I analyse humility in contrast to an envious disposition to show the benefits accruing from a reconciliation to our incapacity to self-admire.

As the quotations leading this chapter suggest, there is disagreement about the relation that exists between admiration and envy. For Russell, and as we shall soon see for many others, envy and admiration are poles apart. For Taylor, there is a form of envy she calls ‘admiring-envy’, which “may be harmless and conceivably even valuable.” When we add to this mix the following words of Adam Smith it is obvious that there is far from a consensus on the relation between admiration and envy, and a great deal of work needs to be done to clarify the relationship. On emulation, Smith wrote that

[t]he love and admiration which we naturally conceive for those whose character and conduct we approve of, necessarily disposes us to desire to become ourselves the objects of like agreeable sentiments, and to be as amiable as those whom we love and admire the most.
The different perspectives on the relation between admiration and envy are largely the result of varying views on what it means to emulate and whether emulation requires a positive attitude toward an exemplar or need only be associated with particular goods another has and which one wants for oneself.

The accounts of envy provided by Taylor and Rawls rely too heavily, I believe, on the idea that where a person desires some good that another has or has brought to her attention, she will experience one or other form of envy. Rawls, for example thinks that the sight of another’s greater good generates emulation-envy which leads us to strive in socially beneficial ways for similar things for ourselves. Taylor says that “[a] person may envy another in the sense that she admires and herself wants the qualities or possessions another has.” Both philosophers concede, however, that neither the concept of a socially beneficial emulation-envy for Rawls, nor admiring-envy for Taylor, are typical cases of envy. So why do they choose to label certain experiences as forms of envy when what is typical of envy is not to be found in these experiences? Establishing a clearer picture of the relation between envy, admiration and emulation, therefore, will form the first part of this chapter. I will then proceed to turn attention to how Rawls and to a lesser extent Taylor have not accounted for the difference between episodic pangs or bouts of envy, to which, I shall claim, we are all prone, and having an envious disposition. Both authors posit numerous ‘types’ of envy, but pay little heed to why only some people become deeply envious and why others are able to recognise, take responsibility for, and subdue their envy.

An explanation of why some people can become more deeply envious, I will argue, can be found in how a person views being subject to ontological shame. To distinguish a basic envy to which we are all vulnerable from a spiteful, bitter envy, we need to grasp how a person’s incapacity to self-admire impacts upon her attitude toward others who seemingly
have reason to feel pride. Common and spiteful envy, then, are directly related respectively to one’s reconciliation to or resentful defiance of ontological shame.

Traditionally, emulation has been thought to include a positive attitude toward another. Aristotle, for example, argued that the desire to emulate arises out of admiration for another person. In recent years there has also been a strand of thinking, most eminently supported by Rawls, that insists that it is envy rather than a positive attitude toward another which acts as the catalyst for the desire to emulate. We are presented, then, with what appear to be two opposing views of what it is that motivates a person to desire for herself something which another person has or is thought to have. Either the person is motivated to emulate through a positive appraisal of another, typically admiration, or she wants to have for herself what another has because she is envious of the other having it.

Envy, has generally been understood to include negative, hostile and destructive thoughts and feelings about another, and none of these need be present in Rawls’s emulation-envy. It is only where these ‘other-destructive’ attitudes are present, for Rawls, that we can say that there is envy proper. Envy proper for Rawls, will occur when we “feel downcast and no longer value so highly what we have; and this sense of hurt and loss arouses our rancour and hostility.” So while the desire to emulate is aroused by something that is not envy proper, Rawls insists on associating emulation with envy because ‘the sight of another’s greater good’ is sufficient to produce a reaction in us that he considers envious in character.

Rawls seems to think that to desire to emulate requires no more than that we ascertain what it is we want for ourselves without having any discernible attitude toward the person who has brought what we want to our attention. This formulation of what it means to emulate effectively removes any emotional interchange between one person and another. Because there is no need to account for what transpires between someone who wants something she
sees or believes another has and the other who has it, we can label it an impersonal account of emulation. It would seem that nothing of any emotional import transpires between people while each person goes about ‘bettering’ themselves. Considering the importance Rawls attributes to the ‘support’ individuals give to one another and the appreciation of others ‘excellences’ that were discussed earlier in Chapter Five, this is a curiously impersonal perspective on what it means to emulate. For Rawls, there is no requirement that we learn from or take a lead from others, all that is required to emulate is to see that others have what one would like to have, and that in having it there will be social benefits.

In contrast, the following is an example of the view that it is admiration rather than envy that lies at the heart of emulation.

Emulation is often equated with envy. The two phenomena are quite distinct and generally opposite in content. To emulate is to wish to be like someone, to identify with that someone out of admiration. Emulation is not spiteful, self-seeking, begrudging, or malicious, as is envy. Emulation does not seek to hurt the rival, just to equal or surpass. However, when emulation is thwarted the rivalry may become malicious.¹¹

I think this statement is essentially correct; but it is worth noting that Berke shifts from a context in which emulation is based on admiration to a context where it is not so obvious that admiration for one’s ‘rival’ has been or can be retained. He gives no explanation of what changes take place so that an original admiring-emulation is replaced by envy. This is to say that neither the view that emulation is always associated with admiration, nor the view that emulation is always associated with envy come to grips with the complexities of emulation in a competitive context. One’s attitude toward the person whom one wishes to emulate can alter according to the success or even likely success of such emulating.

Because Rawls has dissociated the desire to emulate from any specifiable feelings we might have for others - at the least, strong ones like admiration and envy proper - his account of emulation-envy is vulnerable to the sort of criticism brought against it by Taylor.¹² Taylor
brings to our attention that there are times where a desire to emulate can lead to harming another and so it is not always ‘socially beneficial’. She cites an example where one person finds herself in direct competition with another for the same position or job. Emulation in such a case involves aiming at acquiring the other’s particular possession, “his job, his position.” It follows, says Taylor, that “in intention at least she must be other-destructive as well as self-improving. In this case, therefore, emulation envy does not seem to be clearly distinguishable from envy which is destructive.”

Taylor is responding to the inadequacy in Rawls’s account of emulation-envy where two or more people are drawn together in competition over a single object of their desires. If we are prepared to accept that it is emulation at issue in such a case, then Taylor has succeeded in bringing to light the problems with the ‘harmless and socially beneficial’ clause of Rawls’s account of emulating. She has reminded us that to emulate requires that we have some emotional engagement with another person; that we will have feelings for or about the other we wish to emulate. Taylor implies that Rawls has failed to account for the possibility of envy proper intruding into his category of emulation-envy because he has not understood that what he means by emulation-envy is really what Taylor herself calls admiring envy. Where emulation is supposedly harmless and socially beneficial, as Rawls wants to claim, then, says Taylor, “it is not clear that what he has here in mind is emulative rather than admiring envy, as I have respectively defined them.” What, then, does Taylor mean by admiring envy? She classifies it as that form of envy where “the role of the person possessing the [desired] good is that of an ideal or of someone to be admired.” We are immediately struck with a confusing conflation of admiration and envy. Taylor’s classification of admiring envy is puzzling for she, herself, admits that “this kind of envy lacks those features and defects which characterise the typically envious.”
The person who strives in socially beneficial ways, and who does not harbour any ‘other-destructive’ thoughts, is, for Taylor, an admiring envier. This, I would suggest, is as unconvincing as Rawls’s emulator who also strives in socially beneficial ways and can be classified as an emulating envier. Neither description or classification is convincing because there seems to be no requirement that such a person be envious at all in such contexts. Both Rawls and Taylor admit as much. For Rawls the emulating envier is not envious in the proper sense, and for Taylor, the admiring envier is not envious in any way that we typically characterise as being envious. This perspective has arisen, I suspect, because Taylor has retained too much of the Rawlsian notion that envy need not involve any specifically disapproving thoughts about another; it is simply the feeling anyone might have (everyone will have) when confronted by another who has what they themselves want. This perspective is evident when she says that not all envy is necessarily vicious. She distinguishes admiring envy from envy the vice. In admiring envy, the person sees the other as an example, not merely in the sense that the fact of his possessing something which makes it appear more possible for her to try for something similar; it also gives her hope. This falls under Taylor’s heading of ‘admiring-envy’, “for the role of the other is still only that of in some way assisting her to get to where she wants to be; she does not envy him his possession of the good in question.”\(^\text{18}\)

Envy the vice, meanwhile, “has as its object not so much the good the other possesses, but rather the other’s-possessing-such-a-good. . . It is this type of envy which spoils the good it covets.”\(^\text{19}\) The envious person of this sort, does not necessarily want for themselves that which another has. The good in question is thought to be desirable not necessarily or not merely for its own sake, but is thought to be needed primarily to secure or boost the person’s self-esteem . . . The perceived deficiency may be anchored in the lack of some possession or personal characteristic she herself regards as being required for worth, or she may think things necessary for acquiring the esteem of others, which in turn is needed for her to esteem herself.\(^\text{20}\)
Seen this way all of one’s actions that relate, however loosely, to something possessed by another will necessarily involve one or other form of envy. There is something awry, I would suggest, with this perspective; for even if the connection between admiration and emulation is not as straightforward as many have thought, to claim that every interaction with others which involves a person becoming aware of her desire to possess for herself something that another has brought to her attention must denote one or other form of envy, seems counter-intuitive.21

It cannot be overlooked, of course, that it is obvious that in wanting for oneself something brought to one’s attention by another having it, either the very thing she possesses or something similar, there is always the possibility that envy will surface. The key feature of emulation, however, is not one or other form of envy, but I would suggest, covetousness. Covetousness has been presented as an excessive and culpable desire, one that we would do well to eradicate from our emotional repertoire. Much of this ‘bad press’ has come from a one-sided view of the Biblical injunction to not covet one’s neighbour’s wife, etc. Philosophically it has never quite recovered from Hobbes’ view that “Desire of Riches [is called] Covetousness: a name used alwayes in signification of blame.”22 But alongside the Biblical injunction to not covet one’s neighbour’s wife, etc., there is St. Paul’s exhortation to “covet earnestly the best gifts,” and most theological dictionaries and commentaries describe it in a way that could be defined as “an eager desire which though strong may be innocent and even commendable.”23 This is to say that covetousness is not always destructive and in the ‘well moderated’ personality can be positively useful. Importantly, there is often a displeasure at oneself when an earnest desire for something arises which one thinks one should already have. This self-directed annoyance and self-critical attitude is often mistaken for envy. It is an annoyance associated with coveting not envy and I would insist that envy requires both a coveting and a displeasure of another, rather than just a self-directed annoyance.
The focus in covetousness is on something desired for oneself. It is distinguishable from envy which has a dual focus, on both oneself and on another who is the possessor of that which one covets. Interestingly Taylor comes close to describing covetousness in her category of ‘object-envy’, which she says involves a focus of attention on the good itself rather than the person possessing the good. This allows her to distinguish object or admiring envy, where a person is envious of the good the other has, from ‘state envy’ where the person is envious of the other person having the good.24 This schema, I would suggest, requires revision, along the lines I have proposed; that to desire for oneself something that has been brought to one’s attention by another possessing it need not involve being envious. Taylor’s ‘object-envy’ can be more accurately described as coveting. Where one has admiration for another who possesses the good one desires for oneself, we are simply in the presence of both coveting and admiration, neither of which needs to be associated with envy. The key point here is that for envy to be present there needs be a displeasure at or an ill-feeling toward another. In the absence of such displeasure or ill-feeling one can covet some particular good without this ardent desire being viewed as essentially tied to envious thoughts or feelings.

Because covetousness does not require one to have any one specifiable feeling or attitude toward another, one can ardently desire a good without any negative or positive feeling toward another. Our feelings and attitudes toward another are a separate issue to our coveting of particular goods. Such feelings are a necessary part of emulation not covetousness. Since covetousness can exist independently of envious thoughts about another, we have the component required to emulate others that Rawls insists be understood as a distinctive and socially beneficial form of envy. This would seem to indicate that rather than associate every harmless, non-destructive, admiring, and socially beneficial aspect of emulation with some form or other of envy, it would be more accurate to describe the common feature in all types of emulation as covetousness. This allows us to
retain the important distinction between admiration for a person one wants to emulate and envy of her. What we need to attend to is the probability that rather than there being different types of envy - Rawls names five, Taylor seven - there are different types of emulation; one including envy, another admiration, and possibly a third where there is some attitude besides envy or admiration accompanying covetousness.25

We are now able to directly address the problem Taylor sees in Rawls’s account of ‘socially beneficial’ emulation-envy. It is possible to say that where it is specifically the job, rather than the person holding the job, that the focus of attention is on coveting. One wants the job and may be indifferent or apologetic to the other person, or even want her to be promoted. Where there is a displeasure at the other person having the job then we can say that this is a case of envy. We can say this because coveting is distinct from envy. Unlike envy, coveting does not require one have any specifiable feeling about the other person. Where it is his job, so that the greater or stronger desire is to see him deprived of it, there is envy, and if we insist on calling this a case of emulation, then we may wish to call this a case of envious-emulation. The extent or intensity of this envy will depend on a number of factors. In common envy one can vacillate between the displeasure associated with coveting – of not having the job one earnestly desires – and the displeasure of the other having the job. The tension between an annoyance at oneself and a dislike of the job holder keeps the envy under some measure of control. Only when the decision about who gets the job is made will the tension be resolved. In spiteful envy, however, all of one’s self-directed annoyance for not having what one wants will be added to the displeasure at the other. A doubling of displeasure will occur and envy will deepen. Most likely, this sort of distinction between desiring the job itself and desiring the job because it is his, is not strictly maintained. There is typically a mixture of both sorts of attitude in envious-emulation. Such a label differs from Rawls’s emulation-envy simply in the fact that there is actually the displeasure or ill-will of envy involved in the event, rather than, as it is for
Rawls, a complete indifference to the other, which on his own account precludes it from being envy proper.

In Chapter Seven it was claimed that envy possesses a resentment against ontological shame. To be in admiration of another does not include any resentment toward the person being admired, not at least where the admiration is of the highest order. I have said that emulation is coveting a particular good together with some specifiable attitude toward the other. If emulating can be based on admiration, then there will be no resentment at the other who one thinks has reason to feel pride. One can covet the particular good without any trace of resentment over the other’s entitlement to pride. In fact, if there is admiration in the desire for emulation, then there will be pleasure and perhaps delight in the person one wants to emulate. This is in fact what admiration conveys – that the other is deemed to have every right to feel proud. If, however, the emulation is based on envy, then there will be resentment of the other based on the simple idea that the other has no right or entitlement to feel pride when I do not. This is important to note when we come to discuss how the envious person attempts to disguise her envy in expressions of moral resentment.

Taylor claims that in ‘sophisticated envy’, “the good (or kind of good) is thought to be needed not necessarily or not merely for its own sake, it is needed primarily to secure or boost the person’s self-esteem,” and “it is this which is here the coveted good to be achieved at all cost.” What Taylor reveals here is that it is not primarily some particular thing that is coveted but what possession of this thing or good makes possible for its possessor. While it is not the most obvious concern where one experiences the sharp but temporary pangs of envy, I would suggest that in all forms of envy proper, there is covetousness of another’s believed entitlement to pride. But so long as the envier’s concern is focused on and restricted to not having the specific thing the other has, then there is hope of emulation, and concern about another having a right to feelings of pride from possessing
this thing remains merely latent. Where the desire to emulate is either absent or weakens in the face of a lack of success, then the first phase of a deepening envy will be marked by a turn from envy over another having a particular thing toward what having this particular thing means for its possessor. This is to say that envy, at its core, always carries a concern over pride and self-esteem, but this becomes a major concern in envious-emulation only if the envier cannot, or thinks she cannot, successfully emulate. An ongoing and intensifying displeasure will gnaw at her because she now feels impotent in the face of another who has a greater entitlement to pride. In short: if the envious person has little or no hope of attaining the coveted thing or good, then her envy will deepen into a despair over the other’s justifiable right to pride; a right or justification that she knows she does not have.

In common envy, alongside coveting for oneself the pride another is thought justified in having, there is a mean-spiritedness - a wanting the other to not be deserving of the admiration and esteem that one wants for oneself. To get the better of envy requires that one face the shame of such mean-spiritedness. To the extent that the envying person can acknowledge this shame she will be able to rid herself of any potentially destructive animosity toward the other and if she so desires, undertake or continue to emulate, with a more positive attitude. Envy begins to deepen when as David Cooper notes, the envious person “wants to see others have less,” and much prefers “the situation in which no one does better than him.” 27 Because the pleasure of pride is an important contributor to and confirmation of human self-worth, there will be a clear sense of shame attached to wanting to see another’s sense of self-worth diminished or even annulled. This is the shame of mean-spiritedness. As Taylor notes, “[i]nsofar as a person is envious, she is also mean and spiteful to some degree.”28 Such a mean-spiritedness applies even where the person envied may not feel any appreciable pride. All that matters for the envious person is that the other, in her view, is justified in or is entitled to feel pride and this she wants diminished or annulled. For envy to take hold, the shame that attaches to begrudging another her right to
feel pride must be suppressed or bypassed. Where it is disowned, the envious person begins to focus on what not having the desired thing or object means for her and this brings to prominence the concern about her own pride and self-esteem.

In understanding that resentment proper does not include covetousness, the envious person sees a way of fighting back against the clear superiority of the person she envies. The way back for her resides in making use of the ‘moral status’ of resentment proper. She has at least these two options available: she can assert that the other’s pride is undeserved or she can present the other’s covetousness as culpable. The former may prove difficult because the merit of her own type of pride is immediately brought into question and is likely to fall well short of the standard now being applied to the person envied. An attack on the culpability of the envied person’s covetousness will appear in something like the following form: “Doesn’t she know that the cost of her jewellery would feed the starving; it’s disgusting self-indulgence”. The envying person is able to put to use what might appear in itself a good and moral attitude – a reduction in culpable covetousness – to disguise her envy. She can point to the fact that she does not want nor ever did want what the other has, that she does not covet the particular thing or object in question – say an exquisite necklace or a Lamborghini, and therefore she cannot be accused of being envious. She will insist that her displeasure is based on the other’s undeservedness to be acclaimed because her jewellery really isn’t that spectacular, and after all, “she paid far too much for it,” or she could only afford the Lamborghini because her rich uncle died and bequeathed her a fortune.

These are the sorts of strategies employed to discredit the person envied, none of which are ultimately effective because the envier cannot rid herself of her own desire for the pride that possession of these sorts of things provides. This is to say that envy can sometimes be passed off successfully as resentment where envy is mistakenly understood to be about
particular things or objects rather than about what these things can provide for the person who has them. Once it is grasped that what, at the deepest level, evokes envy is not particular things but the entitlement to pride these things provide, then attempts to pass off envy as a non-covetous and moral resentment will be seen as fraudulent and manipulative.

The sociologist Helmut Schoeck wrote that “[e]nvoy is ineluctable, implacable, and irreconcilable, is irritated by the slightest differences [and] is independent of the degree of inequality.” I think he attributes to envy what I claim is attributable to our incapacity to self-admire. Not all envy, it seems to me, is implacable or irreconcilable. There is a difference between pangs of envy to which we are all subject and the development and deepening of envy that can become an envious disposition. It is where envy deepens to this extent that we can agree with Schoeck’s view that “it is not the absolute differences between men which feed envy, but subjective perception, the optics of envy. In other words, the envious man sees what confirms his envy.” The person of an envious disposition, I suggest, considers esteem-worthiness to be essentially the power to provoke envy (or fear) in others because she herself is easily provoked to envy and the person she envies is the person who most easily attracts her attention and her displeasure. To be able to retain pride while feeling envious, or in spite of it, she needs to equate pride with the power to provoke envy in others. Through the ‘optics of envy’ she believes that the other toward whom she has envious displeasure, has this power. It is this power to provoke envy that she most readily recognises and which she wants for herself. To be esteem-worthy, in her eyes, is to be able to provoke envy in others.

The person whose envy has deepened into a disposition will harbour the strongest displeasure and ill-will where the person envied is believed to be justified in having pride because she has accomplished something worthy of the admiration and esteem of others. The pride that comes with esteem-worthiness of this sort, aligned as it is with the person’s
own sense of worth-to-others and her self-respect, is the sort of pride that reveals the
envier’s own pride to be nothing more than a pretentious seeking after attention. On this
basis, eliciting admiration from others is no more important than gaining their attention
through provoking them to envy, or in some cases, engendering in them fear and
trepidation. When confronted with a genuine esteem-worthiness that encompasses self-
respect and worth-to-others, the person with such a view of what it means to be esteemed,
is likely to experience the strongest and most spiteful displeasure because she is confronted
by someone who is receiving esteem for things others genuinely value and warmly
appreciate rather than because they are provoked into feeling the displeasure of envy or are
fearful of some harm befalling them.

I would suggest that taking pleasure in provoking the envy of others is an observable and
typical component of conceit. This is why it is difficult to convince a conceited person that
she has done anything wrong and that one’s ill-will toward her is not based on envy. The
conceited person interprets every objection to her conduct and all expressions of moral
resentment as expressions of poorly disguised envy of her. All claims of justifiable
resentment will be scoffed at for if any of these grounds were to succeed in changing the
conceited person’s view of herself, it would bring to light ontological shame, the very thing
that reveals conceit to be vain pretence. Moreover, because the envious person often takes
pride in her ability to provoke the displeasure of envy in others, upon evaluating another as
justified in feeling proud, she will see the envied other as entitled to provoke her to envy,
and this, she will all too readily meet with her own brand of righteous indignation.

Taylor thinks the envious “with their misguided search for worth lack self-confidence and
self-esteem.”34 Or, as she says elsewhere, “the envious person’s thoughts and desires . . .
are misdirected: her self-esteem is insecure because she thinks of herself as lacking that
which would enable her to think well of herself.”35 These are the hallmarks of an envious
disposition and are discernible in the person who is unreconciled to her incapacity to self-admire, who will disown and displace the affects of shame that arise from this ontology, and who will see in others who are believed to be deserving of admiration, a direct challenge to what they understand to be their own entitlement to self-admire. Such a disposition stands in sharp contrast to the type of person who “dwells on various human merits, talents, and achievements . . . and does not . . . cherish any of his moral or intellectual endowments or accomplishments more – just because they are his – than comparable ones in other people.” This, I think, is a description of a humble disposition and now that I have established the difference between envy and admiration, I want to argue that an envious disposition stands in sharpest contrast to a humble disposition.

Henry Sidgwick noted an oddity about humility: that if a person’s merits are comparatively high, it seems strange that humility would prescribe that one have a low opinion of oneself. Indeed, this would be an oddity if humility was in fact a matter of having a low opinion of oneself; but this, I shall argue, is not what humility requires. Humility, I suggest, requires only that one not think too highly of oneself, or more specifically, that one not think so highly of oneself that one considers self-admiration possible. It stands as the antithesis of belief in the possibility of self-admiration.

Humility has its supporters and its detractors. It can attract admiration or contempt. Most famous of those in the first camp is St. Thomas Aquinas; while Frederick Nietzsche is seen as one of the most influential detractors. Aquinas states that humility tempers the mind, “lest it tends to high things immoderately”, and that humility and “highmindedness” are not mutually exclusive. For Nietzsche, humility is “self-diminution”, and only the rare “higher man” avoids it. Humility is very often compared to pride or egoism, but I think it also has features that stand out most clearly when compared to spiteful envy. This is so because both an envious disposition and humility stand in relation to ontological shame in a
way that pride does not. Pride is a compensation for our incapacity to self-admire, so while the sort of pride I have called pride-in-self-esteem is founded on a refusal to reconcile to ontological shame, proper pride or the pride-of-self-worth will include such a reconciliation and is commensurate with humility. There is, so to speak, an ennobled version of pride. There is no ennobled version of envy. In its most common form, envy has a mean-spiritedness which for many of us, brings a sense of shame, and where it deepens into an envious disposition, where everything is seen through the optics of envy, there is a strong desire to deprive, spoil, and destroy.

Humility can co-exist with the pride-of-self-worth. All that the humility will do here when confronted with reasons to feel proud, is remind the person that she cannot admire herself; that she cannot ‘behold’ herself in wonder. There is no requirement in humility to disavow thinking oneself admirable. Humility requires only that one be reconciled to one’s shame, which means an acknowledgment of the impossibility of self-admiration and a reconciliation to this fact. Humility sits well with proper pride – the pride-of-self-worth, but not with the pride of a truncated self-worth, the pride-in-self esteem.

There are at least four recognisable features in humility. These include: not thinking so highly of oneself that one is drawn into believing self-admiration is possible and justified in one’s own case; not putting one’s pride on display to provoke others to envy; an overcoming or reluctance to draw from primordial resentment; and an obvious disclosure of ontological shame. I will give a short explanation of each of the first three features and enlarge upon them when the discussion moves to the fourth, that is, humility as a disclosure of our incapacity to self-admire.

The first aspect of humility in not being drawn into the illusory belief in the possibility of self-admiration is primarily self-regarding. It requires a reconciliation to one’s incapacity to
self-admire and an acknowledgment that there is an upper limit to one’s pride. The second aspect exhibits regard for others and requires reticence in the display of pride. Modesty effects this concealment or covering over of outright pride so that others are not confronted with a provocation to envy. Together these two aspects of humility lead to an overcoming of the propensity we have for drawing upon primordial resentment to defend our self-respect, and in this reluctance to draw from primordial resentment there is a clear manifestation of ontological shame. In short: the shame of not being a source of wonder to oneself is embodied in the concept of humility.

The person of a humble disposition has in mind how others can be exposed to the shame of their inability to self-admire and that such exposure can take place where one provides others with a reason to feel envious. There is a reticence in humility, displayed through modesty, that is not dissimilar to the sort of reticence, discussed in Chapter Four, that we show in our everyday speech. There is a concern and sensitivity toward others in humility specifically, in not revealing one’s pride too openly, no matter how justified one is in having it. It this way, modesty presents one’s pride in such a way that it never carries any hint of pride as self-admiration. I shall return to modesty later in the chapter.

The humble person can recognise disrespectful treatment but will not take this to mean her sense of self-worth has been so diminished that resentment is called for in a way that might cause another to suffer greater diminishment of her self-worth.43 There is a reluctance to enter an exchange with another in this way, particularly if the humble person senses that the disrespectful other lacks a sense of self-worth. To respond with a weapon from the arsenal of ‘moral’ resentment, say anger or return of insult, even if justified, may cause greater harm to the other than has befallen oneself. In this way it can be said that the humble person has set aside certain aspects of moral resentment, those that demand a reaction in defence of self-respect.44 Jeffrie Murphy highlights this sort of problem when he writes,
Humility is alert to this tendency in self-respect to be overly protective of self-worth, even when no disrespect has occurred. We can recall from Chapters Five and Seven that self-respect is primarily a negative comportment toward ontological shame, by which I mean it is a respekt for the debilitating power of ontological shame. It has two main functions in its contribution to self-worth. It draws upon primordial resentment to protect and defend the self against exposures of shame. As all exposures of shame are, on my account, acts of disrespect, resentment is perfectly appropriate where the shame experience is acute because one has been the subject of some disrespectful act. But second, there is also anticipatory and blameworthy shame and these are the forms of shame that require a person to have self-respect in order to respond to them and effect the necessary changes to her attitudes and actions.

There is a weakness in humility. It can lead to an indifference in matters that call for respect-resentment, particularly on one’s own behalf. But just as the overzealousness of self-respect can be counterbalanced by the tendency in humility to rein in resentment, so too the tendency in humility to ignore disrespect can be counterbalanced by self-respect and a willingness, in some circumstances, to express resentment. The person who has balance between self-respect and humility will not respond to matters of esteem with resentment, and will not allow herself to become a doormat when disrespect is at issue. As Taylor puts it “[b]eing virtuously humble does not mean losing one’s human dignity and self-respect”.

The fourth aspect of humility is that it carries with it a clear disclosure of ontological shame. The way in which humility bears or shows ontological shame is not, however, as a shame that one must resent, but as a shame that one should treat as essential to human
fellowship. From an individualistic perspective ontological shame is resented. I cannot ‘behold’ myself as wonderful and precious. I am not, to myself, an object to be highly prized. But at the level of community and fellowship, it is precisely the limitation on egoism that is necessary for valuing and esteeming others and for developing self-worth in a community with others rather than in psychic isolation.

The humble person grasps the ethical significance of ontological shame not in its negativity but in the way in which it compels us to look beyond ourselves for our sources of wonder in the world. While there are many occasions where the incapacity to self-admire is disheartening and cause for disappointment, particularly where one is subjected to the ignorance, indifference and the maliciousness of others, there are compensations of some magnitude in being incapable of self-admiration. We are drawn into relationships with others and into gift-exchanges. The delight that is derived from being a party in such gift-exchange is sufficient to outweigh the negative aspects of our shamefulness. Humility includes a recognition of the value residing in the fact that our shameful limitation compels us to find greatness, beauty and excellence in others rather than in ourselves. It allows us to in-gather as much preciousness from the world as possible and to not waste our energy on vain attempts to see ourselves as wonders of the world.

A humble disposition begins to colour all the virtues and excellences which are ennobled precisely in accordance with what humility brings sharply into focus - one’s shamefulness and the moral imperative to cover this shame with the finest covering possible, and with as little reliance on moral resentment as possible. What humility brings to light is that that there is good cause to adorn oneself with ‘glory’ to cover ontological shame. Without ontological shame there would seem to be no motivation to render or cover oneself in the glory that one considers fitting for the task. Without ontological shame we would think the merest achievements worthy of our own exalted pride, admiration and esteem. We would
all be rampant egoists. It is precisely the power of ontological shame to limit us in this way that drives us to set standards for pride that will more often than not better the uncompromising nature of our shame. It allows us to affirm our self-worth, and shows us the riches of interpersonal communion.48

It was said in Chapter Five that self-respect is forged in the cauldron of acute shame. Humility, by contrast, is formed in gift-exchange. It is forged in one’s admiration of others, or being in wonder at something. It emerges from being in the presence of something greater than oneself and given that one can behold the wonderous and precious in anything or anyone other than oneself, everything and everyone is in this sense both greater than oneself and a potential source of wonder to be admired.49 An admirer participates in the wonder that resides in gift-exchange, and in complying with the condition of return-gift she acquires an elevated status – not in relation to the person admired but to her former self, the self she was before she entered the gift-exchange. It is in being elevated within gift-exchange that one will be ‘humbled’, where such ‘humbling’ means to be lifted up by something greater than oneself. The something greater in this case is the person who has given reason to be admired and the very nature of gift-exchange wherein one is a co-contributor to the creation of a new and edifying event that extends beyond what one brought to the exchange as an individual.

It must be reiterated that one cannot give gift to oneself. Those who are egoists attempt to do so, but end up craving admiration and esteem to a degree beyond that which most of us want or expect. If, as I have argued there is no admiration for another in envy, then there is no exchange of gift in envy. There is nothing to exchange that will qualify as gift. There is displeasure and ill will on the part of the envier and this forecloses on any possibility of gift-exchange. The difference between an envious disposition and a humble disposition can be grasped through an understanding of the conditions of gift-exchange. If we recall from
Chapter Three, to admire is to receive as gift something given by another, in expressing admiration there is a return-gift which, in turn, is accepted by the original giver. If one accepts another’s expressed admiration then one is acknowledging that whatever excited the other person to admire is indeed worthy of admiration.

The humble person will accept that her humility is potentially a gift for others, or at the least makes possible receiving others’ qualities as gifts unto herself. By contrast the egoist considers a ‘gift’ to be whatever she has given to others. In her mind it is not the admirer who transforms what she has ‘given’ into a ‘gift’; it was already given by her as ‘gift’ and the admirer should simply follow the preordained pattern of admiring whatever is presented as a ‘gift’. This explains why the egoist expects to be admired, and why she responds with anger and often aggression where the value she believes she has as a ‘gifted’ person, is disconfirmed. She cannot see things otherwise because in her eyes, what she has given is already gift and in no need of another’s input to become gift. Nothing she gives is a mere ‘given’. It is ‘gift’, and for it not to be received as such is, for the egoist, an act of disrespect. It is, of course, not a matter of disrespect but of a failure to esteem, and a failure brought about because the person making the judgement does not see the merit in whatever has been offered to her as gift.

Humility makes it possible to see that what one has done, or is doing, needs to be converted from a ‘given’ to a ‘gift’ by the judgement of others. This is where humility is at its best, where it never forgets that it is others who decide whether what one has accomplished is, for them, a ‘gift’. Humility never allows one to impose one’s own judgement of esteem-worthiness onto others. To be humble, then, is to be always mindful that nothing one does is straightforwardly worthy of the admiration of others. This, of course, does not preclude the humble person from believing that she is indeed worthy of admiration, even if others do not see it this way. But this self-appraisal of her own worthiness is always restricted by her
humility which is founded on the premise that self-admiration is neither possible nor belief in it at all beneficial to one’s well-being.

Humility makes possible a positive outlook on our incapacity to self-admire. It can do this in two ways – through accommodating proper pride and assisting in the joy of gift-exchange. As necessary as self-respect is to protect one against outbreaks of shame, it does not, in itself, as Taylor remind us, include any ‘favourable attitude’ toward oneself. Humility allows such an attitude; it anchors pride. It justifies pride because pride under the auspices of humility will be a pride directly and appropriately related to the necessity to cover ontological shame. Pride is compensation for our own inability to self-admire, but pride as the pleasure of self-gratifying the desire for esteem can be devoid of any connection to the shame of this limitation. Pride of this sort is an overcompensation for ontological shame and hence a pallid, emasculated version of the pride that accompanies esteem-worthiness. Pride-in-self-esteem is just this deformed sort of pride. It is devoid of any understanding of the role pride ought to play in the covering-for our inability to self-admire. Proper pride is the standard bearer or the gauge of how worthy one’s actions and qualities are in covering for ontological shame. It is our compensation as it were, for being the sorts of beings we are. Proper pride is the compensation for being unable able to see oneself as wonderful or precious, a being to be highly prized and esteemed. The egoist senses this, of course, and her exaggerated self-importance testifies to her recognition of the value of pride, but it is a value interpreted in terms of an avoidance of and refusal to accept her own limitation rather than in an acceptance of and reconciliation to it.

That a humble person will prefer an admirer to emulate rather than offer direct praise for her humility indicates that among the virtues, if not unique, humility is certainly unusual in that it imposes its own conditions upon the precise nature of the return-gift expected. So long as admiration for it remains, humility displays a power to compel its admirer to
emulate. Humility has this compelling power because where the degree of admiration in the
gift-exchange has been lowered, the admirer is drawn into believing that she already
possesses and values some measure of humility, and that this is why she now admires it.
With this thought that she has confirmed what she already values, the desire to draw
inspiration from and emulate the humility admired in the other seems not so difficult as she
may have first thought.

Understandably, humility is difficult to admire because it carries with it a clear disclosure
of ontological shame. In an encounter with a person who portrays herself as one who
refuses to adopt the pretence of self-admiration, many of our own pretensions founded on
our own delusory belief in self-admiration are exposed. This is an encounter with a virtue
that is unsettling to our sense of dignity and I would argue that there are only two sets of
circumstances where humility can be readily admired. The first is where one has directly
benefited from an other-regarding feature of humility; the second, in its artful disguise as
modesty. This is to say that humility can be admired where it is accompanied by modesty.
Examples of humility as other-regarding may include having been saved, for instance, from
the sharp blows of another’s anger, or being saved the disconsolate feeling one can
experienced when faced with another’s boastful show of her superiority. It is here that
another’s humility can be readily admired. Where humility is primarily self-regarding,
expressions of admiration for it are likely to be edited and redirected toward more specific
attributes, like tolerance, patience, forbearance, etc. It is here that we might hear the words
‘Oh, you are too modest”. This indicates, I think, that it is humility in the service of others
that attracts admiration more than humility in one’s own service. Humility as the self-
regarding virtue of not thinking too highly of oneself does not attract admiration much
beyond the level of social approval. By contrast, where a humble person is sensitive to the
human propensity to become envious wherever pride is exhibited, there is concern over
having her own pride, however justifiable it may be, presented to others in such a way as to
not risk provoking others to envy. Here, humility, tactfully disguised as modesty, can be more readily admired.

While it is possible that admiration for any virtue can arouse in the admirer a desire to emulate, it is only in admiring humility, I suggest, that a person’s admiration for humility compels her to emulate this virtue, as the only appropriate return-of-gift. Where other virtues can be admired and praised, humility, where it is admired, requires a very different response and return-of-gift. It requires that the condition of return-gift be met through emulation rather than through praise, and this is a reason why many of us show a reluctance to admire it and why the humble person may feel embarrassed where her humility is attracting attention. Both the admirer and the humble person know what is at stake in admiring humility. It requires of the admirer that she not, in the future, display her pride provocatively to elicit envy in others, that she be prepared to offset a natural tendency to resent when slighted, and that she accept in a reconciliatory way, her incapacity to self-admire. For the person whose humility is being admired, there is the embarrassment of knowing what is now required of her admirer is no small thing; that it can be onerous and counter to the delights of typical gift-exchange of talents and virtuous qualities. The humble person understands that to admire humility is not an easy task given the human struggle with ontological shame. The indebtedness involved in admiring humility is an indebtedness that impinges on our self-esteem, our self-respect; in fact, on our entire sense of self-worth.

Not luminous in its beauty, nor as easily admired as many excellences and virtues, humility does, however, possess a certain nobility in its refusal to be mastered by one’s natural primordial urge to feel resentful over being limited in one’s self-glory. There is a dignity attached to gaining some control over primordial resentment. Because humility helps a person set her level of appropriate pride below that of a pretentious belief in self-
admiration, her self-worth possesses an integrity which enables her to rein in the natural propensity to react with resentment whenever actual or imagined disrespect occurs. Humility will search out what lies at the very core of our being: a primordial resentment or annoyance against being–in-shame. It relays the stark message that, as difficult as it is, primordial resentment must be resisted wherever possible, even if it means one’s self-respect may suffer for not expressing justifiable resentment. It also imparts the message that although we are constituted as beings who are deprived of the assurance and joy that self-admiration, if it were possible, would bring, we can at least address and get the better of the resentment attached to this deprivation. Humility helps us to see that our incapacity to self-admire has benefits that will be squandered if primordial resentment is permitted to dominate our outlook on life.

This is to say that the humble person is prepared to suffer some measure of disrespect, and to relinquish her right to react with resentment over this disrespect. This is not a foreswearing of resentment, which would be the ‘repudiation and driving out’ of feelings of resentment, a sweeping denial of the power of primordial resentment, but a giving-into the reality that one cannot always avoid being treated disrespectfully. Just as one cannot expect to have one’s desire for esteem met at every turn, and one is faced with disappointments and misunderstanding, so it is with matters of respect from others. This too will sometimes fail, if only for the simple reason we do not know, as clearly as we would like, the difference between failing to esteem someone and failing to respect her. Humility errs on the side of ‘good will’ – that is, one is prepared to overlook actions that disrespect because the person so acting may not understand she is being disrespectful rather than simply failing to esteem.

In reining in the natural urge to express resentment, humility enables a person to grant or give those things that cover ontological shame greater opportunity to appear and attract
admiration. To resist drawing quickly upon primordial resentment makes it possible to approach others in a way where something about them can be found worthy of admiration. We often put this as ‘finding the good in others’, and it accounts for the humble person often attracting a following.

Since we grapple with our primordial resentment against being denied the alluring fruits of egoism and the self-sufficiency it falsely promises, a display of humility can arouse in some others a resentful disdain. It can be seen not just as a disclosure of ontological shame but as an exposure. It can appear as a bare-faced manifestation of ontological shame. It is here that modesty plays its part to help veil the shame that humility manifestly reveals but which it, without modesty, cannot cover. Modesty brings together humility and proper pride. It allows us to satisfy the desire for esteem and to accept that feelings of pride are appropriate so long as one is not seduced into believing in self-admiration. Modesty draws from humility on occasions when incoming praise threatens to undermine this ‘limit to pride’ and it adorns the shame that inheres in humility. It allows just enough of ontological shame to show through to appease those who might think that the reception of praise will entice the person into thinking she is entitled to self-admire. Modesty helps the person being admired retain her humility without it appearing an abrogation of self-worth.

Modesty completes the gift-exchange. It is the most appropriate attitude to have for bringing gift-exchange to a conclusion so that the particular exchange is completed without an endless chain of debt and repayment. Modesty can bring a particular gift-exchange to completion because it both acknowledges and covers ontological shame. It covers the shame that humility bears, and it veils but does not hide pride. Modesty is an artful way of receiving the gift of praise so that humility can be retained while pride can be enjoyed. Unless the gift-exchange can be completed in a show of modesty, there is the risk that the exchange can become unsatisfactory with the onset of resentment and discouragement on
the part of the admirer. Modesty forecloses on any possibility of resentment over having
one’s admiration and expression of it discounted or having one’s worth-to-others treated
with disdain. Modesty displays deference in such exchanges; “You are worthy of my
gratitude. . . thank you.” There is a note of self-affirmation for the admirer; her admiration
is being accepted gratefully which means she has self-worth in being-of-worth to others.
This suggests that in face to face gift-exchanges the humble person would prefer the
exchange to be reduced from an agape-experience or high admiration to confirming
admiration so that her humility is not placed under threat of disintegrating and modesty can
be retained without looking somewhat false or contrived. The admired person’s concern is
for her own integrity, for in the euphoria of high admiration there is always the enticement
of self-admiration. She would also prefer that the admirer begin to discharge the
indebtedness through emulation of humility itself rather than in praise of her humility.
Again, the enticement to self-admire is greatest where there is praise from another.

Modesty draws from humility so that no matter how wonderful, brilliant, or virtuous one
may be, there is a mindfulness that the decision to admire these acts, or character-traits, lies
ultimately in the hands of others. However much pride one’s modesty allows, the decision
to admire rests with others. Humility itself recognises that no matter how wonderful,
brilliant, or virtuous one may be, our human shamefulness cannot be overcome or removed
even by others who can admire us deeply.

There is, of course, as others have noted, a false version of humility.54 False humility is the
belief that, in light of ontological shame – that is, because one cannot self-admire - one
cannot have pride, and that one must live in strict accord with this belief. It is to
misconstrue proper pride as self-admiration; a healthy sense of self-worth as an egoistic
self-esteem; and a proper pride as ‘sinful pride’, as Taylor calls it.55 Such false or
counterfeit humility can never be received as gift, for it offers nothing in the way of a
covering for an exposed shamefulness. All that is presented to us in a counterfeit humility is a disturbing disclosure of our shamefulness without any adequate covering. To be presented with an uncovered disclosure of ontological shame is something to be resented rather than admired. The intended gift of pseudo-humility is rejected because it simply cannot be admired. It is not possible to get lost in the wonder of another’s submission to her shamefulness. The intended gift, then, includes a clearly recognisable derogatory note and Nietzscheans are right to treat it with disdain.

The genuinely humble person seeks to admire others wherever possible. As quoted at the outset of this chapter, humility “has to do with what an individual’s attention is focused upon, the extent to which his mind keeps dwelling on various human merits, talents, and achievements.” This is why I consider it is an envious disposition rather than conceit or self-infatuation that stands in sharpest contrast to humility. The spitefully envious person cannot find much, if anything, in others worth admiring. The central concern in an envious disposition is to spoil the pride another has or is thought entitled to have as if this will in some magical way provide a boost to her own sense of self-worth. Humility keeps a rein on the resentment that nourishes spite and in doing so allows others to have their pride-of-self-worth and to enter into gift-exchange with those that they can admire. If, as Russell says, we will find happiness in admiring more and envying less, then humility is the key to finding such happiness.

In summary: alongside the negative implications of our being incapable of self-admiration; there are compensations of some magnitude in being constituted in shame. We are beings who are capable of turning this shameful fact to our advantage. We can have pride in what we do, and we can enjoy gift-exchange. I think it plausible to suggest that the impetus for much of what we accomplish, achieve, and succeed in doing resides in our incapacity to view ourselves as wonders in the world. Without this limitation we would not be driven to
accomplish the sorts of things we think admirable and to cover for our inherent shame, or the things that others can admire because it brings them joy. We are beings capable of great deeds, of ingenuity, and of creative brilliance, and from this “harvest of human genius” human dignity emerges in a way that would not be possible if we were beings capable of self-admiration. Envy as a disposition precludes the enjoyment of gift-exchange and the pride it is founded on is devoid of so many sources of self-worth it brings no satisfaction. By contrast, a humble disposition, and the modesty it grounds, enable a person to admire more, envy less, enter gift-exchange and enjoy all the sources of her self-worth.
ENDNOTES

1 Russell. 1930. p. 86.
3 Schlesinger 1994, p 252
5 Adam Smith 1976, p. 114.
6 Rawls 1971, p. 533.
9 Rawls 1930, says that admiration is “a compensating passion” for envy. p 86.
10 Rawls 1971, p. 533.
11 Ibid.
12 Berke 1988, footnote 58, Chapter One. p. 304. Berke also says that “I think the modern tendency to change envy into its opposite, admiration, is another example of the need to conceal, as well as defuse, the malevolence inherent in envy”. Ibid. Footnote 56.
14 Ibid., p. 235.
15 Ibid., p. 236.
16 Ibid., p. 235.
17 Ibid., p. 234.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., p. 235.
21 Ibid.
22 Parrott, 1991, for instance, considers ‘admiring envy’ to be confusing”. pp. 9, 10.
26 For Rawls, there is benign, emulation, and envy proper along with ‘excusable’ and ‘inexcusable’ envy. For Taylor, there is object, admiring, state, particular, general, primitive and sophisticated envy.
28 Cooper 1982. pp. 40, 44.
29 Taylor 1988, p. 248. Also, Aristotle, 1886, who says that ‘mean-minded persons are envious’. p. 159.
31 Also, “ Envy is an inescapable and unappeasable drive in man. Hence it is utterly hopeless to strive for a society which could be freed of envy by social reform”, Ibid, p. 247.
32 Thomas Veblen. 1965 (1905) emphasises envy provocation in esteem, when he states that, “[t]he desire to stand in pecuniary standing and to gain the esteem and envy of one’s fellow men”, in The Theory of the Leisure Class. New York: Augustus Kelley. p. 32.
The advertising industry knows this well-enough; that to successfully create a desire for something is to offer the potential possessor the satisfaction of either being admired by others or failing this, and perhaps more importantly, the pleasure that is derived from provoking others to envy.

Plutarch says, “enviers eye more jealously those who possess a reputation for goodness, feeling that they possess the greater blessing, virtue; . . .”, as quoted in Elster 1999, p. 183. The contrast here between envy and admiration, or at least a positive attitude toward the other is brought out by Eugene Raiga. 1932. “The noble action demanded by morality”, he writes, “is that one should rejoice with others in their happiness, gaudere felicitate aliena, a virtue, indeed, which fine natures put into practice, but envy is there, ubiquitous upon this earth, and everything that contributes to the pride and joy of others causes it to suffer.”


Taylor 1985, claims that “humility the virtue is not strictly the polar opposite to sinful pride”. p. 51


Schlesinger, 1994, gives the example of Rabbi Meltzer whose seminal work on Maimonides was wrongly criticised for errors and inconsistencies and for insufficient scholarship. One of the Rabbi’s students claimed he could refute all the allegations made against his mentor, and wanted to publish his research findings. The Rabbi’s response was swift; “You will do nothing of the sort! You are probably not aware that the author of the polemic essay has regrettably undergone a series of misfortunes, as a result of which he has lately become deeply depressed. Surely, I cannot allow you to deprive a man, in such a deplorable state of mind, of whatever joy and satisfaction he may have derived from being able to refute some of my theses”. p. 253. Presumably, Rabbi Meltzer did not expect his words to be carried out into the world, for had he expected they would be, it would seriously undermine the student’s claim of the Rabbi’s humility.

This is a point made by Jean Hampton, 1990, when she says that in moving ‘beyond resentment’, “self-defence is not a point of the protest.” p. 56. Adam Smith,1976, a staunch defender of the propriety of resentment, also says that the “nobleness of pardoning appears, on many occasions, superior even to the most perfect propriety of resenting.” p. 240.

Murphy 1988, p 91. Because Murphy states that “the primary value defended by the passion of resentment is self-respect”, pp 16, 93, his view of resentment based on illusions of pride, etc., seem to fit my concept of esteem-focused resentment.

That the should be an element of ‘fear’ or ‘beware’ in Respekt is brought out by Joel Feinberg 1973. “Some Conjectures about the Concept of Respect”, in The Journal of Social Philosophy. Vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 1-3. Feinberg suggests that Kant has in mind observantia respect which requires that we regard others as the possessors of a moral power and authority, which imposes upon us certain forbearances. I would suggest that we respect the power of shame both as it applies to ourselves and how it leaves others vulnerable to disrespect.

Taylor, 1985, p. 51. William Neblett, 1979, argues that a humble disposition is “an understanding disposition”, which he thinks is “superior . . . as an ideal of the ideally good person, to an indignant disposition, even one of the properly moral sort.” “Indignation: A Case Study in the Role of Feelings in Morals”, Metaphilosophy. Vol 10. No.2. p. 132.
But of course, setting appropriate standards for pride in relation to self-worth will not remove the threat of shame. As Deigh, 1995, rightly says, shame can still strike without warning and without apparent reason in spite of one’s life plans. As La Rochefoucauld wrote, “nature has given us pridefulness to spare us the unpleasantness of seeing our own imperfections” (maxim 36 in *Reflexions diverses*), as quoted by Elster 1999, pp. 85, 86.

While there is a potential goldmine of riches in such an attitude, there is also a darker more menacing side to finding something ‘greater than oneself’, particularly as it relates to unrestrained patriotism. A. Clutton-Brock 1921, describes this danger in his essay, “Pooled Self-Esteem”, *The Atlantic Monthly*. December. “It becomes impossible for me to believe I am such a wonder as I would like to think myself, in the face of surrounding incredulity: so I seek for something . . . that I can believe to be a wonder, without arousing criticism and incredulity . . . There are many such things, but the largest, the most convincing, and the most generally believed in is Our Country.” I will leave it to historians and political philosophers to consider these words in light of the role of excessive patriotism in the formation of authoritarian governments and engagements in war.

I spoke earlier of modesty bringing to completion the gift-exchange in way that precludes any ongoing or lingering sense of indebtedness. It brings to completion the gift-exchange. Later in this chapter I will focus on the role modesty plays in allowing a person to combine both humility and pride.

This has relevance to an earlier point I made in Chapter Three, about Michael Slote’s argument for ‘commonsense virtue’, and against ‘commonsense morality’ (and Kantianism). The ‘self-other’ asymmetry and ‘self-denying, other favouring’ aspects of commonsense morality are, I suggest, understandable given the role of humility in addressing our ontological shame. Others depend upon us not regarding ourselves in such a way that will expose them to their shame. In addition to the views expressed in *Goods and Virtues*, Slote has also written on the same topic in *From Morality to Virtue*. 1992. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

This is Max Scheler’s line of thought; that modesty keeps a person “at a distance until shame begins to dissolve in the face of the increasing decisiveness of love”. Max Scheler 1987. *Person and Self-Value*. Dordrecht: Martin Nijhoff. p. 40.

Humility has features that are not present in modesty. So the term modesty can be, I think, restricted to the form of humility experienced where one is being admired or congratulated, praised, honoured, etc. Ben Ze’ev thinks that what is being described, here, is better understood as modesty. 1993, pp 235-46.


Taylor 1985, p. 51.


The ‘magical’ aspect of envy is noted by Taylor, 1994. p. 149.

Conclusion

I began the thesis with an account of the problems facing self-esteem theories. There are indications that much of the work on self-esteem carried out in social psychology suffers from a lack of conceptual clarity and that this has led to various controversies over the value of high self-esteem. The intervening chapters have deepened that analysis in Chapter One. The heavily positive connotations of self-esteem, based as they are on “biased and wishful thinking”, fail to acknowledge “the darker side of self-esteem.”¹

We are confronted with the fallacy of popular and unreflective endorsements of self-esteem that are founded on the mistaken notion that all of one’s worth resides in self-esteem. I have argued in this thesis that self-esteem can be isolated from other sources of self-worth and lead to psychic disorder. Alternatively, self-esteem as one’s favourable opinion of oneself can be incorporated into a robust sense of self-worth where it is one of several forms of self-affirmation.

This means that the commonly employed terms ‘high’ and ‘low’ self-esteem do not capture the distinction theorists are attempting to make between a sense of self-worth that is robust and healthy, and a self-worth that is impoverished and leads to poor intersubjective relations and, under certain conditions, to violence. Allport warned us almost seventy years ago that self-esteem alone is “responsible for a great super-structure of masquerade built up in every life. All in the interests of self-esteem one may cover one’s true emotions, put on a front, and at a considerable cost avoid exposing one’s weaknesses.”² He added that “the persona that develops protects one from unwelcome narcissistic wounds”, and that what “is even more spectacular, likewise in the interest of self-esteem, is the capacity men have for deceiving themselves.”³

Allport’s words seemed to have gone largely unheeded. Perhaps they have been read as if they apply only to those who have an exaggerated sense of self-importance, or to
those who fake self-esteem, rather than to the notion of self-esteem itself as it plays out in our quest for self-worth. There is a self-esteem that masquerades and conceals. It is the self-esteem of a truncated self-worth, and it is the form of self-esteem to which we are all attracted because it protects us from the wounds of shame. It is the self-esteem founded on the vision of an ability and entitlement to self-admire and to see oneself as ‘a wonder in the world’. The egoist, for example, believes she can self-admire. She reasons also that an ability to self-admire is obvious evidence for a capacity to self-admire, and as with all of the better human capacities, especially those associated with self-empowerment, it would be remiss to not develop it. She becomes ensnared in the pretence of self-admiration.

It seems imperative, then, that future analyses of self-esteem must take into account ontological shame, for the shame attached to being denied the agape-experience of ourselves manifests itself in the emotions. My analysis of self-esteem was undertaken with a view to understanding ontological shame, its impact in emotions that cluster around self-esteem and its role in self-worth. I would suggest therefore, that future studies into self-esteem take note of Salmivalli’s insight that “instead of studying self-esteem as a unidimensional continuum from “low” to “high,” qualitative distinctions should be made . . . between different types of unhealthy self-esteem, such as disparaging and underestimating self verses narcissistically refusing to see anything negative in oneself.” 4 I shall leave it to those in social psychology to address this issue.

For this thesis, the discussion of self-esteem and its problematic conception has led to an exploration of the deep source of much of our emotional psychology in the shame that inheres in not being able to admire ourselves and be the independent origins of our sense of self-worth. Through the discussion of love of esteem, pride and admiration in Chapters Two and Three I have shown that there is a radical asymmetry between our admiration and esteem for others and the forms of self-affirmation available to us. As pride is the form of self-affirmation most easily satisfied, it can suffer from belief in the
possibility of self-admiration and thereby become separated from others sources of worth.

The analysis of esteem, pride, and admiration laid the groundwork for the focus on shame which was the key issue in the central Chapters Four to Six. I explored acts of concealment to show that they can be either appropriate coverings for, or deceitful denials of, our ontological limitation. The concept of self-worth was further developed to include self-respect with its susceptibility to shame experiences, and the self-affirmation that comes from being-of-worth-to-others. The ‘self-act dissociation’ and ‘difference-in-focus’ theories of guilt and shame were analysed to reveal that the distinction failed to capture the sense of shame attached to ‘being guilty’ of a wrongdoing. Because admissions of guilt can often be a cover-up of blameworthy-shame, it is mistaken to think these admissions carry the desire to atone. Rather it is remorse, with its retention of a sense of shame that provides the impetus for atonement and reparation.

Finally we have seen that there is a primordial resentment against our incapacity to self-admire. This resentment lies at the root of both envy and moral resentment. In Chapters Seven and Eight I examined envy, first in how it can be disguised as moral resentment through its enlistment of ‘the sense of injustice’ residing in ontological shame, and then how it differs sharply to admiration as a source of emulation. I completed the thesis by arguing that an envious disposition is the culmination of the seductive but erroneous belief in the possibility of self-admiration and therefore includes both a spitefulness against those thought to be entitled to feel pride and a delight in provoking envy in others. As such it stands in stark contrast to humility which carries with it a clear understanding of our ontological limitation.

In a sense, we are, and are not, shameful beings. The shame we have because we cannot self-admire is the shame of not being fully self-sufficient. We are limited in how we see
and experience ourselves. But alongside the negative implications of our being constituted in shame we are beings who are capable of turning this shameful fact to our advantage so as to accomplish, achieve, succeed in our endeavours, all of which clothe this shame, so that without this severe limitation we would not be driven to and think natural our desire to accomplish things. This is our being human: that we are beings capable of great deeds, of ingenuity, and of creative brilliance all, I claim, in the service of covering for the shame each of us as individual must carry. Testimony to this ingenuity as our true nature is our admiration for a vast array of accomplishments.
ENDNOTES

1 Baumeister, Smart and Boden 1999, p. 273.
2 Allport 1937, p 169
3 Ibid.
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