

Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants

PLATO'S *GORGIAS* AND
THE POLITICS OF SHAME

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CONTENTS

<i>List of Tables</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
<i>Introduction</i>	1
<i>Contemporary Attitudes toward Shame</i>	1
<i>The Theoretical Debates Surrounding Shame</i>	2
<i>Plato's Relevance to the Contemporary Politics of Shame</i>	6
<i>Plato's Gorgias and the Politics of Shame</i>	16
<i>Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants</i>	21
PART ONE: <i>Plato's Gorgias and the Athenian Politics of Shame</i>	27
CHAPTER ONE	
Shame and Rhetoric in Plato's <i>Gorgias</i>	29
<i>Situating Plato's Gorgias within the Platonic Corpus</i>	35
<i>The Dual Character of the Socratic Elenchus</i>	38
<i>From Gorgianic Rhetoric to Platonic Rhetoric</i>	41
CHAPTER TWO	
Shaming Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles	56
<i>The Refutation of Gorgias</i>	61
<i>The Refutation of Polus</i>	65
<i>The Refutation of Callicles</i>	79
<i>The Mechanisms of Shame</i>	84
CHAPTER THREE	
Plato on Shame in Democratic Athens	89
<i>The Canonical View of Plato's Criticisms of Athens</i>	90
<i>Disrupting the Canon</i>	91
<i>Parrhēsia as an Athenian Democratic Ideal</i>	96
<i>Parrhēsia and Shame</i>	98
<i>The Structure of Shame</i>	100
<i>Flattering vs. Respectful Shame</i>	104
<i>Plato contra Tyrannical Democrats</i>	110
CHAPTER FOUR	
Socratic vs. Platonic Shame	114

<i>Shame and Deception in Plato's Gorgias</i>	114
<i>The Myth as an Illustration of the Socratic Elenchus</i>	120
<i>Platonic Myth vs. Socratic Elenchus</i>	126
<i>Gregory Vlastos on Socratic and Platonic Irony</i>	131
<i>Alexander Nehamas on Socratic and Platonic Irony</i>	133
<i>Socratic vs. Platonic Irony in Plato's Gorgias</i>	136
PART TWO: <i>Plato's Gorgias and the Contemporary Politics of Shame</i>	141
CHAPTER FIVE	
Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants: Plato and the Contemporary Politics of Shame and Civility	143
<i>The Contemporary Politics of Shame and Civility</i>	143
<i>Michael Warner and the Politics of Shame</i>	145
<i>Jean Bethke Elshaint and the Politics of Civility</i>	147
<i>Elshaint and Warner: Finding a Common Ground</i>	150
<i>The Conceptual Confusions Surrounding Shame</i>	151
<i>Solving the Conceptual Confusions</i>	153
<i>Socratic Respectful vs. Flattering Shame</i>	160
<i>Platonic Respectful Shame and the Search for Consensus</i>	167
CHAPTER SIX	
What's So Negative about the "Negative" Emotions?	172
<i>Defining the "Negative" Emotions</i>	172
<i>Rationality and the Emotions</i>	178
<i>Primitive vs. Advanced Emotions</i>	183
<i>The Positivity of Negativity</i>	193
<i>Bibliography</i>	197
<i>Index</i>	211

INTRODUCTION

CONTEMPORARY ATTITUDES TOWARD SHAME

Shame is a peculiar phenomenon. It has the potential to fracture our social ties in the very instance that it reveals them. It helps to establish the permeable and ever-unstable psychic boundary between the 'self' and the 'other,' both individual and collective, but it often does this in response to the painful awareness that this boundary has been unsettled or disrupted in some way.¹ Shame thus has a complex and ambiguous character. While it can function to help us negotiate our interactions with others in a decent and respectful manner, it can also cause us to turn away from such engagements, or to lash out against what gets uncovered in these interactions. Finally, as Greek tragedies and modern psychological case studies attest, it can even cause a person to commit suicide.²

In contemporary democratic societies shame is often construed as one of the negative emotions that we need to avoid in our deliberations, institutions, and practices, and it is not hard to see why shame comes to light as a negative emotion when we consider some of the pernicious ways in which it has been used in all of these diverse settings. Gays and lesbians, women, the disabled, and members of different races have all been shamed and stigmatized, both explicitly and implicitly, by certain laws, policies, or norms of deliberation that have sought to either punish them or exclude them altogether from the public realm because of their allegedly shameful characteristics or behaviors. The institution of marriage has been just one of the many ways in which gays and lesbians and members of different races have been excluded from the kinds of recognition that underpin self-esteem, and from the financial and social resources that allow one to participate as a full member of society. The horrific prison abuses at the Abu Ghraib prison, perpetrated against Iraqi prisoners during 2003 and 2004 in the course of the Iraq War, surely illustrate some of the worst manifestations of the emotions of both shame and humiliation in the realm of international relations. Finally, the different colored stars and triangles

¹ Throughout this book, I shall be talking about shame as a phenomenon that operates between both individual and collective 'selves' and 'others.' As will become clear over the course of this book, the 'other' before whom the 'self' feels ashamed can be external, internal, actual, imaginary, fantastical, realistic, singular, collective, specific or general. All subsequent references to 'self' and 'other' are not in single quotes. Cf. Kingston (2008, 113) who argues that one of the fundamental principles that Plato and Aristotle share is the view that all passions can be understood as individual and as collective phenomena.

² Basing her argument on a number of contemporary psychological and psychoanalytic accounts of shame, Toni Massaro (1999, 89) argues that in extreme cases, shame can lead to a "profound and complete loss of self that inspires a desire to die."

placed on Jews, Gypsies, gays, and lesbians served (and continue to serve) as horrific symbols of one of the most extreme ways in which a regime can devote itself to a systematic shaming and stigmatization of certain groups as a justification for eliminating them altogether. Anyone who has contemplated the horrific atrocities that have been committed against various individuals, groups, and entire races throughout world history cannot help but think that shame is one of the most negative, i.e., hierarchical, primitive, inhuman, demeaning emotions that mankind has in its repertoire. Indeed it is tempting to think that as we progress toward more democratic practices in our own polities, and more humanitarian interventions in foreign countries, shame will be the emotion that we will try to eradicate more and more from the human condition.

But before moving from these situations to an outright condemnation of shame, isn't it first necessary to ask whether shame, in all of its manifestations, leads to these sorts of pernicious outcomes? Moreover, isn't it also important to ask whether there aren't certain manifestations of shame without which we could not perform our deliberations as citizens or political leaders; contemplate our future actions with others in the domestic and international realm with humanity, dignity and respect; or protect ourselves and others citizens from certain types of damage and harm? Don't we wish that people like Hitler or Eichmann had felt ashamed of their treatment of Jews, Gypsies, and gays? Don't we admire, respect, and dignify people like Martin Luther King, Jr. who shame the American public for its mistaken equation of democratic equality with segregation and "separate but equal facilities" for blacks and whites? Don't we (as I surely did) scan the horrific pictures of prison abuses at Abu Ghraib prison trying to find just one person actually turning their head in shame rather than giving us the thumbs up and proudly smiling at the camera? Isn't it necessary for nongovernmental organizations like Human Rights Watch to explicitly shame regimes that carry out torture that is not sanctioned by the Geneva Conventions, or to shame regimes that stigmatize and punish unwed mothers in developing countries who have AIDS? Isn't it shameful when a political leader ignores the dire needs of one of his own cities in the aftermath of a hurricane because there just aren't enough rich white people living there, or when a political leader tries to sell a Senate seat to the highest bidder because that's what everyone else in Illinois does? Finally, don't we want our media to shame these leaders and politicians when they do engage in these sorts of actions, especially if they do them in the very undemocratic hope that they will never be divulged to the public?

THE THEORETICAL DEBATES SURROUNDING SHAME

These ambiguities that swirl around shame in our ethical and political lives also get reproduced in much of the contemporary theoretical literature that

focuses specifically on this emotion. Political theorists who condemn shame do so because they see it as something that threatens certain necessary conditions for democratic participation and deliberation. Shame can threaten the mutual respect necessary for democratic deliberation by diminishing a person in the eyes of his audience or even in his own eyes, thus causing the person to withdraw from the discussion, and it can do this in a way that may be much more effective than a show of force. Utilizing Gabrielle Taylor's psychological work on shame, John Rawls describes it as "the feeling that someone has when he experiences an injury to his self-respect or suffers a blow to his self-esteem."³ As self-respect is for Rawls a "primary good" and necessary condition for active participation in moral and political life,⁴ shame is dangerous precisely because it can instill apathy and cynicism in the person, either by making everything seem worthless or by weakening the will to strive for things one values.⁵ Similarly, building upon the psychological theories of Donald Winnicott, Martha Nussbaum has argued that shame (or more precisely a primitive form of shame that continues to linger in all of us to some degree)⁶ ought to be banished from our legal systems because it contains dangerous aspirations to omnipotence that endanger rather than foster the "institutional and developmental conditions [necessary] for the sustenance of a liberal respect for human equality."⁷ Finally, Jill Locke has recently argued that feminists and democrats should be skeptical of shame because the "negative global self-assessment" it involves and the weariness it induces actually forecloses rather than opens up the kinds of counterpublics and alternative spaces "where freedom can dwell," especially for "shame-ridden and shame-prone" subjects.⁸

In a somewhat similar vein (though from a different angle), queer theorist Michael Warner has argued that a politics of shame is pernicious to democratic deliberation because it isolates certain groups from the public by asserting a norm of what is acceptable and then silencing or concealing any "deviant" voices. In Warner's work, the "politics of shame" denotes the practice of diverting or avoiding the feeling of sexual shame by pinning it on someone else. Shame is the central mechanism by which the false moralism of the majority restricts the sexual autonomy of certain individuals by making their experi-

³ Rawls (1971), 442.

⁴ Rawls (1971), 62.

⁵ Rawls (1971), 440.

⁶ Nussbaum (2004), 15. For a full discussion of Nussbaum's book, see chapter 6.

⁷ Nussbaum (2004), 16. Cf. Massaro (1997 and 1999), who utilizes a number of different psychological and sociological theories of shame to show why shame should not be introduced into the contemporary legal system in the form of shaming penalties. As will become clear in this book, I also do not support shaming penalties as a part of any legal system, but I do want to argue that another type of shaming is important for democratic politics.

⁸ Locke (2007), 153–55, 159. She borrows the term "where freedom can dwell" from Hannah Arendt's book *On Revolution*.

ences and pleasures seem disgusting and therefore unworthy of acknowledgment. Equally problematic for Warner is the fact that instead of striving to circulate accurate knowledge about, and challenge the predominant view of their practices, these “perverts” strive to become “normal” by presenting themselves in accordance with the image of the “normal” citizen.⁹

On the opposite side of this debate, theorists of civility, such as Jean Elshtain, have argued that shame can provide the necessary conditions for democratic deliberation by excluding and thereby protecting the private lives of citizens from the gaze of the public. For Elshtain, individuals who parade their sexuality or intimate lives in the public breach the “boundary of shame” because they transpose the bodily functions, feelings, and interpersonal relationships that are meant for a private audience into the public sphere. Instead, for her, the public sphere should only be concerned with the activities of “arguing for a position, winning approval, or inviting dissent as a citizen.”¹⁰

Similarly, Christopher Lasch has argued that America is actually suffering from a culture of narcissism and shamelessness in which the mass media regularly parade the “most outlandish perversions, the most degraded appetites,” and moralists and psychoanalysts are in the business of getting people to accept and celebrate rather than judge and try to overcome these perversions.¹¹ As he puts it, “We do children a terrible disservice . . . by showering them with undeserved approval . . . Self-respect cannot be conferred; it has to be earned. Current therapeutic and pedagogical practice, all ‘empathy’ and ‘understanding,’ hopes to manufacture self-respect without risk.”¹² Without the sting of shame, individuals never learn the individual initiative that is forged by overcoming obstacles and failures, nor do they develop respect for impersonal standards of competence that underpin any true form of education.¹³

Alternately, communitarian theorists of civility such as Amitai Etzioni argue that shame is necessary not so much to protect the individual from dangerous intrusions by the state or to educate him to self-reliance, but rather to express and reinforce the shared moral values that countries such as America are in danger of losing.¹⁴ Etzioni and others have even gone so far as to favor the reintroduction of shaming penalties, e.g., forcing child abusers or drunk drivers to wear signs or bumper stickers publicizing their crimes.¹⁵ According to

⁹ Warner (1999). For a full discussion of Warner’s book, see chapter 5. For similar accounts of the normalizing effects of shame see Goffman (1963), 128–35; and Nussbaum (2004), 173–74, 217–19.

¹⁰ Elshtain (1995), 55. Cf. Saxonhouse (2006, 204) who argues that a rejection of shame may lead to a loss of the civility that is necessary for the coherence of a political community.

¹¹ Lasch (1995), 198; See also Lasch (1979); Twitchell (1997); and Gurstein (1996).

¹² Lasch (1995), 206.

¹³ Lasch (1995), 206.

¹⁴ Etzioni (2001).

¹⁵ Etzioni (2001), chapter 2, 37–47; and Kahan (1996). For criticisms of shaming penalties, see Massaro (1997); Karp (1998); and Nussbaum (2004), chapter 5.

Etzioni such penalties are actually democratic because they express society's collective disapproval of certain acts, and they can be far more just than imprisonment because incarceration, unlike public penalties, often subjects prisoners to harsh conditions, offers few possibilities for parole, and fosters recidivism far more than rehabilitation.¹⁶ Shaming penalties, on the other hand, express society's disapproval of the behavior while simultaneously giving the individual the possibility of showing his remorse and of reconciling with and reintegrating back into society.¹⁷

Although this kind of defense of shame may seem to lend itself to a conservative political agenda, William Miller and Dan Kahan have recently argued that emotions like shame and disgust can play a progressive role by marking out those moral matters for which there can be no compromise in a liberal democratic society, e.g., crimes such as "rape, child abuse, torture, genocide, predatory murder and maiming."¹⁸ By expressing our collective abhorrence of these crimes and forms of cruelty, shame and disgust become virtues that track these vices and are necessary for the proper functioning of a liberal-democratic society.¹⁹ Alternatively, John Braithwaite, who is an opponent of the kinds of shaming penalties favored by both Etzioni and Kahan, has argued that shame can play a positive role in the criminal justice system through "reintegrative shaming conferences."²⁰ Such conferences involve bringing together two "communities of care": the victims of the crime and their families or supporters, and the offenders together with their families and supporters. Because violent offenders have often erected a shield to protect themselves from feeling sympathy for or shame toward their victims, the victims' statements will instead affect the mothers or friends of the offender, and their reactions will in turn cause the offender to feel ashamed of his actions because of his respect and care for this latter group.²¹ As Braithwaite puts it, "It is the shame of letting down those we love and trust that has the greatest power over us," and it is this kind of shame that is more likely to get criminal offenders to take the hard road of behavioral modification.²² Finally, Braithwaite's work on shame has recently been utilized in the theories and practices of restorative justice, and of truth and reconciliation commissions after war, mass atrocities, and genocide.²³

¹⁶ Etzioni (2001), 42, 46.

¹⁷ Etzioni (2001), 44.

¹⁸ Miller (1997), 36. See also Kahan (1996) and (1999).

¹⁹ Miller (1997), 202; and Kahan (1999), 64. (Miller and Kahan both draw upon Judith Shklar's work *Ordinary Vices* for this view of liberalism as the avoidance of cruelty.)

²⁰ Braithwaite (2000), 119–21.

²¹ Braithwaite (2000), 120.

²² Braithwaite (2000), 120.

²³ For excellent treatments of shame in these contexts, see Drumbl (2002) and Lu (2008).

PLATO'S RELEVANCE TO THE CONTEMPORARY POLITICS OF SHAME

As this brief overview of the politics of shame illustrates, there is a great deal of disagreement about the place of this emotion in contemporary democratic politics. Some of the opposition to shame comes from the fact that it *is* a discomforting and unpleasant emotion to experience, and from the ample empirical evidence that shame *can* be used to stigmatize and isolate people causing them to withdraw from the political realm.²⁴ This latter empirical evidence cannot be denied and, as I will show in chapters 1 and 2, it is sometimes on display in Plato's *Gorgias*, just as it was sometimes on display in ancient Greek politics more generally. However, as Plato's dialogues and human life make abundantly clear, guilt, empathy, compassion, pity, love, anger, fear, remorse, or even calm calculation can be and have been just as crippling, disruptive, and pernicious to individuals, groups, or polities in the history of mankind.

Indeed, one of the most important corrections that both Plato and Aristotle can make to contemporary theories about the role of emotions in politics is to illustrate the fact that no emotion is a virtue in moral and political life, but rather that all emotions have the possibility of becoming an integral part of our democratic virtues or vices. For Plato, a desire to be without shame does connote a certain viciousness of character and a tyrannical personality; however, the presence of shame in no way guarantees that we possess virtue, even if it can often underpin our false pretensions to it. Shame, like the equality that Tocqueville examined in *Democracy in America*, can lead us either toward new and subtler forms of tyranny and despotism in our psyches and our polities, or toward new and subtler forms of liberty, democracy, and reciprocity. This book on shame is meant to show the many ways that, and reasons why, shame led in both of these directions for the Greeks in the fifth and fourth centuries BC, and for ourselves in our own recent history, so that we can devise the democratic institutions and practices that will tip the scale toward liberty, democracy, and reciprocity.

Second, as my overview also illustrated, some of the disagreements arise from certain ambiguities about what is meant by shame, and from the particu-

²⁴ Both Massaro (1997) and Nussbaum (2004) marshal significant and substantial evidence from the psychoanalytic and sociological literature on shame to show that hiding can be one of the reactions to shame. I think they are right to think that hiding is the dominant reaction to a certain type of shame or shaming by others. However, this is because they are primarily thinking of shame and shaming in terms of the kinds of stigmatizing penalties involved in shaming penalties, such as making people wear signs or bumper stickers that publicize their crimes or, even more problematically in the case of pedophiles, their particular mental illnesses. This is the dominant form in which shame has been conceptualized in the legal literature and actualized in the legal system, but it is not the only and certainly not the salutary form of shaming that I shall be supporting in this book.

lar manifestation of the emotion that is actually being praised or condemned. Many contemporary theories of shame and civility focus on only one aspect of shame, thus making their appreciation of shame's political and psychological work necessarily partial. Is Elshtain's "boundary of shame" an emotion, a virtue, an institutional arrangement, a set of practices within liberal democracies, or a character trait like civility, and how are these things related to one another? Is her "boundary of shame" or "veil of civility" actually necessary to ensure that the feelings of shame Rawls denounces are excluded from the public sphere? In other words, might they not both agree that respecting others as equals requires a politics of shame (understood as the civility made possible by our sense of shame) that avoids the pernicious practice of stigmatizing and humiliating others? This, of course, would be something very different from the politics of shame that Warner criticizes, and it may well amount to what he himself speaks of in other parts of his work as the possibility of finding a common human dignity in shame.²⁵ Related to this possibility, however, is the question of whether one can acquire a sense of shame or attain a dignity in shame without *ever* experiencing the painful feelings of inadequacy and the blows to one's self-esteem that characterize the primary occurrence of shame.²⁶ As Martha Nussbaum points out, "We do not think that the solution to all problems of shame lies in the effacement of the uncomfortable feelings,"²⁷ and we may even think that self-respect requires feeling shame "in various circumstances of reversal or failure."²⁸

These ambiguities all point to the necessity of examining the complex manifestations and diverse forms of shame as a preliminary step to answering the question of whether or not shame has a place in democratic politics. The fact that ordinary language allows us to denote these various manifestations of shame with the same word suggests that there are complex and dynamic connections between these feelings, practices, and character traits that need to be theorized. This kind of analysis is required before one can argue either that shame is a necessary support for democratic interactions and deliberations or that it necessarily undermines these things by weakening the resolve, respect, and self-esteem that underpin human communicative interactions. The solution to our problems of shame then requires us to articulate the connection between the psychological and the political phenomena of shame. What does it mean to speak of the "politics of shame" or the "politics of emotion" more generally? Alternatively, how are political and social actions

²⁵ Warner (1999), 36.

²⁶ As Massaro (1999, 87) puts it, "One who truly felt *no* shame . . . would be a radically unsocialized, deeply disturbed individual who lacked a most basic inhibition—so basic that it is likely that very few (if any) utterly shameless individuals exist."

²⁷ Nussbaum (1980), 400.

²⁸ Nussbaum (1980), 404.

incorporated into the psyche in the form of shame? Can we have a democratic politics that preserves the kind of shame that is constitutive of respect and civility while avoiding the shame that stigmatizes and isolates certain groups from the public sphere?

In this book I explore these complexities that characterize shame in its dynamic capacity to move us simultaneously outward to sociality and political life and inward to the ongoing creation of a unique self. I do so through the lens of Plato's dialogue the *Gorgias*, not only because the emotion of shame was central to Greek political life and thought, but more importantly because it continues to be central to our own political life, even if this is often in the form of vehement denial.²⁹ Plato's analysis offers critical leverage on our contemporary democratic theories and practices because it offers one of the most profound meditations on how imperialistic democracies degenerate into tyrannies in part through their very disavowal of shame, and their desire to see shame as a simplistic and outdated emotion, and shamelessness as a form of freedom and courageousness.³⁰

This desire to be without shame in order to be free is no less true of many of the world's current democratic polities, and of the kinds of psychosocial phenomena that led to the situation within which these polities now find themselves.³¹ Contrary to what the leaders, media, and pundits now tell us, we do not have only the Depression of the 1930s to look to for a model of the kind of moderate and self-limiting democracies we might now all want to become. Plato's Athens was coping with similar problems and had just come out of an imperialistic war, a tyrannical democracy, the regime of the Thirty

²⁹ The same is also true of shame's constant companions like honor and esteem. As Brennan and Pettit (2004, 8) put it, "The assumption . . . that ordinary folk have no interest in honour and esteem and that it belongs only to the aristocracy is a grievous error."

³⁰ At *Republic* 8.560d–e Plato describes the tyrannical individual as a person who renames shame "simplicity" and shamelessness "courage." (All references to and translations of the *Republic* are from the translation by Allan Bloom, *The Republic of Plato*, Second edition (New York: Basic Books, 1968), unless otherwise noted.) This encapsulates what Plato brings out in great detail in his depiction of the potential Athenian statesman, Callicles, in the latter half of the *Gorgias*. As I will show in this book, the *Gorgias* contains Plato's most careful and sustained treatment of the relationship between shame, democracy, and tyranny.

³¹ I borrow the term "psychosocial" from Danielle Allen (2000b). As Allen (2000b, 333 n.3) puts it, "The word 'psychosocial' [describes] the ways in which an individual's participation in social practices and ideas interacts with the *individual psyche* (or meets the needs of the individual psyche) and serves to foster *social cohesion*. The word indicates how social cohesion at once supports individual cognitive and psychological mechanisms and needs their support." Like Ober (1989, 11), Allen (2000b, xi) and Frank (2005, 3–5), I think that the Greek notions of the Athenian constitution (Ober), or authority and desert (Allen), as well as the Aristotelian notions of action and practice (Frank) lie at the intersection between structures and individual agents, between institutions and beliefs. The same is also true of Plato's notion of shame. It is a phenomenon made possible by the interaction of certain types of institutions and certain types of individual psychic states and beliefs.

Tyrants, and a period of unparalleled prosperity built partially upon greed, injustice, and the desire to banish shame from their collective psyche and polity.³² Plato's writings are all deeply marked by these experiences of the late fifth century BC, and by his experience of the poorer but more moderate and democratic Athens that existed within the very different world order of the fourth century BC.³³

If our own current problems arose in part from the *lack* of self-regulation and self-limitation within each of our polities' economic and political institutions and practices, I hope to show that such self-regulation and self-limitation are at the heart of a very important kind of democratic shame. As we rebuild the physical infrastructures or territorial boundaries of our polities to redress our current economic and political woes, it is my hope that we will also try to rebuild the psychosocial infrastructures and boundaries that predispose us to see our worldwide "depression" as an intractable crisis, rather than as an opportunity for change in a new and more democratic direction.³⁴ Shame can be one of the last safeguards of our democratic constitutions and by this I mean both our psychic and our political constitutions. Shame can be (and always has been) an important guide at such difficult crossroads, even if it is a guide that always threatens to lead us astray or down paths we have traveled before. More specifically, I argue that Plato's analysis of shame in the *Gorgias* supplies a deeper understanding of the necessary but dangerous role of this emotion in human life and democratic politics than either the proponents or the opponents of the contemporary politics of shame and civility. I do this by articulating the three different kinds of shame and shaming practices that can characterize human communicative interactions and democratic deliberations. In what follows, I refer to these different models of a politics of shame as 'flattering,' 'Socratic respectful,' and 'Platonic respectful' shame.³⁵

This turn to Plato will of course strike some readers as odd, so before discussing Plato's specific insights on shame and democracy, I shall outline my reasons for making precisely this move. First, as certain Platonic scholars have argued, Plato's middle dialogues contain some of the most profound consider-

³² The "Thirty Tyrants" refers to the pro-Spartan oligarchy that was set up after the surrender of Athens at the end of the Peloponnesian War in 404 BC. See Balot (2001, chapter 7) and Frank (2007) for excellent accounts of how Plato's *Republic* responds to the greed (*pleonexia*) and injustice (*adikia*) that plagued Athens during the period of the Peloponnesian War and the oligarchic revolutions of the late fifth century BC.

³³ Ober (1989) offers an excellent account of how the ideology that was forged and re-forged by mass and elite citizens in democratic Athens during the fourth century BC (partially in response to the excesses of the previous century) served as a crucial support for this more moderate and less tyrannical democracy.

³⁴ The notion of a worldwide "depression" is an excellent example of the kinds of psychosocial phenomena that I will be speaking about in this book. It suggests both the psychological state and the political-economic institutions that reciprocally create and sustain our current situation.

³⁵ All subsequent references to these terms are not in single quotes.

ations on human psychology, the role of emotions in politics, and the dynamic relationship between the psyche and the polity.³⁶ The famous analogy between the soul and the city in the *Republic* is the most obvious example of these Platonic concerns.³⁷ Trying to understand exactly what the analogy between the thumotic, erotic, and rational parts of the soul and the corresponding classes in the city means is one of the most difficult challenges to any reader of this dialogue. Similarly, all of the other dialogues of this period—the *Gorgias*, the *Symposium*, and the *Phaedrus*—contain profound reflections on the relationship between the psyche and the polity. More specifically, the *Gorgias* contains one of the first and most sustained reflections on the complex relationships that can exist between shame in the psyche and the shaming practices of democratic politics.

The second reason for turning to Plato consists of the need for thinking outside of certain early modern conceptual paradigms. Contemporary theorists of the emotions have stopped speaking about them as *either* raw feelings *or* unique forms of cognition because they have begun to realize that such binaries fail to capture the complex phenomena of the emotions. Such strict binaries have been inherited from early modern thinkers like René Descartes who conceived of passion and reason as completely distinct faculties,³⁸ or from the psychologist and philosopher William James who famously wrote, “*Our feeling of [bodily changes] as they occur IS the emotion [James’ italics].*”³⁹ Instead, the current notion of a “politics of emotion” stresses the need to theorize the connections between feelings, thoughts, behaviors, and practices in ways that evade the static and binary categories of inner/outer, reason/emotion, mind/body, and public/private.⁴⁰ These strict dichotomies that characterize the early modern turn in political philosophy are simply not present in the Platonic corpus, even though these dualisms have characterized our interpretations and distortions of Platonism. The very asocial and unencumbered selves that we now need to think beyond are remnants of a way of thinking that is foreign to the Greeks, and here I think that elements of their very strangeness

³⁶ See Kaufer (1978); Irwin (1977), 191–216; Irwin (1979), 191, 195, 218, 221; Klosko (1983); Vlastos (1991), 45–81; Cooper (1999), chapters 2 and 4; and Lear ([1998], 1999). For a full discussion of the ordering of Plato’s dialogues and the particular characteristics of his middle dialogues, see chapter 1.

³⁷ One of the best treatments of this theme in the *Republic* is Lear ([1998], 1999). For an excellent account of the dynamic and reciprocal relationship between characters and institutions in the works of Aristotle, see Frank (2005).

³⁸ For an account of Descartes’ problematic dualisms, see Kingston (2008).

³⁹ I borrow this citation from Solomon ([1998], 2008), 189.

⁴⁰ For examples of this new approach and some of the debates within it, see Lutz and Abu-Lughod (1990); Damasio (1994); French and Wettstein (1998); Reddy (1997); Blackburn (1998); Elster (1999); Redding (1999); Koziak (2000); Nussbaum (2001); Marcus (2002); Solomon (2003) and ([1998], 2008); Walzer (2003); Hall (2003) and (2005); Konstan (2006); Clarke, Hoggett and Thompson (2006); Gross (2006); Sokolon (2006); Krause (2002) and (2008); and Kingston (2008).

can help us get away from these problematic early modern modes of thinking about the self and the emotions.⁴¹

Finally, I believe that Plato can help us think more deeply about the differences between a shame that is grounded in respect for others, and a shame that stigmatizes others and that depends upon a rigid and irreversible hierarchical structure between the shamer and the shamed. A number of theorists of shame have pointed to the fact that Attic Greek, unlike English, has two words for shame: *aidōs* and *aischunē*.⁴² It is tempting to think that the two Greek words give us the necessary distinctions between a bad kind of hierarchical shame that is linked only to dishonor and disgrace (*aischunē*) and a good kind of shame linked only to awe, reverence, modesty, and respect (*aidōs*).⁴³ When I first began work on this book, I myself felt (and hoped) that this might well be the case. Unfortunately, by the time of Plato and Aristotle, many of these distinctions had begun to blur.⁴⁴ *Aischunē* had come to be used as a synonym for *aidōs* in many contexts, and the verbal form of both words (*aischunomai* and *aideomai*) when used with an accusative referring to another person or persons could be used either in the sense of “I feel ashamed before,” or “I respect.”⁴⁵ (As I will show in chapter 2, this bipolar or two-directional aspect of Greek shame (*aidōs/aischunē*) is essential for understanding the intersubjective character of this phenomenon.) Plato himself often uses forms of *aidōs* and *aischunē* interchangeably,⁴⁶ or uses the same word (*aischunē*) when articulating very different manifestations of shame.⁴⁷

Although both *aidōs* and *aischunē* shared the possible connotation of respect for an other in Plato’s time, there were still subtle distinctions between the two terms which are important for understanding the relationship between Plato’s *Gorgias* and our own contemporary notions of shame. The more archaic and poetic word, *aidōs*, was originally used primarily in martial and

⁴¹ Cf. Kingston (2008, 113) who argues that Plato and Aristotle can redress the modern tendency to see an emotion as either a wholly internalized phenomenon or a solely individual one.

⁴² See for example Riezler (1943), 457; Cairns (1993), 415; Williams (1993), 194 n.9; Scheff (1997), 209; Konstan (2006), 93; Nieuwenburg (2004), 466 n.12; and Saxonhouse (2006), 61 n.9. All Attic Greek terms are transliterated.

⁴³ This is the argument of Riezler (1943) and Scheff (1997). Konstan (2006, 91–110) also thinks there is an important distinction between the two terms, but for him this arises more out of the fact that *aischunē* can have a prospective and a retrospective character, whereas *aidōs* can have only a prospective character. In other words, the object of *aischunē* can be a past, present, or future blow to one’s self-esteem, but the object of *aidōs* can only be a future blow to one’s self-esteem.

⁴⁴ See Cairns (1993), 415 and 455; Williams (1993), 194 n.9 and Nieuwenburg (2004), 466 n.12.

⁴⁵ Cairns (1993), 415 and 455.

⁴⁶ See for example *Euth.* 12b; *Rep.* 8.560c–9.571d. Konstan (2003, 95–100) argues persuasively that Aristotle differentiates between *aidōs* and *aischunē* because he only uses *aidōs* in a prospective or restrictive sense while he uses *aischunē* in both a prospective/restrictive sense and a retrospective or remorseful sense. I have not found this distinction to be true of Plato’s use of the terms.

⁴⁷ In the chapters that follow I argue that this is precisely what happens throughout the *Gorgias*.

religious settings and had positive connotations of awe, respect, and reverence for the gods, or respect and modesty before one's superiors, guests, or strangers, especially in Homer.⁴⁸ With the development of Athenian democracy in the fifth and fourth centuries, the word *aischunē*, which first occurred solely with the meaning of disgrace,⁴⁹ gradually began to take on some of the more positive connotations of respect that had been characteristic of the archaic term *aidōs*. Now, however, this respect was directed more toward other men and their man-made codes than toward the gods. Indeed, one of the few subtle but important distinctions between *aidōs* and *aischunē* that persisted in Plato's time was the fact that there was no active verb form of *aidōs*, but there was an active verb form of *aischunē*, which (in the first person singular) was *aischunō*.⁵⁰ In other words, while it was possible to *aischunō* (shame or dishonor) another person, it was impossible to *aideō* another person. This of course makes sense if *aidōs* was originally that particular emotion brought about by the irreversible hierarchical relationship between man and the gods, and this actually makes *aischunē* closer to our contemporary notion of shame, in the sense that it can refer both to the felt experience of shame and to the action of shaming that we direct toward others.

This also explains why the only word used throughout the *Gorgias* to describe the kinds of shame and acts of shaming that were experienced and performed by democratic Athenians and by Socrates is *aischunē*. When Plato uses the word *aischunē* in the *Gorgias* the connotations of dishonor and disgrace are still foremost, but he also uses it to describe the motivation that prompts Socrates to relentlessly question and shame his fellow citizens into perplexity and uncertainty out of an attitude of respect. As Socrates tells Callicles, he (Socrates) would be ashamed (*aischunoimēn*) if he could not render his particular brand of help to himself or to others (*Gorg.* 522d).⁵¹ There is thus within the dialogue an attempt to articulate two related but different kinds of shame (*aischunē*) that can be felt before or wielded against one's peers and fellow citizens, and that can lead either in the direction of conformity and flattery or critical reflection and respect.

⁴⁸ Latimer (1926), 2–4, 35–37; Cairns (1993), 49–146; Riedinger (1980). (Cairns (1993, 135), however, argues that *aidōs* is never used exclusively in a religious sense in Homer. He (1993, 138–39) also argues that even in certain Homeric passages *aidōs* and *aischunē* were used synonymously to refer to instances of disgrace or dishonor before other men.)

⁴⁹ Konstan (2003, 294 n.11) argues that the noun *aischunē* “first occurs in the sixth-century poet Theognis [verse 1272], in the sense of being a ‘disgrace,’ and becomes common toward the middle of the fifth century BC.” While the more archaic and poetic term *aidōs* is only cognate with *aischos* (disgrace) and *aischron* (ugly or dishonorable), *aischunē* is clearly derivative from them.

⁵⁰ Liddell and Scott (1996), 43.

⁵¹ All references to and translations of the *Gorgias* are from the translation by James Nichols, Jr., *Plato: Gorgias* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998). All citations refer to the Stephanus pages and sections of his translation.

The other subtle distinction between the two emotions that persisted in classical Athens was the association of *aidōs* with the virtue of modesty and the metaphor of a covering mantle, and the association of *aischunē* with the virtue of courage.⁵² In the deft hands of Plato, this subtle distinction is used both in the *Apology* and especially in the *Gorgias* to remind his fellow citizens that the only truly courageous person in a democratic polity is the person (i.e., Socrates) who feels a certain shame (*aischunē*) before the very activity of philosophizing, and who thus refuses to flatter his democratic audience.⁵³ Indeed, as I will argue at great length in chapters 3 and 4, Plato's *Gorgias* offers both his contemporary Athenians as well as his future readers a vivid image of the kind of courage needed in order to reciprocally shame one's fellow citizens out of their complacency, false moralism, and problematic conflation of shamelessness with courage and freedom.

The fact that a philosopher like Plato can help political theorists think more deeply about an emotion like shame in the aforementioned ways is, of course, a relatively uncontroversial claim. However, my book goes further and challenges the traditional and canonical view of Plato as a virulent anti-democrat by examining the ways in which his dialogues actually utilize and develop certain Athenian democratic ideals within and alongside his critique of Periclean imperialistic Athens.⁵⁴ By repositioning Plato in this way, I am better able to utilize his insights into the complex role of shame in Athenian democratic politics in order to address the issues I outlined earlier in the contemporary politics of shame and civility.

In doing so, I also challenge the prevalent view, most famously espoused by Gregory Vlastos, of a democratic Socrates and an anti-democratic or authoritarian Plato.⁵⁵ By this I do not mean that I think of Plato as an avid supporter of fifth- and fourth-century Athenian democracy, nor do I think that the democracy was justified in putting Socrates to death for what they took to be inherently anti-democratic activities.⁵⁶ I think that whether these thinkers were

⁵² Konstan (2003), 95 and 296 n.17. Konstan here cites Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.84.3 for this distinction. For an excellent argument against conflating shame with modesty in a very different literary and historical context, see Wagner (2008).

⁵³ For an excellent account of this form of Socratic courage in the *Apology* and the *Gorgias*, see Balot (2008).

⁵⁴ This approach to Plato was first developed by Euben (1997); Saxonhouse (1996) and (1998); Wallach (1997) and (2001); and Monoson (2000). Other thinkers who offer nuanced and sympathetic readings of Plato's attitude toward democracy include Wardy (1996); Balot (2001); and Frank (2007) and (2008).

⁵⁵ Vlastos (1983c) and (1991). Thinkers who have argued for Plato's anti-democratic attitudes include Vickers (1988), 88–89; Vlastos (1991); Roberts (1994); Ober (1998); and Nehamas (1998). Thinkers who have argued for Plato's authoritarian attitudes include Popper (1945); Havelock (1957); Taylor (1997); Dombrowski (1997); and Shorris (2004).

⁵⁶ For the argument that the Athenian democracy was justified in prosecuting Socrates for anti-democratic activities and sentiments, especially concerning the practice of free speech, see Stone (1988).

enemies or friends of Athenian democracy is a very complicated question and the solution is not contained in the notion of a democratic Socrates and an authoritarian Plato.⁵⁷ In certain instances, both Plato and Socrates were opposed to specific practices and policies of democratic Athens, e.g., they both objected to the kind of mass decision making characteristic of the Athenian democratic assembly and law courts.⁵⁸ However it is important to see that, in some cases, their opposition was to the particular form that democracy took in Athens during the fifth and fourth centuries BC. This was a form of democracy that was far more direct and participatory than our contemporary democracies: it lacked most features of our modern-day bureaucracy, civil service, or representative institutions; a number of key political offices were filled by lot; and citizens could debate, offer amendments to, and vote on things as diverse as war policies, taxation, public works, and diplomatic negotiations.⁵⁹ In contrast, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, many of us take for granted the authority of an entrenched elite,⁶⁰ a civil service, and a bureaucratic state structure, and the fact that the average citizen's participation in government is limited mainly to voting.

It should hopefully be obvious that, for me, this is a descriptive, not a prescriptive characterization of our contemporary democracies. I also do not mean to overlook alternative forms of contemporary democratic participation such as social movements or aesthetic practices. I only want to emphasize the fact that modern-day citizens do not (and cannot) participate in the direct governance of a democratic polity to the same degree that the Athenian male citizen did. Second, I also want to suggest that before decrying the elitism of Socrates and/or Plato it is necessary to ask ourselves whether we would want the most important political offices of our own democracies to be chosen by lot.

These significant differences between their situation and our own does not mean that what Socrates and Plato have to say about democratic concepts such as liberty, equality, and majority rule have nothing to offer us as we continue

⁵⁷ For theorists who examine the relationship between Socrates and Athenian democracy, see Monoson (2000), 11 n.23. For a list of theorists who examine the relationship between Plato and Athenian democracy, see Monoson (2000), 12 n.24.

⁵⁸ I owe this point to Danielle Allen. See also Monoson (2000), 11 n.22. See Frank (2005, 6) for the argument that Aristotle also felt that truth was rarely a matter of mass majority rule. (Here she quotes *Meta.* 1009b2.)

⁵⁹ See Finley (1985), 20, 25–26; (1991), 75–76; Hansen (1991), 3; Samons (2004), 28–31; and Rhodes (2006), 56–62. Cf. Ober (1989, 151) who argues, “[the fact] that there was a relatively direct and causal relationship between the opinion of the majority, and state policy and legal decisions is a fundamental difference between Athenian democracy and modern governmental systems.”

⁶⁰ Ober (1996), 5. For the argument that Athenian leaders, including Pericles, did not form anything like an entrenched and self-perpetuating elite see Finley, (1985), 24–25; Ober (1989), 16–17, 21.

to grapple with these same concepts ourselves. It is also important not to make the mistake of thinking that because they do sometimes make assertions that are anti-majoritarian, anti-liberty, or anti-equality, they are therefore anti-democratic thinkers. Their criticisms of these concepts were often directed at the most radically democratic articulations of these ideals, or at the perverted forms of liberty, equality, and majoritarianism that they thought were being practiced by the imperialistic and tyrannical democracy that Athens had become at the end of the fifth century BC. A deeper understanding of what they actually mean by equality, liberty, and majoritarianism can still have relevance for our own thinking on these topics,⁶¹ and as I show in this book their concerns about the corrupt forms of these democratic ideals actually do have very direct relevance for our own current political situation.

Thus, in chapter 3, “Plato on Shame in Democratic Athens,” I argue that a more indirect approach is necessary before applying Platonic insights to our contemporary problems. The first part of this approach involves reconstructing aspects of the Athenian democratic “normative imagery” and then juxtaposing these to Plato’s own account of philosophical practice.⁶² This is necessary because, as both A.H.M. Jones and Josiah Ober have pointed out, although we have a number of classical texts that are critical of democracy, we lack any surviving statements of the theory upon which Athenian democracy was premised.⁶³ When this is done a new reading of Plato becomes possible. More specifically, it becomes clear that although Plato relentlessly attacks flattering rhetoric and the democratic leaders Pericles and Themistocles throughout the *Gorgias*, he does so because they *fail* to live up to certain ideals that are in fact shared by Platonic philosophizing and certain strands of Athenian democratic ideology. It also becomes clear that philosophy requires the same openness to being shamed by another that is exemplified in the democratic ideal of *parrhēsia* (free/frank speaking) and in the Socratic elenchus.

The second part of this new approach involves distinguishing between the representations of democracy and democratic leaders in Plato’s dialogues and the actual historical institutions and theories of democracy that were prevalent in Athens at the time. As Peter Euben has argued, the “democratic leaders,” Pericles and Themistocles, and the “democratic citizen,” Callicles, (all of whom are relentlessly criticized by Socrates), actually fail to live up to certain ideals

⁶¹ For a similar articulation of the relevance of Aristotle’s thought for democratic theory today see Frank (2005), introduction.

⁶² Monoson (2000), 12–15. Monoson borrows the term “normative imagery” from Loraux (1986). For other theorists who pursue this strategy in relation to Plato’s dialogues, see Euben (1994) and (1997), chapters 8 and 9; Saxonhouse (1996), (1998) and (2006); Wallach (2001); and Balot (2001), chapter 7. For accounts of Athenian democratic ideology see Finley (1985); Farrar (1988); Euben, Wallach, and Ober (1994); Ober (1989), (1996), and (1998); Ober and Hedrick (1996); Monoson (2000); and chapter 3 below.

⁶³ Jones ([1957], 1979), 41; and Ober (1998), 147.

explicitly espoused by Athenian democratic discourse.⁶⁴ More specifically, I argue that Socrates' attacks in the *Gorgias* are directed at the supporters or leaders of Athenian democracy who dream of being tyrants, while falsely professing to be concerned with the common good. Socrates' shaming refutations of these interlocutors are thus meant to recall his fellow citizens back to the true practice of democracy. Because shame involves the recognition that we don't actually live up to the ideals we have of ourselves, it can also play a role in showing us that we don't live up to the corrupting image of the tyrant. Taken together, these two strategies allow me to treat Plato not as a total enemy of democratic Athens, but rather as an "immanent" critic of a corrupt Athenian democracy.⁶⁵

In chapter 4, "Socratic vs. Platonic Shame," I go further and suggest that the *Gorgias* illustrates Plato's own criticisms of and corrections to his teacher's elenctic and ironic encounters with others from a standpoint that is in some ways *more* sympathetic to the perspective of Socrates' Athenian democratic audience.⁶⁶ These criticisms and corrections depend upon Plato's own deepening understanding of the role of shame in communicative interactions. Here I argue that Plato's use of myth at the end of the *Gorgias* both illustrates the shaming mechanism of the Socratic elenchus and exemplifies a comportment toward the audience that represents a different kind of respectful shame than the one exhibited by Socrates' own elenctic activities. The myth at the end of the *Gorgias* combines the pleasures of sight and sound, so integral to Gorgias' epideictic rhetoric, with the more painful and negative aspects of the Socratic elenchus to elicit a more positive reaction to the experience of being ashamed. This rearticulation of Plato's position *vis-à-vis* democratic Athens thus allows me to utilize his insights into shame as a way of deepening our own understanding of the role of this emotion in contemporary democratic politics.

PLATO'S *GORGIAS* AND THE POLITICS OF SHAME

One of the reasons it has been so difficult for scholars to see Plato as having any sympathies for Athenian democratic ideology arises out of the many mistaken interpretations of the very dialogue that I focus on in this book. Accordingly, in the first chapter I argue that the problematic distinctions between rhetoric

⁶⁴ Euben (1994), 208–14. See also Wallach (2001, 10) who points out that Plato's criticisms of political injustice and domination have often been mistaken for a criticism of democracy.

⁶⁵ Cf. Monoson (2000); and Wallach (2001). The term "immanent" criticism comes from Walzer (1987).

⁶⁶ Cf. Wallach (2001) who suggests that "Socrates is as much a problem as a hero in Plato's philosophical project" (9) and that Plato's project involved trying to resolve the tensions between the critical discourse (*logos*) of Socratic virtue and Athenian democratic practice (*ergon*) (7). Klosko (1983, 585) also argues that the "rejection of Socratic political tactics is a major element

and philosophy, emotion and reason, persuasion and argumentation, which Plato's *Gorgias* is credited with inaugurating, overlook the distinctions he actually makes between Gorgianic rhetoric, flattering rhetoric, the Socratic elenchus, and the true and noble brand of rhetoric that he forges out of an alliance between Gorgianic rhetoric and the Socratic elenchus. In this chapter I show how the dialogue itself performs a mediation between those elements of Gorgias' display (*epideixis*) rhetoric and Socrates' shaming elenchus, which Plato thinks are *both* necessary if shame (*aischunē*) is to have a salutary role in democratic deliberations. Although Plato critiques elements of both Gorgianic rhetoric and Socratic philosophy in the *Gorgias*, his method of critique (or what he calls the method of collection and division in the *Phaedrus*)⁶⁷ subsumes and preserves rather than wholly negates the salutary elements of these modes of comportment toward others. In doing so, I also challenge the neo-Kantian prejudice that sees respect as a product of practical rationality in isolation from the psychological and affective sources of this phenomenon, and I challenge Straussian interpretations of the dialogue that see it as a Platonic-Gorgianic alliance that is meant solely to protect Socratic and Platonic philosophy from politics. Far from banishing rhetoric and emotion from his own notion of a more philosophical democratic politics, Plato's *Gorgias* shows us exactly why a rhetoric of respectful shame is integral to the kinds of reciprocal and inter-subjective relations that make self–other interactions in a democratic polity both critical and potentially transformative.

In the second chapter, “Shaming Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles,” I offer a detailed analysis of the refutations of Socrates' three interlocutors in the *Gorgias* in order to show how the phenomenon of shame (*aischunē*) is itself constitutive of the structure of intersubjectivity that is necessary for this kind of potentially transformative ethical and political deliberation. Previous accounts of the role of shame in the *Gorgias* treat it as revealing either the ethical truth contained within the psyche of the individual, or the ethical truth contained within certain societal opinions and practices. Instead, I argue that shame points simultaneously inwards to what the individual desires and believes, and outward to the world of other individuals and groups, as well as to the laws and practices within which he moves and lives. This bipolar or two-directional character of shame is reflected in the fact that it involves the cognitive-affective gaze of an other that reveals a certain inadequacy in the self.

Second, I argue that understanding how a shame refutation works requires taking into account the two moments of any shame situation: the moment of recognition and the moment of reaction. Only by distinguishing between these two moments is it then possible to understand why it is that we can speak of

of the political teaching of the *Gorgias*,” but he thinks that Plato's rejection of Socrates led him in an authoritarian direction (594). My position is obviously quite different from Klosko's.

⁶⁷ *Phdr.* 266b; cf. *Phdr.* 263a–266a.

individuals as either being ashamed of the truth or being too ashamed to speak the truth. In this chapter I illustrate these two moments through a detailed analysis of all three of Socrates' elenctic encounters with his interlocutors. Previous interpretations of the role of shame in the *Gorgias*, as well as of our own contemporary theories of shame in democratic politics, end up being partial precisely because they overlook these *two* moments that can both play a part in the kinds of evasions, transformations, and contestations made possible by any shame situation.

The moment of recognition within the primary occurrence of shame consists of the painful but potentially beneficial recognition of the gaze of an other that reveals a certain inadequacy in the self. It is painful because it involves some kind of diminution of the self in relation to an other. However, what is positive about this experience is that it disrupts or unsettles one's "blind" or unthinking identification with an image or ideal, which can actually be a good thing if who we are cannot be fully captured by an overly unitary or fantastical standard. For this very reason perplexity or a salutary kind of disunity and disorientation often characterizes the moment of recognition within the experience of shame, and this very perplexity opens up but does not guarantee the possibility of a radical transformation or contestation of the self or other involved in the shaming situation. What can also be positive and potentially beneficial about this experience is that it can reveal a common truth between the self and the other, e.g., the very vulnerabilities we share as human beings living in an uncertain and to some degree uncontrollable world. Finally, I argue that what endangers the salutary potential in any shame situation are the kinds of reaction that the self makes to what is revealed in the shaming situation, and the mode of comportment by the other doing the shaming (and these two things are often, though not necessarily, related to one another).

The third and fourth chapters, "Plato on Shame in Democratic Athens" and "Socratic vs. Platonic Shame," are thus devoted to articulating these two other elements of a shame situation. More specifically, in chapter 3 I focus on the kinds of reactions to the moment of recognition that led the Athenians to develop a sense of flattering shame that actually foreclosed rather than opened up spaces for contesting the problematic norms of democratic citizenship that were prevalent (if only implicitly) during Athens' imperialistic period. In chapter 4 I then turn to analyze the ways in which Socrates' own unique brand of respectful shaming may have inadvertently contributed to the less than salutary reactions on the part of his interlocutors and his polity more generally. I show how Plato's own revision to Socrates' brand of respectful shame exemplifies the kind of comportment toward a democratic audience that can prompt more salutary reactions to the experience of being shamed out of one's conformity or complacent moralism. Thus I argue that Plato's use of myth reflects certain criticisms of Socrates' engagements with others that are grounded in Plato's own deepening understanding of the mechanisms of shame, and of the

kinds of comportment toward an other that are necessary to elicit a more positive reaction to the experience of being shown that we are not who we thought we were.

In the case of flattering shame (exemplified by the kind of rhetoric that both Polus and Callicles valorize and practice), one fixates on the pain that is inherent to the recognition that one has fallen below the standards of an imaginary or actual other. It is the painfulness of this recognition that becomes the “shameful” situation that one tries to avoid in the future. In flattering shame, one hopes to avoid the unpleasant experience of having one’s identifications punctured by one’s audience. What one considers “shameful” is the fact that one is seen by others not to be what one thought one was, and alternately, what one considers “good” is to be recognized by oneself or others as simply what one already takes oneself to be. The speaker’s sense of shame thus attunes him to the view of the other or audience, but in such a way that this other can never again reveal any inadequacies or criticisms of his self. Nor is he (the speaker) oriented to revealing any inadequacies in his audience. Instead, both parties to the debate are oriented to maintaining the mythic unity of the objectified public image of the “virtuous” citizen. A false consensus then forms wherein “debate” becomes a kind of reciprocal exchange of pleasures or pleasantries, such that neither party ever has to endure the pain of having their identity or ideals criticized by the other. Those actions or aspects of the self that do not fit this mythic unity are then displaced onto other individuals or groups in the shaming practices of derision and stigmatization. The person whose sense of shame has fixated on the pleasures of mutual recognition and who is oriented to restoring the lost unity that is always sundered by feelings of shame may then try to escape the “shame” of failing to live up to the norm by displacing it onto others. This kind of flattering shame becomes especially problematic when the public image of the truly “virtuous” citizen in an imperialistic polity like democratic Athens actually embodies dangerous and tyrannical aspirations to omnipotence and to freedom *from* all restraints on these problematic desires for omnipotence.

In contrast to this, Socrates’ own sense of shame offers a model of respect that is grounded in preserving our very openness to judgment by the other that is present in the primary occurrence of shame. This kind of respectful shame is oriented toward dissecting the mythical unity of these images of the “virtuous” citizen in the ongoing project of mutual reflection and criticism (as exemplified by the Socratic elenchus.) The morality grounded in this kind of respectful shame consists, not in assimilating to a standard or norm, but rather in remaining open to the ongoing possibility that who you are cannot be captured by any particular norm or self-image you currently possess. As Dana Villa puts it, “[Socrates’] essential task is to get his fellow Athenians to entertain the possibility that the demands of morality may, in fact, run counter to the established norms of the society and its conception of virtuous citizen-

ship,⁶⁸ and as he suggests, this activity provides a model of a kind of critical democratic citizenship that ought to complement the more participatory models of citizenship put forth by contemporary republican theorists.⁶⁹ Just as the Socratic shaming elenchus performs a kind of disruption of unity and identity, so a healthy democracy requires citizens who reciprocally perform and endure the pain of being rightfully shamed out of their conformity. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates performs this critical democratic citizenship role by trying to get his foreign and Athenian interlocutors to see that they are not in fact the tyrants they secretly or not so secretly profess to admire because they do actually admire certain other activities or ways of life that are inconsistent with tyranny.

Finally, Plato's own revision to this Socratic politics of shame reflects his additional consideration that although a certain amount of pain and struggle is integral to the discovery of ethical and political truths, a certain amount of pleasure and consensus is also integral to any act of intersubjective recognition and deliberation. I argue that Plato's model of respectful shame ultimately tries to find a place for the struggle and pain of Socrates' elenchic encounters and for the kinds of pleasures and benefits that can come from acknowledging the commonalities between one's self and one's fellow citizens, even while showing them why and how you disagree with them. Accordingly, I argue that the myth at the end of the dialogue represents a poetic-philosophic and friendly amendment to both Socrates' shaming elenchus and Gorgias' pleasant and spectacular rhetoric. In fact, it exemplifies a respectful shaming of both Socrates and Gorgias because it reveals the insufficiencies as well as the salutary aspects of their own modes of comportment toward others as this is displayed in the initial parts of the dialogue.

In chapter 5, I argue that once these insights into the various manifestations of shame are developed it becomes clear that there are often more striking similarities than differences between the contemporary proponents and opponents of shame and civility. Here I show how the proponents and opponents of shame tend to criticize or alternately to engage in the pernicious politics of flattering shame, while overlooking or misstating the possibilities of both Socratic and Platonic respectful shame that can bind individuals or groups together through the very recognition of their difference or distance from prevalent norms of citizenship. I also argue that Plato's treatment of shame actually extends upon the positive treatments of shame offered by Bernard Williams, Andrew Morrison, and John Braithwaite by showing how shame can open up possibilities of not just transforming the self in accordance with the other doing the shaming, but also of contesting and resisting the very self and other that are revealed in any shame situation. Finally, I show how Plato's incorpora-

⁶⁸ Villa (2001), 3.

⁶⁹ Villa (2001), 299.

tion and transcendence of his teacher's method of shaming others allows us to find a place for consensus and disagreement, deliberation and agonism within a democratic politics of shame.

In chapter 6, I extend my analysis of Plato and shame beyond the particular debates concerning shame and civility to show how the notion of respectful shame that I derive from Plato is actually consistent with some of the most recent findings in the neuroscientific study of the emotions and their significance in human deliberations. I also argue that Plato's understanding of respectful shame requires that we relinquish the oversimplistic division between "positive" and "negative" emotions and instead focus on the positive and negative manifestation of each and every emotion in human life and, more particularly, in democratic deliberations and practices. Related to this, I argue that in order to understand the place of emotions in human ethical and political life it is necessary to overcome the problematic distinctions (propagated by many psychoanalysts and political theorists in the past century) between shame as a primitive and amoral emotion and guilt as a mature and moral emotion.

PRUDES, PERVERTS, AND TYRANTS

Finally, I should say a little about my title, even though the figures, especially that of the tyrant, shall rear their heads in various places throughout this book. I daresay they have also reared their heads recently in our own democratic polities. This should not be too surprising for as I hope to show in this book, they are figures that have a lot to do with those aspects and types of shame that we continue to share with the Greeks.

As I will argue in chapter 5, the prude and the pervert are the two figures or personality types that we moderns tend to think of most when we think about shame and civility. Two things are important about this fact. The first is that these figures center around questions of sexuality where our fundamental vulnerability to the subtle or not so subtle intrusions of others is most manifest, but they also inevitably intersect with political questions surrounding valorized or problematic forms of intersubjectivity. Hence, it is no coincidence that these figures have tended to rear their heads in discussions of gay marriage or AIDS activism. The original perceptions of AIDS as a "gay plague" as well as certain contemporary criticisms of gay marriage both assume that a particular sphere or form of intersubjectivity must be protected from the intrusions of certain "perverts" who threaten the kinds of activities that are to be fostered in these circles of care and concern. They also implicitly convey concerns about just why the activities of these alleged "perverts" should disqualify them from access to the kinds of rights and resources necessary to participate fully as democratic citizens.

If our own modern-day “perverts” tend to be “cross-dressers” or “sodomasochists” who breach the boundary of shame and civility by openly parading their perversions in the public sphere,⁷⁰ the Greeks had their own variation on the “pervert” in the form of the catamite. The catamite was the passive partner in a male-to-male sexual relationship who, by virtue of his passive sexuality, was denied citizenship rights because he was deemed incapable of taking on the role of the active citizen, future soldier, and defender of Athens.⁷¹ He was also seen as a figure of shamelessness because he failed to put up the kinds of restraints or boundaries necessary to participate fully as a rational and active citizen, and instead passively gave in to his shameful and excessive sexual desires.⁷² Socrates’ suggestion in the *Gorgias* that such a person might actually be consistent with Callicles’ own valorization of indiscriminate hedonism as the best way of life for human beings invites a harsh rebuke from Callicles, simply because it poses such an affront to the accepted norms of Athenian democratic citizenship (494e). Callicles interprets Socrates’ comment as a shameless and perverse intrusion into the conversation, even though he (Callicles) had initially professed to be free of the kind of shame that ties one to conventional norms (482e–483e).

Second, as I hope to show in this book, the “prude” and “pervert” are figures that are actually constructed out of the more fundamental desire for very rigid boundaries between the self and the other. If shame is the emotion that helps us negotiate the boundaries between the self and the other, flattering shame involves the problematic desire that we fix this boundary once and for all by coming to see ourselves as the omnipotent and invulnerable beings or the perfectly “virtuous” citizens that we so desire to be. The “prude” is the person who wants shame to police these rigid boundaries to prevent the intrusion of shameless “perverts” into the collective self or polity. In the *Gorgias*, Callicles tells Socrates that it is fine to philosophize when one is a youth but that this childish activity should be given up when one reaches adulthood or else one becomes ridiculous and worthy of a beating because one becomes inexperienced in the customs and character of one’s own polity (484c–e). It is Callicles’ prudish desire that one could learn to become a virtuous citizen by simply attuning oneself to the prevalent norms of “virtuous” citizenship in imperialistic Athens, and this leads in turn to his desire to literally beat up anyone like Socrates who challenges these norms. Callicles’ prudishness represents the fan-

⁷⁰ These examples of “perverts” are drawn from Jean Elshtain’s (1995, 54–55) description of the problematic politics of displacement and publicity in contemporary democratic polities. My own sense is that such displays of defiance against our modern-day Victorian prudishness are actually sorely lacking in most democratic polities.

⁷¹ I discuss the importance of the catamite in the *Gorgias* in chapters 1 and 2.

⁷² See Bradshaw (2005) and Monson (2000) for accounts of the ways in which excessive desire was also linked with female desire and female desire was in turn linked to tyranny.

tastical desire for strict and impermeable boundaries between the self and the other, and it also exemplifies the kind of flattering shame that led the Athenians to see Socrates as an “enemy” to their polity worthy of being sentenced not just to a beating, but to death. Socrates’ refusal to flatter the imperialistic Athenians’ problematic self-image of omnipotence and freedom from all restraints thus resulted in his own stigmatization as an enemy of the polis.

Ironically enough, Callicles’ initial profession to be free of the kind of shame that attunes one to the conventional norms of one’s polity (482e–483e), as well as his later contradictory desire to be completely attuned to these conventional Athenian norms (484c–e), actually show that the “prude” and “pervert” are simply the contradictory desires to police rigid boundaries (the prude) or to abolish all boundaries (the pervert) which are inevitably produced out of the refusal to perform the more difficult negotiation between truly open boundaries that are always vulnerable and permeable by an other in the ongoing and reciprocal relationships of respectful shame. Respectful shame performs the dissolution of these rigid boundaries between the self and the other because it keeps open the possibility that both the self and the other might actually be transformed or contested in and through the very actions of shaming and being shamed that are characteristic of a more democratic and less tyrannical form of political intersubjectivity. In contrast to this, Callicles, the character who tells Socrates that one must flatter one’s regime if one wants to preserve oneself in a polity like Athens (521a), merely mimics the contradictory desires of his own imperialistic and tyrannical polity that broke the standing rules and conventions of warfare in its affairs with other Greek cities during the Peloponnesian War, even while it inculcated a rigid norm of active, male, and martial citizenship within the polity to support this imperialistic war.⁷³ For this very reason, Socrates’ criticisms of the tyrannical democrat, Callicles, in the *Gorgias* can offer us important lessons for dealing with the tyrannical impulses that continue to plague our own democratic polities as we face new and novel challenges in the world we share with others.

Until very recently, it might have been tempting for us to think that the tyrant is not someone we need to think much about because we have institutional checks and balances, a division of power, higher laws, and bills of rights that play many of the restraining roles that the ancients thought had to be checked by a rigorous education to virtue. Even if shame did play an important role in restraining the tyrannical and overweening desires of certain individuals for honor, esteem, money, or power, it is no longer necessary (according to such a view), because we have regulations and institutions in place that have

⁷³ As Frank (2007, 445) puts it, the Peloponnesian War “broke the standing rules of warfare that had been in effect since the eighth century BCE, causing major changes in the practice of war,” “destabilizing hitherto settled rules of engagement and categories of identity” and “giving free rein to *pleonexia* [overreaching] in all its registers, psychic, domestic, and imperial.”

corrected many of the oversights of the direct and impetuous democracies of the ancients.⁷⁴

As the first decade of the twenty-first century comes to a close, it is very unlikely that many people still believe that this is the case. Nonetheless, the first place that many people are looking to for answers to the troubling deregulation of our economies or the recent incursions on our political and civil rights is to more regulation or better protections of these rights. These are certainly going to be an important part of the solution to our current economic and political woes,⁷⁵ but it is also important to finally recognize that no external constraints, regulations, and checks on the tyrannical exercise of power can ever fully prevent future abuses of the power that we will always have to give to certain leaders or experts in our societies. They also cannot prevent the future tyrannical abuses that we as democratic citizens might well bring about because of our own desires for more money, bigger homes, more power, and more pleasure in our personal lives. There will always come a point when only the respectful shame of a political leader will prevent him from taking the tyrannical step of proroguing parliament to prevent a non-confidence vote by his democratic opponents, or turning away from the horrific abuses that are going on in various prisons set up around the world to fight terror, or forbidding newscasts of fallen soldiers who have died in the very war which was started to combat fantastical weapons of mass destruction. There will also always come a point when the desire to respectfully shame such leaders will be what gets democratic citizens onto the streets or the blogs to fight against these abuses of power because there is no current election they can vote in, or no new proposition that can overturn the one that has just denied them basic civil rights, or no media or news source that actually wants to play their antiwar message. Recognizing the tyrannical impulses in ourselves and our democratic leaders, a recognition that I will show in chapter 3 was actually elicited by Socrates' acts of respectful shaming, will always be a necessary part of self-limiting and responsible democratic citizenship, especially in the always-present absence of completely sufficient external regulations and laws.

Here Plato's characterization of the tyrant is helpful for diagnosing these tyrannical tendencies in our own psyches and polities. The figure of the "tyrant" is for Plato a personality type and a regime type developed by him in order to explain certain kinds of pathological psychosocial or psychopolitical

⁷⁴ As Euben, Wallach, and Ober (1994, 10) point out, "Debates over reform of the British Parliament and the French Revolution found conservatives criticizing the politics of their own day in terms of the excesses of democratic Athens and . . . *The Federalist Papers* did likewise to justify their redefinition of republicanism and the need for a distant federal government."

⁷⁵ In other words, respectful shame is not a replacement for better laws and bills of rights and I do not want to deny that these will always be necessary to curb the tyrannical impulses of certain people who prove incapable of engaging in "shameful self-assessment" (Locke, 2007), 156.

phenomena that he observed in the polities of his time, and especially within his own imperialistic, democratic Athens. As Nathan Tarcov argues, the ancients characterized the tyrannical regime in a number of different but interrelated ways: it involved any type of rule without legality, limitation, legitimacy, or consent.⁷⁶ However, Plato focused primarily on the tyrant as a soul-type that lingered to some degree in all of us.⁷⁷ One of the perplexing ideas that this book on Platonic notions of shame will illustrate is that there are no *completely* shameless people in this world. Rather the tyrant is the person who *desires* to be shameless, renames his shame simplicity, and tries to banish it from his soul, just as he tries to banish, stigmatize, or (in extreme cases) exterminate any person or other who threatens to make him feel shame.⁷⁸ Such a person develops a sense of flattering shame which links him to the fantastical other of the omnipotent individual who is completely free of all restraints on his immoderate desires.⁷⁹ As Plato illustrates in both the *Gorgias* and Book 8 of the *Republic*, this desire to be omnipotent and free of all restraint grows out of that which democracy itself defines as a good: freedom. In the case of the tyrannical democrat, dramatized in the *Gorgias* by the character of Callicles, this leads the person to the indiscriminate pursuit of any and all types of pleasure and the desire to be free of all restraints including those imposed by the laws and customs (*nomoi*) of his own democratic polity and by the shaming criticisms of his fellow citizens.⁸⁰ For Plato, the failure to moderate these desires leads in the end to its opposite: unfreedom or tyranny, because the people (who share these tyrannical desires for omnipotence) succumb to the flattery of demagogues who tell them that they can have these limitless desires satisfied, and who ostracize or kill any people who try to criticize them for these immoderate and lawless desires.⁸¹ The democratic citizen whose flattering sense of shame attunes him to the desires and pleasures of a wholly omnipotent other inevitably tries to avoid the painful but potentially beneficial recognitions so central to the occurrent experience of shame by stigmatizing and even killing

⁷⁶ Tarcov (2005), 132. Cf. Tormey (2005) and Kalyvas (2007).

⁷⁷ Beiner (2005); Blitz (2005); and Tarcov (2005).

⁷⁸ As Plato points out at *Rep.* 8.567b, the tyrant gradually does away with any friend or enemy who speaks frankly (*parrhēsia*) to him and rebukes him for his actions. At *Rep.* 9.571c, Plato argues “that in such a state [the tyrannical individual] dares to do everything as though it were released from, and rid of, all shame and prudence.”

⁷⁹ Quoting Euripides’ *Trojan Women*, Plato criticizes the poets in book 8 of the *Republic* for extolling “tyranny as a condition ‘equal to that of a god’” (*Rep.* 8.568b). It is this tyrannical desire to be a completely self-sufficient and omnipotent person or polity that Plato criticizes in both the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*.

⁸⁰ At *Gorg.* 484a, Callicles tells Socrates that the tyrannical individual tramples underfoot “our writings, spells, charms, and the laws that are all against nature.” Callicles is also the interlocutor who ends up being least capable of submitting to Socrates’ shaming elenchus and continually begs to be let out of the discussion (497b, 505c–d).

⁸¹ Tarcov (2005), 127–28.

the person who tries to shame him out of his problematic conflation of freedom with shamelessness.

It is this kind of tyrannical action that Plato accuses the Athenian democracy of committing against Socrates in response to his respectful shaming practices. But more importantly, it is this kind of tyrannical action that Plato wants readers of his dialogues to check within themselves so that they do not attempt to eliminate the other in a tyrannical and anti-democratic attempt to become fully autonomous.⁸² The elimination of this other in our psyche is intricately related to the anti-democratic elimination of any and all forms of opposition, which any moderate democracy must preserve as a check on the tyrannical impulses of the majority, especially when this majority does equate democratic freedom with a complete lack of restraint or regulation of its desires for money, glory, and power. Moreover, for Plato this kind of tyrannical impulse to trample on the laws and customs (*nomoi*) of one's polity arises precisely when a democratic polity is faced with new challenges and circumstances that always seem to exceed the standing rules and laws set in place for dealing with the world it shares with others. However, as Plato also shows in the *Gorgias*, the philosophic individual who does feel a certain shame (*aischunē*) before the very activity of philosophizing is precisely the individual who rebukes his polity and plays the role of the other by respectfully shaming his polity and refusing to let the tyrannical self or polity escape from the salutary restraint of shaming criticism.

⁸² See Allen (2000b, 91–93) for an excellent account of why the move on the part of Creon and Antigone in Sophocles' *Antigone* to become fully autonomous or self-legislating is characteristic of the tyrant and his desire to be the source of laws from which he himself is exempt, and why it is contrary to the kind of self-limiting authority that was central to the classical Athenian notion of democratic laws (*nomoi*) and the democratic constitution (*politeia*).