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GUARDING MORAL BOUNDARIES: SHAME IN EARLY CONFUCIANISM

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“[Man] emerged by moving imperceptibly from unashamed sexuality to sexuality with shame. . . .”

Georges Bataille¹

Claims that China is a “shame culture” tend to presume that guilt is the superior moral motivation. Such claims characterize guilt as internally motivated and operative even if no outsider is aware of any wrongdoing. By contrast, they assume that shame occurs only when someone is observed. The observer represents the moral opinion of an outsider, and, as a result, shame is said to be externally motivated. In this view, genuinely moral motivation is internal. Internality is seen as a requirement for moral autonomy (the ability to make decisions independent of particular social norms), and only guilt cultures are thought to provide it. In response to allegations that China is a shame culture, scholars of Confucian ethics have made use of new studies in psychology, anthropology, and philosophy that present shame in a more favorable light.² These studies contend that shame involves the *internalization* of social moral codes. By adapting these new internal models of shame, Confucian ethicists have reinterpreted the emphasis on shame in early Confucianism. Instead of reflecting a fear of external judgment and retribution, they argue, shame represents a motivation that is internally inspired.³

Whether or not this is an effective way to rehabilitate the ethical value of Confucian shame, it raises questions about the very nature of shame in early China. The new understanding of shame adopted from these recent studies features illustrations of shame that seem to have no counterpart in early Confucian texts. The sinological adaptation of these models inadvertently calls attention to the striking absence of such prominent shame metaphors as “being seen,” particularly being seen naked. Is this, then, the same type of shame? Classical Confucian texts depict a society that is convinced of the importance of shame as a distinctively human experience. Yet we may not be correctly interpreting that shame by reading it through a model based on visibility and sexuality. The absence of these metaphors suggests that something else might be at issue.⁴

This article examines the shame vocabulary in early Confucian philosophical texts in light of the metaphors underlying the new internal models of shame. Here it is proposed that, instead of illustrating shame through visual and sexual metaphors, the texts depict shame in the context of contact and contagion among blurred boundaries. This disparity is important because the sexual/visual metaphors depict shame as the exposure of the self in its core or entirety. Minus the sexual/visual

metaphors, there is little reason to think that the shame in early Confucian texts represents the exposure of this kind of self. In fact, given the metaphors related to blurred personal boundaries, a different experience of both shame and self seems to be operative. Furthermore, a shamed self illustrated by blurred personal boundaries is not as conducive to arguments about shame being internally motivated. If the boundaries of the self are not clearly defined (as opposed to an image of a self that can be visually exposed), then it seems unlikely that anyone would develop a rigid ethical distinction between internal and external motivation. It would make as much sense to say shame is internal as external, but to insist on either would be odd. If shame is an experience of blurred personal boundaries, it is less relevant to ask whether it can be experienced without someone else watching. Both self and some form of "other" are certainly present. But the other does not function as a judge, and it does not represent social norms. Thus, its presence is not an impending threat to moral autonomy, as it is when the other is the "eye of judgment." On this basis, this article reconsiders certain recent claims about early Confucian shame. Given the historically layered composition of early Chinese texts, it is hard to find a uniform attitude about proper shame even within one Confucian text. This article challenges the claim that the three early Confucian texts shared such an attitude, specifically the attitude of rejecting external/conventional shame in favor of internal shame and internal moral motivation.

The first section of the paper outlines some of the recent studies that have contributed to producing the new models of shame. It also introduces the visual and sexual metaphors that feature so notably in these models. The second section consists of a structural analysis of shame in Warring States Confucian texts that aims to show some general understandings of shame implicit in the culture of that period.⁵ Whatever the possibilities for a uniform Confucian position on shame, it would have to relate in some way to the period's prevailing understandings of shame. Despite the frequent references to shame in the early Confucian texts, no such references occur in the *Laozi*, the *Mozi*, or the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi*. Hence, this paper relies on evidence within the Confucian texts to reconstruct the implicit understanding of shame in the period.⁶ In light of the general understandings of shame in the culture suggested by the structural analysis, the paper attempts to assess the application of these new studies of "internal shame" to Warring States China. The conclusion sketches how the difference in shame metaphors might affect the question of whether Confucian shame is internally motivated.

New Studies in Shame

By the middle of twentieth century, a trend in anthropology led to distinguishing between shame cultures and guilt cultures.⁷ While devaluing shame cultures (on the grounds that shame is only activated by the experience of being judged by someone else), this categorization praises guilt (or sometimes "conscience") for being founded in an internal sense of having done wrong. Not surprisingly, the categorization tends to identify Western European and American cultures among the few guilt cultures.

Gerhart Piers, a psychologist, and Milton Singer, an anthropologist, are among those who aim to discredit this trend by reconsidering the nature of shame. In *Shame and Guilt: A Psychoanalytic and a Cultural Study*, Piers and Singer posit a notion of internalized shame, thereby rejecting the use of the terms “internal” and “external” as exclusively descriptive of guilt and shame, respectively. Moreover, they argue for the moral superiority of shame by describing guilt as a response to aggressive impulses against punitive parents, which implies that guilt amounts to nothing more than begrudging submission to social norms.⁸ By contrast, they contend that shame is a potentially positive response to the disappointment of not achieving a loving parental ideal. As a consequence, they note, a true sense of shame would amount to a healthy identification with social ideals.⁹ They also depict shame as more ethically promising, because, unlike guilt, it rarely leads to resentment.¹⁰ Piers observes that shame presents the greater potential for personal growth: “Whereas the shame-driven person might be propelled beyond his natural limitations and break, the guilt-ridden as a rule will not even reach his potentialities.”¹¹ In addition to retrieving these positive aspects of shame, Piers and Singer also suggest that, while guilt and shame are distinct, they often occur together or in sequence; hence, they find the notion of exclusively guilt-based or shame-based cultures to be unconvincing.

Recent philosophical studies of shame also investigate its internal aspects. In *Pride, Shame, and Guilt*, Gabriele Taylor notes that shame is felt even when one is convinced of being alone. Taylor describes shame as a kind of self-reflective consciousness of one’s whole being seeming inferior to how one perceives it. While she does contend that a metaphorical audience is integral to the experience, she says that the audience simply represents “the discrepancy between [one’s] own assumption about [one’s] state or action, and that of a possible detached observer-description of this state or action.”¹² In *Shame and Necessity*, Bernard Williams supports Taylor’s description of shame as affecting one’s entire being. Moreover, like Piers and Singer, Williams explicitly attributes this feature of shame to its being an internalization of another’s judgment. In his description of ancient Greece, he says that shame, “requires an internalized other whose reactions the agent can respect . . . [who] embodies intimations of a genuine social reality—in particular of how it will be for one’s life with others if one acts in one way rather than another.”¹³ The internalized authority is not some particular person, Williams argues, but rather an ideal—representing some person other than oneself. Williams maintains that internalization, in and of itself, does not make shame morally credible, because a socially isolated person is not ideally situated to make moral judgments.¹⁴ Nevertheless, Williams shares Taylor’s conception that shame is concerned with the self in its very being, and for this reason, he argues, shame can facilitate self-understanding.

Guilt, by contrast, according to Williams, lacks this advantage, because the primary focus of guilt is the effect of one’s actions on others. Furthermore, he notes that guilt can lose any moral advantage inherent in its concern for others if it focuses on principles instead of people. While complicating any claims to the moral superiority of guilt, Williams also challenges the very distinction between shame and guilt by observing that in the early Greek conception, something like guilt is subsumed under

something like shame. Williams maintains that shame and guilt are not easily separated, because we can feel both with regard to the same thing. Thus, these philosophical studies also resemble the psychological and anthropological studies in muddling the distinction between shame and guilt.¹⁵ Moreover, they, too, challenge claims regarding the moral inferiority of shame.

In the process of defending the internality of shame, these studies actually complicate the moral valuation of internality over externality, although that is not what the sinological adaptations tend to borrow from them. Most of these studies argue that the internal nature of shame cannot be denied, at least as a weak claim: shame *must* internalize the authority of the other if it is to function at all. This is what the sinologists make use of. (The stronger claim—that shame can entail completely autonomous internal authority, independent of any particular conventional norms—is another matter, and, of the studies in Confucianism considered here, only Heiner Roetz' analysis insists on it.) However, although there is some disagreement in the details, ultimately these studies also contribute to making the moral contrast between internal and external appear convoluted. In one sense, they argue, guilt is less internal. That is, guilt is less focused on the self, insofar as it notices the victim of one's ill deeds more than it notices how things reflect back on one's self. This lack of focus on the self seems morally laudable. But in another sense, they imply, shame is less internal. We can even feel ashamed of others.¹⁶ Correspondingly, guilt is more focused on the self, precisely because, in focusing on the deed or the victim, it does not recognize the constitutive relationship between self and other. To that extent, guilt's internal focus seems morally inferior to shame. Thus, to some extent even the moral superiority of "internality" is suspect. Internality may signify moral autonomy, but if the price of moral autonomy is moral motivation that stems from excessive self-focus, then being able to feel moral emotions in solitude is not necessarily to one's credit.

In sum, one might take these studies to suggest that having a sense of the constitutive relation between self and other is more ethically significant than deriving one's moral motivations independent of the ethical opinions of others. But this reevaluation of internality is not indicated by the term "internal shame," and it is not what the sinological studies have emphasized.

The sinological studies have also not emphasized a recurring visual metaphor in these studies that does not resonate with early Confucian texts. It is a significant feature of these new psychological, anthropological, and philosophical reassessments of shame that they frequently depict it as a visual sensation. For instance, Williams explains shame as the experience of being observed (and the subsequent wish to disappear): "The basic experience connected with shame is that of being seen, inappropriately, by the wrong people, in the wrong condition."¹⁷ In saying this, Williams builds upon the characterization of shame supplied by Taylor, who argues that shame is a matter of being "seen through," so to speak, in one's entirety. According to Piers, this sense of being utterly transparent originates in a notion of an omniscient God—in the "all-seeing, all-knowing eye, which is feared in the condition of shame, God's eye which reveals all shortcomings of mankind."¹⁸ In his phe-

nomenological study of shame, Robert Metcalf notes a Nietzschean view of shame that also invokes God's eye: describing shame as being dazzled by a gaze that sees us on all sides. Metcalf observes that the connection between shame and visibility is also important in the work of Sartre. He points out that Sartre defines shame in terms of how one appears to the Other.¹⁹ Indeed, Metcalf claims that the association of shame with visibility is evident "across cultures."²⁰ Whatever the evidence for the latter claim, Metcalf is at least not wrong about these new studies on the internal aspects of shame. Although they never assert that shame *must* appeal to visual sensation, the studies certainly seem confident that vision is fundamental to the experience and that it can always be described in these terms.

The agreement about the visibility of shame in these studies is even complemented by assertions that guilt is auditory. Williams mentions a theory that guilt involves hearing one's own inner voice of judgment.²¹ Piers also invokes this idea, citing Eric Erikson's claim that guilt is an auditory motivation that is slower to develop than shame.²² Agnes Heller uses the same visual/aural opposition, although her terms of comparison are shame and conscience, rather than shame and guilt. Heller sees shame as representing the community's judgment and takes it for granted that this would be depicted through an "eye of other" (instead of an ear). She says shame "makes us blush and hide our faces; it arouses the desire to run away, to sink into the earth, to disappear."²³ She considers conscience to be a more deeply internal motivation and explains it in terms of an internal voice (that of God or of practical reason). Thus, as far as these studies are concerned, while guilt is auditory, shame is evoked by the sensation of being seen, in which the whole self is revealed to an other.

For a variety of interconnected reasons, most of the metaphors of total self-exposure in these studies pertain to sexuality. Piers takes pains to separate internal shame from what he calls "sexual shame." He remarks, "We mean by shame something quite different from 'sexual shame.'"²⁴ Yet he follows this with a striking number of explicitly sexual examples of internal shame.²⁵ For instance, he notes a case of shame and "sexual acting out" of a Don Juan figure and a case of pathological male exhibitionism, which he describes as prompted by "a painful sense of shame over his inadequacy—centered usually on the size and function of the penis."²⁶ Piers' references to sexuality in this context are understandable in light of his use of Freud. For Freud, shame is a force that opposes sexuality. Piers mentions that, according to Freud, shame functions to thwart one's own sexual drives (including voyeuristic drives):

[I]n *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, Freud uses the term "Scham" in close connection with "Ekel" (loathing, disgust), at times almost synonymously with it and defines it as "the force which opposes the voyeuristic drive and might be overcome by the latter. . . ." In the same treatise, shame, together with loathing, is described as one of the barriers against the sexual drive. . . .²⁷

Hence, Piers' use of Freud accounts for the connection of shame to vision as well as the connection of shame to sexuality: internalized shame opposes the pleasures of

sexuality, including that of voyeurism. In other words, shame's role in opposing one's own voyeuristic impulses explains this aspect of the conjunction of shame, vision, and sexuality in these studies.

The other explanation for these sexualized and visual metaphors of shame involves reactions to the voyeurism of someone else. In this context, the experience of shame resembles that of being seen naked. In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud explains that shame is the protective response to exposed genitals. He argues that the visibility of the genitals corresponds to a stage in human development when human beings become proud enough to walk erect instead of walking on all fours.²⁸ At that point humans feel shame about their visible genitals because, in raising themselves from the ground, they have made their genitals vulnerable. Thus, shame occurs when the genitals of the human need protection from the gaze of others: "this [raising himself from the ground] made his genitals, which were previously concealed, visible and in need of protection, and so provoked feelings of shame in him."²⁹ Like Freud, Williams connects shame to the genitals. He notes that the root of the Greek word for shame derives from the word for genitals:

[Shame] is straightforwardly connected with nakedness, particularly in sexual connections. The word *aidoia*, a derivative of *aidos*, "shame," is a standard Greek word for the genitals, and similar terms are found in other languages. The reaction is to cover oneself or to hide, and people naturally take steps to avoid the situations that call for it.³⁰

In light of this shared etymology, Williams implies that seeing someone's genitals is a metaphor for internalized shame. This is the case because the genitals are ordinarily covered, and in shame there is a desire to cover the self. Taylor provides an example of shame that belongs to this context: she describes a nude woman sitting for an artist only to discover that his interest in her has become sexual. Although she was already naked, she is not ashamed until something closer to her very being is exposed by his sexual interest. Hence, the experiences of shame and of being viewed sexually share a common sensation of unwitting self-exposure.

There seem to be two main arguments explaining why sexuality would be used to represent the self in these illustrations of shame. According to Metcalf, the reason the self is what is exposed by nakedness is that the self is private and the genitals represent privacy. In his study of shame in the work of Freud and Max Scheler, Metcalf arrives at the conclusion that sexual exposure resembles shame because both deny the privacy of the self, revealing it to the public:

Scheler's insight that shame is constitutive of subjectivity is nowhere more clearly illustrated than in Freud's account, for there it is evident that sexual shame and inhibition belie the privacy of my sexual being, carefully guarded from all others. Even at this depth of my soul, I am subject to regard. . . .³¹

Thus, the link between shame, vision, and sexuality is the exposure of the deeply private soul. That is, according to Metcalf, sexuality represents the privacy of the inner self, and shame is the sensation of having that privacy exposed to the view of another.

Williams' interpretation of shame in ancient Greece differs from this account of why the genitals represent the self. In his explanation of how shame becomes an internalized motivation, William casts the observer as a thief of the shamed person's power:

It may seem mysterious how any process of internalization can explain shame. The answer lies in the fact that the root of shame lies not so much in observed nakedness itself, but in something of which that is, in most cultures but not all, a powerful expression. . . . The root of shame lies in exposure in a more general sense, in being at a disadvantage: in what I shall call, in a very general sense, a loss of power.³²

Although Williams is explaining here how internalization functions (as opposed to why exposed genitals stand for the exposed self), he seems to avoid recourse to the notion that shame reveals the private realm. Instead, he suggests that nakedness represents the site of a power struggle between the self and the other, even though the other need not be hostile.³³ Yet there must be some reason why Williams says these illustrations of shame show the self to be revealed in its "whole being." In the absence of any overt explanation, perhaps we can infer that, for Williams, seeing someone naked represents seeing their self because the self is formed by the interactions within these power relations.³⁴ In any case, whether because the self is private or because it originates in a power struggle, in these studies exposed sexuality represents the self—revealed in its very being.

Given that the experience of shame is so important in the early Confucian texts, it is peculiar that these visual/sexual metaphors, with their accompanying associations, do not appear in them. Indeed, citing Taylor's and Williams' observations, Kwong-loi Shun argues that the early texts do not associate shame with being seen or, for that matter, with being heard.³⁵ (Actually, the character *chi* does contain an ear radical, so, if the opposition were relevant, there might be stronger reasons to think of shame as aural.)³⁶ Moreover, these early Confucian texts never invoke shame in the context of sexuality.³⁷ In the studies discussed above, shame is represented as being seen through. This sense of being utterly exposed is consistently illustrated through sexual and voyeuristic metaphors. The absence of similar illustrations in the early Confucian texts may indicate shame of a different type or function.

A Structural Analysis of Early Confucian Texts

A diffuse sensation of boundary crossing seems to characterize shame in the early Confucian texts. Although it is not as obvious as the visual metaphors in the internal shame studies, oblique and repeated references suggest that contact functions as the physical model for shame. Shun remarks on this, noting that the experience of shame described by the Confucian texts is like being tainted, and the response is to distance oneself rather than hide.³⁸ Roetz' description of what he calls "external shame" seems to refer to a similar phenomenon.³⁹ In Roetz' opinion, the Chinese terminology for shame depicts it as an external experience. That is, according to Roetz, the

composition of the word *chi* 恥 implies an external manifestation of shame, because he interprets it as someone else's ears growing red after hearing about something shameful.⁴⁰ For his part, Wolfram Eberhard interprets the character's composition as one's own ears growing red in shame. Although Roetz' reading makes a stronger case for his point that shame is external, even the reddening of one's *own* ears implies a mental-physical continuum that Roetz finds deplorably typical of external shame.⁴¹ Roetz links this external notion of shame to impurity. He notes that expressions like *xi chi* 洗恥 (wash off shame) and *xue chi* 雪恥 ("whiten out" shame) point to an external form of shame by implying that shame is an impurity to be cleansed. Although in my view it makes no more sense to call this shame "external" than "internal," Shun and Roetz point to something that seems correct: contact (or what they call taint or impurity) seems to be the primary sensory illustration of shame evident in the early Confucian texts; it is not voyeuristic exposure.

Something like a contact-driven, boundary-blurring model of shame is what emerges most clearly in an analysis of the fifty-odd references to shame in the *Lunyu*, the *Mengzi*, and the *Xunzi*.⁴² These references seem concerned with demarcating blurred boundaries. In particular, this includes boundaries related to the formation of the self (although it also includes conceptual and geographical boundaries). The shamed human person in early China seems to be one whose personal boundaries have been blurred. This blurring occurs in relation to both social status and the body—the mouth, the eyes, the ears, and the entire porous surface membrane—all of which is potentially shameful insofar as it is vulnerable to restructuring. As Mary Douglas notes in a study of the concept of pollution, "all margins are dangerous. If they are pulled this way or that, the shape of fundamental experience is altered. . . . We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolize its especially vulnerable points."⁴³ Along these lines, although the boundaries that need reinforcement vary, the early Confucian texts reveal a conception that shame is a response to blurred boundaries.

The texts reveal this pattern: 36 percent of all cases of shame occur in the context of material goods in general, or food and clothing specifically.⁴⁴ (Not all of these cases present material goods as shameful. It can be shameful *not* to wear clothing,⁴⁵ and shameful to deny ordinary people their desire for material goods.⁴⁶ But, while the reason for the shame is flexible, material goods do make up the bulk of the references to shame.) In the next largest grouping, 22 percent of the cases of shame involve status.⁴⁷ In addition to social status, this category includes assertions that shame is what distinguishes the status of humans from that of animals. Fourteen percent of all references to shame concern the failure to have one's actions match one's speech.⁴⁸ Finally, a smattering of miscellaneous contexts provoke shame—for instance, the shame of not learning, the shame of being a servant, the ruler's shame in losing land, the shame of disguising one's feelings, and the shame of improper human burial.⁴⁹

The notion that shame results from blurred boundaries readily accounts for the many passages in these Confucian texts that connect shame to social status. For in-

stance, the *Mengzi* reinforces differences in social boundaries when it speaks of the shame of servants, archers, bow-makers, charioteers, and small countries.⁵⁰ Likewise, the *Xunzi* reinforces social boundaries when it describes the shame of a mere lad at Confucius' gate.⁵¹ Most of these passages make the point that *even* someone of a low status is sensitive enough to experience shame. The rest manage in some other way to use social status to foster a sense of shame, thereby reinforcing the difference between social levels. By contrast, the *Lunyu's* praise of Kong Wenzhi for not being ashamed to learn from underlings seems to make the opposite point.⁵² But, the *Lunyu* passage confirms that social boundaries are ordinarily the subject of shame. Shame also determines a more fundamental form of "social status"—the boundary between human and animal. The *Mengzi* and the *Xunzi* repeatedly pick shame as *the* human characteristic, or one of the human characteristics, that marks the difference between human and nonhuman.⁵³ Thus, shame often concerns the boundaries that mark social status.

More interestingly, the notion of blurred boundaries accounts for the attention to shameful *bodily* boundaries in these texts. The descriptions of the body in early Confucian philosophical texts hint at sensory contact with barely controllable forces. The texts depict the senses and their desires as making "contact" with external things. For example, the *Xunzi* says:

耳目鼻口形能各有接

The ears, eyes, nose, mouth, and form—each has its own contact. (*Xunzi* 17/11)

This sensory contact apparently obstructs thinking, because the *Xunzi* also says:

耳目之欲接則敗其思

When the desires of the eyes and ears make contact, the thoughts are lost... (*Xunzi* 21/62)

Using similar terminology, the *Mengzi* notes that the reason sensory contact precludes thinking is that such contact consists of things pulling things (and, presumably, thinking does not):

耳目之官不思而蔽於物物交物則引之而已矣

The office of the ears and eyes is not thinking, but being clouded by things. It's simply a matter of things contacting things and pulling them. (*Mengzi* 6A15)

According to the *Xunzi*, the desires pulling at the senses are inherently excessive. The eyes desire the most intense of colors, the ears the richest of sounds, and so on.⁵⁴ In addition to being excessive, this pulling at the senses also appears to be an automatic relation of stimulus/response. Certain conditions (*qing* 情) provoke sensory responses (*ying* 應):

夫民有好惡之情而無喜怒之應則亂

故君子耳不聽淫聲

目不視[女]邪色

口不出惡言

People have the condition of desire and hate, and if they have no chance to respond happily and angrily, then chaos will result.

Therefore, exemplary people do not allow their ears to listen to loose sounds, their eyes to look at corrupt beauty, or their mouths to emit hateful speech. (*Xunzi* 20/26)

The exemplary person's voluntary restriction of sensory exposure suggests a fear that the sensory response to one's environment would otherwise be automatic and uncontrollable. As Shigehisa Kuriyama points out, the movement of *qi* 氣 through the body's openings mirrors the movement of wind in the cosmos: "individualized orifices on the body's surface mediate the confluence of cosmic, local and personal winds."⁵⁵ Thus, a fluid movement of entering and exiting seems to characterize this barely controllable sensory process. Certain things enter the senses,⁵⁶ and other things exit from them.⁵⁷ Whatever enters the senses seems designed to fill (*sai* 塞) their holes. *Lunyu* 8.15 mentions music swelling to fill the ears. The *Xunzi* speaks of stuffing the ears with the sounds of various musical instruments; stuffing the eyes with decorated jade, metal, and fabric; and stuffing the mouth with animals, grain, and the five flavors.⁵⁸ Allowing things to enter and exit the senses is sometimes a matter of "opening" the senses (*kai* 開),⁵⁹ and other times a "following" or "letting loose" of their desires (*shun* 順 and *zong* 縱).⁶⁰ Certain negative evaluations of the senses' desires depict them in terms of unconstrained watery movement, like flowing or dissipating—*yin* 淫 and *liu* 流.⁶¹ More positive evaluations of the senses refer to channeling the movement into a restricted target range (*zhong* 中 and *zheng* 正).⁶² The images suggest that a person's senses are a network of desirous holes to be opened or closed—permitting or not permitting a fluid movement, which can either be plumb with its target, or seep outside the boundaries where it belongs.

This view of the senses, combined with the notion of shameful blurred boundaries, helps explain why shame pertains to material goods in these texts. Most obviously, material goods contribute to the determination of social status. When one takes in or emits more than is justified, the boundaries between higher and lower become confused. The *Xunzi* repeatedly asserts that it is good to take pleasure in one's allotted portion, but shameful to seek more.⁶³

Moreover, in addition to marking status, the material goods that fill the senses also provoke the senses' desires to exceed proper boundaries. Again, unlike the heartmind, the senses cannot think, and therefore do not know how to restrain their desires within bounds. Such is the case with eating. The *Lunyu* seems to object to a prevailing notion that coarse food is shameful:

子曰士志於道而恥惡衣惡食者未足於議也

The Master said, "A scholar intent on the way who is ashamed of bad clothes and bad food is not worth discoursing with." (*Lunyu* 4.9)

But while the coarseness of food may not justify shame, the *Xunzi* notes that eating is shameful for other reasons. In defending its claim that people are born petty (*xiao* 小), the *Xunzi* points out that only the exemplary person knows the proper way to open the mouth and stomach to the outside:

人之生固小人...
君子非得勢以臨之則無由得開內也
今人之口腹安知禮乎
安知辭懷安知廉恥隅積
...人無師無法則其心正其口腹也

People are born small indeed. . . . If it weren't for the exemplary person obtaining power to manage them, they would not have the means to *open out from the inside*. Now a person's mouth and stomach, how can they know ritual? How can they know polite refusal and declining? How can they know humility, *shame*, portions and accumulations? . . . If people lack a teacher and lack standards, how can their heartminds straighten out their mouths and stomachs? (*Xunzi* 4/51)

Hence, even if the quality of food is not shameful, there is shame in the way the food enters and exits. In this context, material goods are shameful, because the ordinary person has no restrained means of opening the senses. Shame is required to maintain the proper boundaries of opening and closing.

Like food that comes in the mouth, music heard by the ears can also blur boundaries. As the *Xunzi* notes, music enters deep and causes rapid change.⁶⁴ Because of this potential for contagion, good music—including the music of the ancients—needs to prevent “corrupt impure” *qi* (*xiewuqi* 邪汙氣) from making *contact* with the people (*wu you de jie yan* 無由得接焉).⁶⁵ The *Xunzi* describes the music of the ancients as “sufficient for happiness, but not flowing” (*zu yi le er bu liu* 足以樂而不流).⁶⁶ What does not “flow” in such music is not the tune, but the airborne contagion. Praising the music of the Qin, the *Xunzi* says it does not cause a flow of impurity (*bu liu wu* 不流汙).⁶⁷ Thus, musical sound has the dangerous potential to leak and penetrate boundaries.

But more so than musical sound, the sound of speech provokes shame in these texts. The *Lunyu* notes that the ancients and exemplary persons feel shame about their speech exceeding their actions. Whereas the *Lunyu* implies that the shame of this lies in the transgression of the mouth that emits the speech (*yan zhi bu chu* 言之不出),⁶⁸ the *Mengzi* draws attention to the transgression against the ears of those who hear it (*sheng wen guo qing* 聲聞過情).⁶⁹ The *Mengzi* seems eager to identify “speech exceeding action” as belonging to the category of “shame,” rather than “crime,” although the two categories seem conceptually close in this context. Echoing the *Lunyu*'s emphasis on the shame of speech not being enacted, the *Mengzi* says:

位卑而言高罪也
立乎人之本朝而道不行恥也

It is a crime to speak of high matters, when one has low status. It is a shame to stand in a ruler's court, and not have one's discourse enacted. (*Mengzi* 5B5)

The *Mengzi* and the *Lunyu* are in agreement that speech crossing beyond the body's action is a matter of shame. In a physiological description of this, one might say, shame is what should occur when the body's movement cannot restrain or keep up with what flows out of the mouth and into the ears. The *Lunyu* confirms the ex-

tent to which shame depends on controlling such body movements. The *Lunyu* rates constantly moving oneself with a sense of shame as the highest form of behavior:

行己有恥使於四方不辱君命可謂士矣

The Master said, "Those who can act with shame, can be sent to the four quarters and not disgrace their rulers' orders—such people can be called 'scholars.'" (*Lunyu* 13.20)

Thus, all of one's bodily movements should be subject to shame, but in particular this applies to those actions that are exceeded by one's speech.⁷⁰

Clothing also provokes shame in these texts, both because it indicates status and because, in the absence of it, the body is vulnerable to boundary crossing. Again, the *Lunyu* opposes the view that coarse clothing justifies feelings of shame. Both in 4.9 and 9.27, the *Lunyu* explicitly exempts poor quality in clothing from being a source of shame.⁷¹ Yet, once again the later Confucians present other reasons for feeling shame in this context. For instance, the *Xunzi* worries about men wearing women's clothing. As for men who dress effeminately, and whose blood, *qi*, and attitude also suggest the feminine, the *Xunzi* deems them shameful. According to the *Xunzi*, chaotic rulers and clever villagers abound in such men who

奇衣婦飾血氣態度擬於女子

... wear striking clothing with feminine adornment and exhibit the blood, breath, and bearing of a young girl. . . . (*Xunzi* 5/15)

The *Xunzi* assures us that all proper males would be ashamed of this kind of cross-dressing:

中君羞以為臣

中父羞以為子

中兄羞以為弟

中人羞以為友

The centered ruler⁷² would be ashamed to have them as ministers, the centered father would be ashamed to have them as sons, the centered elder brother would be ashamed to have them as younger brothers, and the centered person to have them as friends. (*Xunzi* 5/17)

What seems shameful here is the way the clothing blurs male and female boundaries. The *Xunzi* contrasts the chaotic (*luan* 亂) rulers who encourage this loss of boundaries, to those centered persons who find it shameful.

The *Mengzi* description of Liuxia Hui presents another reason why the absence of proper clothing can expose one to the shame of blurred boundaries. Obviously in contrast to the norm, Liuxia Hui takes pride in being unashamed of impurity. He is not even ashamed to serve an "impure" ruler (*bu xiu wu jun* 不羞汙君).⁷³ In the single reference to nudity-based shame in these three texts, the *Mengzi* suggests that Liuxia did not subscribe to the view that one's self can be blurred by exposure to flesh:

爾為爾我為我

雖裼裸程於我側

而不自失焉

You are you and I am I.
Although you stand next to me bare-chested and naked, I will not *lose myself thereby*.
(*Mengzi* 5B1)

Liuxia's assertion seems to refute an opposing view that nakedness *can* encroach on the boundaries of "you" and "I." The threat of nakedness seems so serious that one might even "lose oneself" by being exposed to another person's naked body. But the type of self-loss here is different from that of the visual/sexual shame metaphors. Here, no one appears to be looking on with the potential of judging and causing disadvantage. In fact, no one appears to be looking at all. Rather than providing a view of the (private or whole) self, the threat of self-loss in this nakedness simply seems to involve effluvia of exposed orifices. Thus, clothing is also a focus of shame, not because it hides the genitals, but because it delineates and preserves boundaries that distinguish basic differences—including male/female and self/other.

The *Xunzi's* description of the proper treatment of a corpse makes these theoretical aspects of shame explicit. The *Xunzi* notes that it is shameful to be miserly about tending to the corpse of one's parent:

送死不中厚不敬文謂之瘠
君子...羞瘠

Failing to bury the dead with sincere generosity and respectful forms should be called "miserliness." The gentleman . . . is ashamed of miserliness. (*Xunzi* 19/47)

In other words, it is shameful not to shower the corpse with material goods:

厚其生而薄其死...君子...羞之

[As for being] generous on occasions of birth and stingy at death . . . an exemplary person would be ashamed [to do this]. (*Xunzi* 19/44)

Once again, the point of these material goods seems to be stopping the inner and outer flux of the body. The *Xunzi's* description of the proper arrangement of the corpse involves literally filling the holes that permit movement in a living body. One stuffs the mouth with rice and dried bone, plugs the ears with jade, and binds the eyes with silk. Moreover, as the corpse's decay progresses, one moves the corpse further away. The *Xunzi* overtly notes that this entire shame-induced process of stopping up movement is intended to ease the blurring of distinctions. It says that if one treats the corpse without the reverence due a living parent, one is shameful for blurring the distinction between human and animal:

一朝而喪其嚴親而所以送葬之者不哀不敬
則嫌於禽獸矣君子恥之

If suddenly one has to bury one's honored parent, and those who send off the parent do not show sadness or reverence, then they should be disliked more than the birds and beasts. The exemplary person is ashamed of this. (*Xunzi* 19/62)

One must treat the corpse with the reverence due one's parents. On the other hand, by stopping the holes of the corpse with things like raw rice instead of cooked rice, one carefully establishes that the corpse is *not* the living parent. Thus, stuffing the

corpse's holes is treating the body as human, which distinguishes human from non-human. But stuffing the holes of the corpse with useless items is treating the body as dead, which distinguishes the living from the dead. In this way, shame confirms the boundaries challenged by the disastrous dissipation of the self, represented by the corpse.

Hence, this structural analysis of shame in early Confucian texts suggests a pattern. The topics most often connected with shame are material goods (including food and clothing), status, and the relation of speech to action. The common feature that seems to explain almost all of these references to shame is the sense of boundaries being blurred.

Conclusion

In light of the studies of internal shame discussed in the first section, the structural analysis in the second section highlights some distinct features of shame in early China. The general understanding of shame is neither visual nor sexual in nature. I will argue that this implies two things about the general concept of shame in the period: (1) it does not concern a core self or a clearly bounded self, and (2) it cannot be described as committed to locating moral authority in one particular place (either inside or outside the person). Furthermore, these implications about the general view of shame have some bearing on what can be said about the specifically Confucian attitude toward shame. That is, for a variety of reasons, it is not plausible to posit that the early Confucian took the position of rejecting externally motivated shame.

The General Concept of Shame

Instead of vision and sexuality, these cases of shame emphasize contact and boundary blurring. No particular sensation is singled out to illustrate how shame might manifest itself. Rather, a number of different physical experiences serve as illustrations of shame—the experience of hearing, speaking, eating, wearing clothes, et cetera. In each case, some contact or crossing (not necessarily a transgression) results in blurring the clarity or regularity of boundaries. Thus, I refer to this type of shame as “boundary shame.”

Because it does not emphasize vision and/or sexuality, boundary shame cannot (at least on these grounds) be credited with the concern about the type of self-exposure characteristic of the studies in internal shame. When shame is exemplified by seeing a naked body, the exposed self seems to be represented either by the genitals or the distinct shape of the body. (That is, in the visual-shame model, the self is either symbolized by the genitals as the private core or by the entire physical form as a clearly delimited entity). By contrast, when shame is exemplified by blurred boundaries, the body seems to lack a core or firm delineation. Indeed, it seems porous and open to contagion. Insofar as boundary shame also expresses an exposure of the self by means of an exposure of the body, the self is presumably possessed of ill-defined boundaries. In other words, the metaphor implicit in boundary shame points to a self that is neither exclusively private nor firmly demarcated.

Moreover, in the absence of these visual/sexual metaphors, the boundary-shame model cannot be said to depict internalized moral authority in the way that the internal-shame model does. In order to depict the sense of being exposed *to someone*, shame in the visual model employs an image of a conscious observer. The point that these new studies of shame make is that this external judge is internalized—an actual observer is not required, because the ideal has been internalized. Nevertheless, the judge must first be presented as an external viewer in order to suggest that something external has been internalized (which is why shame has often been accused of being external). By contrast, the boundary model of shame does not always highlight any consciousness other than that of the shamed person him/herself. Moreover, while the context of boundary shame is obviously social, the location of a moral authority is not clear.⁷⁴ In spite of the fact that, in the boundary model, the *cause* of shame can come from outside, the model does not indicate where the *judge* of shame is located. In fact, it does not signify moral authority by depicting a judge (either simply external or external and then subsequently internalized). In other words, boundary shame is not so much a matter of being exposed *to someone* as a matter of simply being exposed. To that extent, the boundary model of shame says nothing definitive about internal or external moral sources.

Nonetheless, although no external moral authority appears in these cases, it is unlikely that there is none. In the same way, although vision and sexuality are not used to call attention to a core self, we are not justified in concluding that no unity of the person exists. At best, the argument from absence grants the hypothesis of a degree of difference. The combination of not depicting a core self and not depicting an external moral authority might indicate a more fluid conception of the relation of the person and society, in which the self is neither impervious to social influence nor entirely lacking in autonomy/personal unity. In the visual-shame model, the sense of being seen (particularly being seen naked) represents an exposure of the person's core or entirety. This representation is partly accomplished by the presence of the naked body. It is also accomplished by the juxtaposition to the (usually) alienating judgment of an other. That is, even as it challenges the self by posing against it, the other in this contrast (who is delineated fully enough to function as a judge) mirrors the unity of the self. Williams argues that in the ancient Greek conception the unity to the self resides in the visible body. The obvious person "in front of everyone's eyes" is what functions as the unified self. According to Williams, this accounts for the Homeric concern about keeping corpses whole.⁷⁵ As the discussion of the corpse in *Xunzi* 19 shows, the early Chinese also manifested considerable interest in the body's integrity. On these grounds, it seems that the early Chinese also thought of the body (and, by extension, the self) as being in some sense whole. Yet in the experience of shame, the self who is exposed is not normally naked, and the exposure is not accompanied by an alien judge. Perhaps this is because the unity of the self is conceived as a construction that is open to restructuring. The presence of an other in boundary shame neither opposes the self nor judges it, although it may contaminate or be contaminated by it.

Thus, perhaps the boundary-shame model shows a wholeness of the body (and

self) that is not something to be taken for granted. Instead, the body is only potentially whole. In other words, the bodies struggling to sustain their boundaries in the boundary-shame metaphors might indicate a self that only maintains wholeness through regular effort.

Indeed, the argument is often made that in the early Chinese conception the self is not firmly bounded. For example, a vagueness of the physical form is apparent in the early Chinese discourse about the medical body. Traditional Chinese medicine conceives of the body as a microcosm of the cosmos, with insides and outsides that are tenuously constructed and quite permeable.⁷⁶ Hence, according to Kuriyama, "individuation in classical China had no ontological basis. The nature of the self that slipped out of phase was ultimately the same as that of the environment it emerged from: the self was itself windlike."⁷⁷ As Roger T. Ames maintains, this is consonant with the early Chinese "process ontology." The concept of closed and separate things belongs to dualist thought, he argues, not the thought of early China:

The separateness implicit in dualistic explanations of relationships conduces to an essentialistic interpretation of the world, a world of "things" characterized by discreteness, finality, closedness, determinateness, independence, a world in which one thing is related to the "other" extrinsically.⁷⁸

Thus, Ames contends that the person in early China is not an individual in the sense of being a discrete member of a group in which all members possess certain essential, indivisible properties. The person is an open, interdependent construction whose uniqueness can only be an achievement, not a given. The person cannot be said to be "unitary" in the sense that his/her experiences are all "one." Rather, the person is "an undetermined range and locus of experiences expressed through specific roles and relationships."⁷⁹ Adopting this idea, Chris Jochim suggests that early Chinese ontology features the construction of a self that is not "closed off" from what is not self.⁸⁰ On similar lines, John Hay notes that among early Chinese artifacts the physical body was not portrayed as a whole, distinctly apart from the landscape surrounding it.⁸¹ He notes, "There is no image of a body as a whole object, least of all as a solid and well-shaped entity whose shapeliness is supported by the structure of a skeleton and defined in the exteriority of swelling muscle and enclosing flesh."⁸² Hence, perhaps this boundary-shame model confirms that the body and the self in early China are vulnerable constructions.

The Confucian View of Shame

The use of this structural analysis for understanding early Confucian shame (in relation to the general understanding of shame at the time) may help resolve an issue of controversy. While there seems to be no disagreement that something like boundary shame is the general conception of shame in the period, the early Confucian attitude toward boundary shame is a subject of contention. Shun presents an early Confucian view of shame that resembles boundary shame: "the thought associated with it [shame] is that one could be tainted by a certain situation."⁸³ Shun's reference to tainting is similar to what this structural analysis indicates, because, to a large extent,

boundary-blurring shame involves contact between things that should not have contact. Hence, one might speak of this in terms of taint or impurity. (However, it also involves excess or failure to recognize boundaries, which is not, strictly speaking, a matter of being tainted.) For Shun, the claim that Confucian shame is based on tainting is not incompatible with asserting that Confucian shame is truly ethical. Although he sees ethical and conventional shame as different, Shun does not define ethical shame in strict opposition to external norms and conventions. He says that for Confucians shame “can be directed to the way one is treated in public” and is “measured by ethical standards that need not coincide with ordinary social standards, though there can be overlaps.”⁸⁴

On the other hand, Roetz observes a similar “archaic” form of shame in the early Confucian texts, but he thinks that the Confucians rejected it. That is, he thinks the texts reject an impurity-based form of shame that is not an “inner-oriented process” and that does not recognize a firm distinction between psyche and physis, or inner and outer.⁸⁵ Roetz reads evidence of external manifestations of shame (such as references to blushing and washing off shame) as signs that persons who experience shame in this way also experience the foundation for moral authority as being external. He posits that between this external shame and what he considers true Confucian internal shame there was, in early China, a middle form of shame that imagines internally the judgments of others. He says that true Confucian shame surpasses even this, because instead of “internalizing” public opinion it “counterbalances” it. By this he seems to mean that the early Confucians saw the judgment of the community’s authorities as “unreliable,” and therefore related their shame instead to “something not realized in the empirical world.”⁸⁶ Thus, unlike Shun, Roetz finds that the Confucian approach to shame is unique precisely because it rejects conventional shame, which locates the source of moral authority outside the self.

Even those who refrain from comment on the relation of Confucian shame to questions of impurity may have a place within this disagreement. For example, Bryan Van Norden denies that there could be a fundamentally skeptical relation to the community such as the one Roetz envisions. For Van Norden, it is not possible that humans could be *that* ethically autonomous.⁸⁷ Thus, in Van Norden’s view, the almost exclusively inner orientation that Roetz requires for true ethics is not the goal of early Confucianism. Nevertheless, like Roetz, Van Norden posits that the early Confucians, as a whole, aimed to minimize the kind of shame that is based on standards of appearance and how things look to others. He implies that early Confucians distinguished between shame based on the belief that “we (or those with whom we identify) have significant character flaws,” and shame derived from the belief that “those whose views matter to us look down on us (or on those with whom we identify) on the basis of a standard of appearance we share.”⁸⁸ The former he calls “ethical shame” and the latter “conventional shame.” In summarizing the early Confucian view of shame, he characterizes all three texts as having the same position with regard to this distinction—claiming that they are all “at pains to minimize the significance of ‘conventional shame’ and to emphasize the importance of ‘ethical shame.’”⁸⁹ Hence, despite his commitment to the idea that an individual’s ethics

must in some way depend on the shared views and practices of the community, Van Norden attributes to early Confucians the goal of reducing dependence on external things. Like Shun he makes no claims about strict interiority, but like Roetz he considers opposition to exteriority to be the defining feature of the early Confucian attitude toward shame. As a result, although he does not ground his claims on the idea that Confucians rejected impurity-based shame, he depicts an early Confucian position on shame that is more consonant with Roetz' claim about rejecting external considerations than Shun's claim about shame being a matter of tainting.

In terms of textual evidence, there is little basis for determining whether the early Confucian texts oppose something like "conventional shame" on the grounds that it is conventional. The texts never directly address the subject. It is true that the *Lunyu's* use of shame seems subversive of social status, but the motive for its subversion is not evident. If this structural analysis reveals anything about the individual text's views of shame, it is that the *Lunyu* is less concerned than the *Mengzi* or the *Xunzi* about maintaining status boundaries through shame. Of all the shame-related passages in these texts, the assertion in *Lunyu* 5.15 that it is not shameful to seek advice from social inferiors seems the most like a dismissal of social norms. The undermining of shame about material markers of social status in *Lunyu* 4.9 and 9.27 reinforces this point. (This is somewhat complicated by the claim in *Lunyu* 8.13 that in a well-ordered state it is shameful *not* to have these markers).

If inside/outside were the relevant categories for classifying shame, one might expect that the *Mengzi*—with its argument for the internality of rightness (*yi* 義)—would be most likely to oppose conventional shame. However, as noted above, the *Mengzi's* use of shame seems distinctly status-affirming.⁹⁰ The discussion of shame in *Mengzi* 2A7 seems to make the point that one's social role determines one's moral state. That is, while basing its criticism of arrow, bow, and coffin makers on the notion that their occupations profit from harming people, it makes an observation about the shame of servants that indexes their moral life to something that has no apparent source in doing their job. It simply suggests that they tend to be (or should be) those who lack benevolence and wisdom. Like the implication that small states should not be ashamed to take commands from larger ones (*Mengzi* 4A7), this appears to be an evaluation of moral worth based on conventional standards rather than virtuous action. The tell-tale "even" in the *Xunzi* 7/1 reference to a small boy showing shame (like the one in the *Mengzi* 3B1 reference to a charioteer showing shame) makes it seem equally grounded in social shame-norms. While citing an exception, it implies that shame is a virtue one might reasonably not expect from a social inferior. Moreover, whereas the *Lunyu* considers it shameful to be motivated by a desire for profit during corrupt ages, the *Xunzi* only considers it shameful if the profit is not shared.

Given that these uses of shame affirm ordinary social standards, it seems likely that the texts also see these standards as having a valid impact on shame. But this does not prove that the *Lunyu* is more opposed to "conventional shame" than the other texts, because it does not prove that it is opposed to conventional shame at all. The status-challenging passages in the *Lunyu* are just as easily interpreted as simple

assertions about which blurred boundaries matter. That is, while the *Lunyu* does defy certain norms of shame, it is not clear that it rejects them *because* they are conventional per se.

It is almost as difficult to say what counts as conventionally shameful in these texts as it is to determine whether the texts condemn it. Assuming with Van Norden that “conventional shame” is shame spurred by fear of what worthy people think and/or by breaching standards of appearance, it is hard to draw a clear distinction between that and shame about one’s character flaws. For instance, allowing one’s speech to surpass one’s deeds is among the things the texts describe as shameful. To determine whether the texts aim to reject conventionality in shame by deeming this shameful, we would need evidence that the texts consider this to be a sign of a character flaw, as distinct from a problem with standards of appearance or something that might provoke others whom we respect to look down on us. In other words, not living up to one’s word *is* a character flaw, but those whose views mattered to an early Confucian (presumably figures of respect and authority) probably concurred about that, and it is not clear that the texts object to their being ashamed of it on those grounds. In fact, in *Lunyu* 5.25, where Confucius describes someone who shares his own sense of shame, the point seems to be that Confucius’ sense of shame is vindicated by imitating or at least fortuitously resembling that of this older figure. If shame is vindicated by being shared with an authority figure, then one might imagine being justifiably ashamed of whatever that authority figure deems shameful. Furthermore, not living up to one’s word is as much a problem for standards of appearance as it is a character flaw. That is, one might say it “looks good” to have your words match your deeds. So unless the texts make the distinction, it does not seem safe to infer that its role as a character flaw is the real Confucian motive for condemning it.

While we seem to be unable to say whether the early Confucians opposed shame conventions qua conventions, we do seem to be in a position to comment on the early Confucian attitude toward shame derived from boundary crossing. In some instances (such as the *Xunzi* 4/51 reference to shame of the mouth and stomach), the Confucian interpretation of shame seems congenial to the notion that shame is caused by contact between inside and outside. Moreover, the *Xunzi* asserts that impurity can come from inside the person; hence, the early Confucian shame cannot be described as a rejection of external, impurity-based shame. In his argument that Confucian shame is precisely this rejection of external contact, Roetz cites the *Xunzi*, which says that the gentleman is ashamed of not cultivating himself, but not ashamed of being seen as impure:

士君子所能不能為
君子能為可貴不能使人必貴己
能為可信不能使人必信己
能為可用不能使人必用己
故君子恥不修不恥見汗
恥不信不恥不見信
恥不能不恥不見用

The scholar and gentleman have things they can and cannot do. The gentleman is able to act honorably, but he cannot make others *have to* honor him. He can act in a trustworthy way, but he cannot make others *have to* trust him. He can act usefully, but he cannot make others *have to* use him. Hence, the gentleman is ashamed not to cultivate himself, but he is not ashamed to be seen as impure. He is ashamed about not being trustworthy, but he is not ashamed to not be seen as trustworthy. He is ashamed to be unable, but he is not ashamed not to be seen as useful. (*Xunzi* 6/39–41)

In arguing for the view that Confucian shame is a replacement of impurity-based shame, Roetz interprets this passage's reference to self-cultivation and impurity as an internal/external contrast. However, in light of the rest of the passage, the contrast here seems to be between things that can be *controlled* and things that cannot. The first line asserts this explicitly. By contrasting being "unable" with being "seen as useful," the last line reinforces the point: this is not a matter of dispensing with one thing in favor of another. That is, in light of the parallelism of the lines, this is not an argument against purity and in favor of self-cultivation any more than it is an argument for dispensing with being useful in favor of being able. The passage seems to say that external things are things that we are unable to control fully. It asserts that it is not practical to take responsibility for things outside one's own control. That does not entail claiming that being motivated by external factors is less than ethical.

More importantly, *Xunzi* (18/105–109) challenges any impression that impurity always comes from outside, because it explicitly mentions impurities (and watery movements of dissipation) that come from inside (流淫汗僂...是辱之由中出者也). It is important to clarify that while the passage does assert that a gentleman cannot be *disgraced* by external things, it does not make any claims about shame per se. It compares things like being flogged and mutilated (as coming from the outside) with being dissipated and impure (as coming from the inside). The context of the passage concerns what kind of circumstances constitute having "rightness" (可以有義)—or not being in a state of moral disgrace. It does not address shame as something that may or may not coincide with such a state.⁹¹ In any case, because it asserts that impurity comes from inside, *Xunzi* 18/107 undermines the argument that Confucians reject impurity-based shame on the grounds that it comes from outside. Thus, the evidence from the overt discussions of shame-related topics in the *Xunzi* confirms that inside/outside barriers are not firmly drawn and are unlikely to form the basis for the unique ethicalness of Confucian shame.

Because of the flexible construction of self, boundary shame does not necessarily emphasize external derivation or motivation. The disparagement of external motivation and the insistence on the moral superiority of internal motivation suit a context wherein the boundaries between self and other are assumed to be firm. In a context where solidifying the internal/external boundaries of the person is conceived as an achievement, it makes less sense to speak of moral motivation being derived exclusively internally or externally.⁹² Such an insistence on pure internal or external motivation is unlikely to arise because a person's boundaries become less permeable only with effort, which means that the achievement of firm personal boundaries is preceded by lengthy interaction with the "external." As a result, even for the morally

adept, who have succeeded in mastering their personal boundaries, nothing could be *entirely* internal in any case.

This study does not propose to be a definitive account of every case of shame in these texts. It presents a formula for why shame is an issue in some contexts and not others. The specific formula for shame that emerges from this analysis explains it as a constructive reaction to the blurring of boundaries—notably personal boundaries. Comparing this boundary shame to recent studies on internal shame reveals that shame in early China is not generally understood to be externally motivated. In terms of early Confucianism, there is no compelling reason to assume that it uniformly opposes shame conventions. Furthermore, it is unlikely to be based on the rejection of external shame. In the Confucian texts, and presumably in the Confucian view, the boundaries between inside and outside the person are relatively flexible. It seems that impurity can derive from inside as well as outside the person. Thus, it seems wrong to conclude that the distinction between the Confucian view of shame and that of the culture in general is that the Confucian view rejects some notion of external moral authority implicit in a conventional impurity-based understanding of shame.

Notes

- 1 – Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* (San Francisco: City Lights 1986), p. 31.
- 2 – See, for example, Bryan W. Van Norden, “The Emotion of Shame and the Virtue of Righteousness in *Mencius*,” in *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 1 (2002); Kwong-loi Shun, “Self and Self-Cultivation in Early Confucian Thought,” in Bo Mou, ed., *Two Roads to Wisdom? Chinese and Analytic Philosophical Traditions* (Peru, IL: Open Court, 2001); Heiner Roetz, *Confucian Ethics of the Axial Age* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); Paolo Santangelo, “Human Conscience and Responsibility in Ming-Qing China,” in *East Asian History* 4 (1992); Margaret Ng, “Internal Shame as Moral Sanction,” in *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 8 (1981); and Wolfram Eberhard, *Guilt and Sin in Traditional China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).
- 3 – Eberhard (*Guilt and Sin in Traditional China*), Santangelo (“Human Conscience and Responsibility in Ming-Qing China”), Roetz (*Confucian Ethics of the Axial Age*), and Ng (“Internal Shame as Moral Sanction”) all speak explicitly of early Confucian shame as internal shame. While also making use of these studies, Van Norden (“The Emotion of Shame and the Virtue of Righteousness in *Mencius*”) opts for different terminology—speaking of ethical shame and conventional shame. In using the term “Confucian ethicists” as shorthand for scholars of Confucian ethics, I do not mean to imply that they consider themselves to be Confucians, although some may.

- 4 – The terms for shame appear frequently in the early philosophical Confucian texts (the *Lunyu*, the *Xunzi*, and the *Mengzi*)—both in the form of views that the texts challenge and in the form of views that the texts endorse. While the texts do not always promote feelings of shame as explicitly as *Mengzi* 7A6 (which names shame as a requirement for humanity), even the texts’ rejections of shameful feelings reinforce the sense that it was an important cultural pre-occupation in the period. However, unless we assume that shame is a physiological affect associated with blushing (which might be indicated by the composition of the character *chi* 恥—a heartmind and an ear), the translation itself is open to question. Shun raises the possibility that *chi* is closer to contempt (Shun, “Self and Self-Cultivation in Early Confucian Thought,” p. 236). Van Norden implies that the overlap in usage with our terms for conventional and ethical shame vindicates the translation, although in some cases he treats dislike and disgrace as interchangeable with shame (Van Norden, “The Emotion of Shame and the Virtue of Righteousness in *Mencius*,” p. 47).
- 5 – Because this section is a structural analysis of shame, its purpose differs from traditional works of Confucian ethics and studies of individual Confucian thinkers. It does not aim to show how each Confucian thinker approaches the subject of shame, if that is even possible. In other words, it does not attempt to fit the views of shame it uncovers into these thinkers’ systems of thought. It does not focus on the shared views of all three thinkers as Confucians or even on the unified views of one thinker. The target of this section is to understand what the Confucian texts reveal about the general concept of shame in early China. By “general concept of shame” I mean implicit assumptions about the nature of shame, as distinct from meta-positions about whether a particular type of shame is proper or improper. It is likely that there is an implicit general understanding of what is meant by the terms we translate as “shame”; otherwise, we would not be justified in attributing the same language to the texts. But it is less likely that there is much consensus about which types of shame are preferable. In any case, my point here is that this categorization itself (internal/external shame) need not have arisen.
- 6 – Van Norden argues that the absence of shame in the other philosophical texts reflects the fact that shame is used for character cultivation and the other texts are not interested in that topic (Van Norden, “The Emotion of Shame and the Virtue of Righteousness in *Mencius*,” p. 69). My sense is that these other texts are not invested in consolidating the boundaries of the person. But neither argument really explains why the other texts would not at least mention shame, if only to *criticize* the Confucian position.
- 7 – In the context of Asia, the most famous case of this is Ruth Benedict’s claim that Japan is a shame culture, in *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1947). The notion is also applied to China by David Reisman in *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press,

1969) and by Sun Longji in *Zhongguo wenhua de shencengjiegou* (Hong Kong: Yi Shan Chu Ban She, 1983).

- 8 – Gerhart Piers and Milton Singer, *Shame and Guilt: A Psychoanalytic and a Cultural Study* (Toronto: W. W. Norton, 1971), p. 53.
- 9 – *Ibid.*, p. 70.
- 10 – *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- 11 – *Ibid.*
- 12 – Gabriele Taylor, *Pride, Shame and Guilt* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 66.
- 13 – Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), p. 102.
- 14 – Williams argues that if internalized motivation means thinking that right and wrong can be determined simply on the basis of internalized laws (those of God or reason, for example), then its ethical value is suspect. Instead, he suggests that right and wrong are not easily determined without recourse to a sense of one's place within a society:

It [guilt] can direct one towards those who have been wronged or damaged, and demand reparation in the name, simply, of what has happened to them. But it cannot by itself help one to understand one's relations to those happenings, or to rebuild the self that has done these things and the world in which that self has to live. Only shame can do that, because it embodies conceptions of what one is and how one is related to others. (Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, p. 94)

He notes that without an internalized other, "the convictions of autonomous self-legislation may become hard to distinguish from an insensate degree of moral egoism" (*Shame and Necessity*, p. 100). Agnes Heller (who counterposes shame and conscience rather than shame and guilt) arrives at a similar question and asks, "Is it so obvious, so much beyond reasonable doubt, that obedience to an internal authority is always so far superior to an external one?" (Agnes Heller, *The Power of Shame: A Rational Perspective* [Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985], p. 39). Although he adopts the language of "internal shame," the nonempirical sense of shame that Roetz attributes to early Confucians (see below) contrasts sharply with the point that Williams and Heller make here.
- 15 – Nonetheless, these studies do not entirely conflate the notions of guilt and shame. In general, they present guilt as a self-sufficiently achieved response to a deed (or deeds) in which one is aware of harming a victim. By contrast, they present shame as a reaction to a perception of one's self as a whole in relation to a community.
- 16 – This is why Heller calls shame "prerational."

- 17 – Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, p. 78. He also says, “The psychological model for each emotion involves an internalized figure. In the case of shame this is . . . a watcher or witness” (p. 219).
- 18 – Piers and Singer, *Shame and Guilt*, p. 30.
- 19 – Robert Metcalf, “The Truth of Shame-Consciousness in Freud and Phenomenology,” *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 31 (11) (2000): 1–18.
- 20 – *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- 21 – In reference to Greg Vlastos’ “Happiness and Virtue in Socrates’ Moral Theory,” Williams says, “it has been interestingly suggested that guilt is rooted in hearing the sound in oneself of the voice of judgment; it is the moral sentiment of the word” (Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, p. 89).
- 22 – Piers and Singer, *Shame and Guilt*, p. 47.
- 23 – Heller, *The Power of Shame*, p. 5.
- 24 – Piers and Singer, *Shame and Guilt*, p. 28.
- 25 – As my use of Piers here shows, I am not claiming that these studies insist that shame must be connected to sexual images. My point is that whether they say so or not they consistently rely on sexual images to portray the experience. This should be a warning to scholars who want to apply their work to early Confucianism. If what they are describing is an emotion generally associated with the sensation of being sexually exposed, and no such association occurs in the Confucian texts, then it is worth considering whether this emotion corresponds to what the Confucian texts describe.
- 26 – Piers and Singer, *Shame and Guilt*, pp. 32, 35.
- 27 – *Ibid.*, p. 19. This association of shame with disgust—which Freud explains by calling them forces that oppose voyeurism and the sex drive proper—is also a feature of early Confucian texts. Indeed, this is what leads Shun to suggest that one term we translate as shame (*chi* 耻) is so much like viewing things as tainted that it might better be thought of as contempt (Shun, “Self and Self-Cultivation in Early Confucian Thought,” p. 236). But Freud’s account of the association of shame and disgust does not quite apply to the early Confucian texts. In these texts, shame and disgust *do* function as forces of opposition, but what they oppose does not seem to be sex. Instead, as I argue below, shame is like disgust insofar as it, too, opposes things that threaten the boundaries of the self. Thus, the association of shame with disgust may be caused by their common provocation. In other words, they both seem like mild versions of what Julia Kristeva calls “abjection”—the feelings of loathing and disgust in response to things that expose the border between self and other (Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1982]).

- 28 – Rather than contrasting vision to hearing, Freud interprets this as vision overtaking the sense of smell. He says that when humans walked on all fours, their sexual desire was stimulated by the olfactory sense and was limited to a specific period. In walking erect, human sexual desire is stimulated by vision and can occur at any time. Hence, he argues, visual sexual stimulation has overtaken the power of olfactory stimulation, so much so that sources of sexual smells, like menstrual blood, are now taboo (Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey [New York: W. W. Norton, 1961], p. 54).
- 29 – Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 54.
- 30 – Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, p. 78.
- 31 – Metcalf, “The Truth of Shame-Consciousness in Freud and Phenomenology,” p. 16.
- 32 – Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, p. 220.
- 33 – This is an important point for Williams. He observes that we can be ashamed of being admired by the wrong people. Moreover, if social shame seemed completely hostile to the person who is subject to shame, then there would be no *shared* culture of shame (Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, p. 84).
- 34 – Something like this seems to be operative in Metcalf’s text as well: the essential shame experience of being seen naked is a matter of being seen as the other sees me. For Metcalf, this is a power relation, like that of master and slave. It is a power relation in the sense that it constitutes “me.” *I am* insofar as I am seen by the other who has power over me. In belying my privacy, this experience of shame also belies my autonomy and my very selfhood (“The Truth of Shame-Consciousness in Freud and Phenomenology,” pp. 15–16). Thus, Metcalf implies, the self is produced by oppositional power relations.
- One reason I am hesitant to apply this scheme to early Confucian texts is that the notion of the construction of self through this kind of power-bond seems foreign to the early Confucian context. In early Confucian texts the forces of power seem more constructive and less personal. Of course there are violent forces, like the impulse to chaos, but these forces destroy identity rather than create it. Moreover, although the “other” in the visual-shame models is metaphorical, the metaphor itself is more personal and judgmental than those in early Confucian texts. It is hard to say, since the Confucian texts do not address this kind of question directly, but it does not seem to fit early Confucianism to say the construction of personal identity is overtly based on an either/or conflict with the judgment of an other (even granting, as Williams does, that the judgment might be less than hostile). (More on this below.)
- 35 – Shun writes, “[The Chinese character *chi* 恥] is not associated with the thought of being seen or heard, and the reaction typically associated with it is not hiding or disappearing” (Shun, “Self and Self-Cultivation in Early Confucian Thought,” p. 235).

The characters *chi* 耻, *xiu* 羞, *kui* 愧, and *zuo* 作 are the only characters I take to mean shame in the early Confucian texts. I do not think the terms *ru* 辱 (disgrace) and *wu* 恶 (sometimes translated as “disdain”) are close enough to these shame terms to be treated as the same thing, although shame certainly is *related* to disgrace and disdain in these texts. As a result of my focus on shame per se, there are passages in the Confucian texts that Shun, Van Norden, and others treat in their analyses of shame that I do not consider here, because to do so might prejudice our understanding of the specific characters conventionally translated as shame.

- 36 – Roetz seems to associate guilt with an inner voice, but observes no connection between shame and vision. The only evidence one might adduce for such an association between shame and vision would be likely to involve an overly literal reading of the word *jian* 见, “to see,” used to describe being perceived as pure, trustworthy, and useful in a passive sense in *Xunzi* 6/39–41. It includes the line “Hence, the gentleman is ashamed not to cultivate himself, but he is not ashamed to be seen as impure” (故君子耻不修不耻见汗). There is nothing particularly visual about purity, trustworthiness, and usefulness. On the basis of the rest of the passage, I think this line implies that cultivating oneself and making oneself pure are synonyms, and the contrast here is between what one can control (cultivating and purifying oneself) versus what one cannot control (causing others to perceive one as pure). See below for more discussion of this passage. For my reasons for thinking that there is no aural/visual conflict here, see my *On the Epistemology of the Senses in Early Chinese Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002).
- 37 – The one reference to nakedness (discussed below) conveys no hint of sexuality.
- 38 – Shun writes, “the thought associated with it is that one could be tainted by a certain situation, and the typical reaction is to remedy or distance oneself from that situation” (Shun, “Self and Self-Cultivation in Early Confucian Thought,” p. 235). Actually, from the perspective that shame is a visual sensation, distancing oneself might seem like an extreme way of hiding. For example, Piers cites both reactions to shame: “instinctive (inborn) behavior patterns of flight or hiding” (Piers and Singer, *Shame and Guilt*, p. 19).
- 39 – Roetz considers this form of shame to be a trace of a less-advanced approach to morality in early China, not the true inner shame of the early Confucians (see below). For clarification, I should note that I do not endorse Roetz’ terminology. He calls this external or heteronymous shame because, by failing to distinguish between “physis” and “psyche,” it suggests an externalized moral norm. When I refer to shame as “external,” I mean externally motivated. I do not mean that it manifests itself on the outside of the body, and I do not think that not distinguishing between mind and body makes early Confucian shame external any more than it makes it internal.

- 40 – Roetz, *Confucian Ethics of the Axial Age*, p. 177, and Eberhard, *Guilt and Sin in Traditional China*, p. 12.
- 41 – This mental-physical continuum is discussed below.
- 42 – Again, given the frequency of references to shame in early Confucian texts, it is surprising that, among the early philosophical texts, only the Confucian texts seem interested in shame. None of the indications of shame discussed here occur in the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, the *Laozi*, or the *Mozi*.
- 43 – Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966), p. 122.
- 44 – There are thirteen instances of shame related to material goods, and five related to food and clothing in particular. Some of the references to material goods mention status as well, suggesting that the two go hand in hand.
- 45 – *Mengzi* 2A9 (and 5B1).
- 46 – *Xunzi* 16/22.
- 47 – There are at least seven cases where some aspect of status interacts with shame, and five cases where the presence of shame indicates one's status as human.
- 48 – There are seven cases of shame occurring because actions fail to match speech.
- 49 – This categorization is not exhaustive, which is evident in my use of a small "miscellaneous" category; however, the bulk of the cases fit somewhere in the pattern.
- 50 – *Mengzi* 2A7, 4A7, 3B1 (discussed below).
- 51 – *Xunzi* 7/1.
- 52 – *Lunyu* 5.15 says:
 子曰敏而好學不恥下問
 The Master said, "He was diligent and fond of learning and was not ashamed to ask those of a lower status."
 It is possible that, because Kong Wenzi only *temporarily* bypasses status for the sake of learning, this, too, could be read as endorsing social boundaries, but that seems like a less plausible reading.
- 53 – *Mengzi* 2A7, 7A6, 7A7; *Xunzi* 19/62.
- 54 – *Xunzi* 11/46. *Xunzi* 21/14 makes a similar point regarding the enviable situation obtained by certain ancient sage-kings.
- 55 – Shigehisa Kuriyama, "The Imagination of Winds," in *Body, Subject, and Power in China*, ed. Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 34.

- 56 – The *Xunzi* specifically mentions the sounds of mosquitoes and music; see *Xunzi* 21/61 and *Xunzi* 20/15.
- 57 – The *Lunyu* and the *Xunzi* mention speech; see *Lunyu* 4.22 and *Xunzi* 20/26.
- 58 – *Xunzi* 10/63.
- 59 – *Xunzi* 4/51.
- 60 – *Xunzi* 23/2, 21/62.
- 61 – *Lunyu* 15.11; *Xunzi* 20/26, 12/70, 20/4.
- 62 – *Xunzi* 1/28, 18/105; *Xunzi* 4/5, 20/27. These negative and positive metaphors appear in contexts involving sound, but presumably the same would apply to sight, taste, and other senses.
- 63 – *Xunzi* 6/35, 27/69.
- 64 – *Xunzi* 20/15.
- 65 – *Xunzi* 20/4.
- 66 – *Xunzi* 20/4.
- 67 – *Xunzi* 16/62.
- 68 – *Lunyu* 4.22.
- 69 – *Mengzi* 4B18.
- 70 – The other worry about boundary-threatening speech is indexed to content. Read quite literally, the wetness of slanderous speech might allow it to slide easily past boundaries, and rumors seem to cut into the boundaries of the flesh:
 浸潤之譖膚受之塑不行焉可以謂明也
 One who can be called bright does not facilitate damp moist slander or flesh-wounding rumors. (*Lunyu* 12.6)
- 71 – *Lunyu* 9.29 reads:
 子曰衣敝緼袍
 與衣狐貉者立而不恥者其由也與
 The Master said, “Wearing a tattered hemp robe next to someone in fox and badger fur, standing without shame—that would be Zilu.”
- 72 – I do not translate this *zhong* as “average,” because the contrast seems to be *luan* 亂, not “small” or “great.”
- 73 – *Mengzi* 2A9 and 5B1.
- 74 – Again, external manifestations of shame like blushing need not indicate an external *moral authority*. Moreover, even when the source of shame overtly comes from the outside (as in the *Mengzi* 5B1 discussion of Liuxia Hui), the passage does not say where the source of moral *judgment* comes from.

- 75 – Hence, Williams contends that there is no need to search for some other concept of a whole self in early Greece (Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, p. 24).
- 76 – Even if, as Kuriyama contends, the concept of the body emerged through *dis-harmony* within those relations, this still does not imply that the body has a clearly distinguished form (Kuriyama “The Imagination of Winds,” p. 31).
- 77 – Kuriyama “The Imagination of Winds,” p. 33.
- 78 – Roger T. Ames, “The Body in Classical Chinese Philosophy,” in *Self as Body in Asian Theory and Practice*, ed. Thomas Kasulis, Roger T. Ames, and Wimal Dissanayake (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), p. 160.
- 79 – Roger T. Ames, “The Focus-Field Self,” in *Self as Person in Asian Theory and Practice*, ed. Thomas Kasulis, Roger T. Ames, and Wimal Dissanayake (Albany: State University of New York Press 1994), p. 198.
- 80 – Chris Jochim, “Just Say No To “No-Self” in *Zhuangzi*,” in *Wandering at Ease in the Zhuangzi*, ed. Roger T. Ames (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 39.
- 81 – Granted, as Williams notes with regard to Bruno Snell’s argument that early Greek art did not grasp the body as a unit, this kind of evidence can be elusive (Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, p. 23).
- 82 – John Hay, “The Body Invisible in Chinese Art?” in Zito and Barlow, *Body, Subject, and Power in China*, p. 51.
- 83 – Shun, “Self and Self-Cultivation in Early Confucian Thought,” p. 235.
- 84 – Ibid.
- 85 – This notion that mind and body must be seen as fully distinct from one another in order for shame to be internal—and therefore moral—seems dubious. As Williams notes, a individual disconnected from his/her own body and those of others is as likely to be a moral egoist as an ideal moral agent.
 In any case, there is little evidence of such a definitive distinction between mind and body in these early Confucian texts. Certainly there is no sustained attempt to explain how one feature (mind or body) goes about affecting or influencing the other, which suggests that there is no such gap. Moreover, as Ames points out, the term *shen* 身 (self-body) seems to refer to both a physical and a psychic entity (Ames, “The Body in Classical Chinese Philosophy,” p. 165).
- 86 – Roetz says that this non-empirical ideal is “recommended in the teachings of [the early Confucian] school,” but apparently its existence as a recommendation in the teachings is not the same as being empirically “realized” in these teachings (Roetz, *Confucian Ethics of the Axial Age*, p. 178).
- 87 – Van Norden says, “I am not denying that it is conceptually possible for there to be creatures subject to ethical shame but not conventional shame. But I do not

think humans are that kind of creature" (Van Norden, "The Emotion of Shame and the Virtue of Righteousness in *Mencius*," p. 62).

88 – Van Norden, "The Emotion of Shame and the Virtue of Righteousness in *Mencius*," pp. 60–61.

89 – *Ibid.*, p. 67.

90 – Here I disagree with Van Norden, who claims that Mencius "almost always uses his shame vocabulary in connection with failures of character" (Van Norden, *Confucian Ethics of the Axial Age*, p. 67; emphasis added).

It is true that *Mengzi* 2A6 connects *yi* 義 (rightness) to *xiu* 羞 (shame), and *Mengzi* 6A6 affirms the certainty of our having a sense of rightness (among other things) by noting that it is not fused from without. However, I take this to mean that the sense of rightness, born of shame and distaste, originates within—not that one's own shame is never justifiably influenced by what others think.

91 – *Mengzi* 2A6 and 6A6 connect *yi* 義 (rightness) to the terms *xiu* 羞 (shame) and *wu* 惡 (aversion) insofar as the heart of *xiuwu* is the sprout of *yi*. Whatever this means for the concept of shame in the *Mengzi*, there seems to be no grounds for extending the connection to the *Xunzi*.

92 – This is in no way a denial that in early Chinese thought the separateness of persons was not obvious, but it *is* a denial that the boundaries of the person were considered inflexible.

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