

Healthy Shame? An Interchange between Elspeth Probyn and Thomas Aquinas

Tom Ryan SM

ABSTRACT

In her recent book *Blush: Faces of Shame*, Elspeth Probyn offers a profile of shame drawing on the disciplines of psychology, sociology and cultural anthropology. She argues that shame is a) inherently value-oriented, b) necessary for human well-being and c) universal or 'essential' as a human phenomenon. This approach to shame has significant resonances with the theological anthropology and christian ethics of Thomas Aquinas. In exploring these authors, we can gain a clearer picture of the transformative function of shame in the personal, social, cultural and moral dimensions of human life.

We all blush, feel uncomfortable, and for a host of reasons. As part of life, shame 'raises questions of great and enduring interest concerning what it means to be human'. These words encapsulate Elspeth Probyn's concern in *Blush: Faces of Shame* (xviii).¹ This is an enlightening, enjoyable and even uplifting work, due to its accessible scholarship, personal engagement and, at times, the author's courageous transparency.

In accepting the author's invitation to come exploring with her, I found myself following her suggestion to discover 'sidetracks' of my own. Naturally, some of these were in personal memories. But I was often intrigued with the number of times Probyn's investigations appeared to resonate with the work of Thomas Aquinas on shame. In this article I would like to meander down that sidetrack and probe perspectives from the thirteenth and twenty first century.

My approach will use three key positions argued in *Blush* (ix-xviii) as markers to revisit Aquinas' discussion of shame in his *Summa Theologiae*. For Probyn shame a) consistently entails values, self-evaluation and the contours of living a good life; b) is an integral part of healthy human functioning in the personal and social realms; c)

can be seen as a universal, even ‘essential’, aspect of human life. I will compare and contrast Probyn and Aquinas in three stages: first, in relation to their respective contexts, aims and methodologies; second, in their understandings of the meaning and role of shame; thirdly, to conclude by some brief observations about shame in the contemporary context.

1. Contexts, Aims and Methodologies



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Naturally, Probyn and Aquinas have differing historical contexts. The backdrop to Probyn’s book is the world shaped by post-modernism, pluralism of cultures, multiple perspectives and especially that of feminist thought. Further, her methodology blends the empirical (quantitative research), the qualitative (personal

experience and narrative), with insights from sociology, psychological theory and cultural anthropology. Her conclusions and arguments have their grounding in researched data and informed commentary.

Alternatively, Aquinas’ setting is the relatively stable world of the thirteenth century and its classical world-view. While open to other cultural perspectives (e.g., Islamic), his primary aim is to elaborate a theological synthesis of the Christian faith within an ecclesial context. He uses the tools of philosophy, especially of metaphysics and philosophical psychology. His writing is, at times, informed by his personal experience, as in his insightful calibrations of love and friendship. But, overall, his work is characterized more by philosophical argument from reflection on common experience than by rigorous empirical method or the warmth of personal narrative.

Again, while Probyn acknowledges the role of other emotions and affective realities, her dominant focus is on shame's role in human life. Aquinas has a broader canvas. In the equivalent of two or three books, he develops a moral psychology of the emotions, the affective virtues and their role in moral action, virtue and the Christian life.

Between the two authors, there is an interesting point of convergence. Probyn presents two approaches to shame. As a psychological/ scientific reality, shame is an 'affect' that involves the workings of the brain and associated bodily reverberations. As a sociological/cultural reality, shame is an 'emotion' which has a cognitive component and is expressed socially. Interestingly, this approach has its parallel in Aquinas' recognition of the psychosomatic aspects of human behaviour. He uses 'passions' to describe movements of what he names the 'sensory appetite' – the bodily aspect of human affectivity that is 'affected' or 'moved' to be immediately responsive to sense experience, particularly in the area of relationships.. It entails a both a bodily alteration together with an evaluative cognition of an object – an attitude for or against an object perceived to be good or bad, hence love, desire, hate, fear etc.² For Aquinas, 'passion' is a blend of 'affect' and 'emotion' found in Probyn.

2. Meaning and Role of Shame

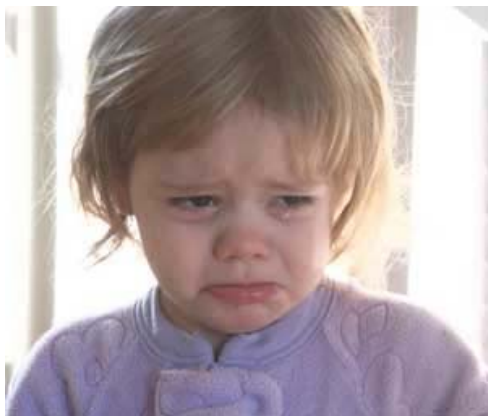


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Think of four moments when we find ourselves embarrassed. I walk into a room and think someone else is smiling at me. My interest is aroused. I move forward to talk to the person and realize that the smile was directed to someone just to my left. I had misread a cue. There was recognition, interest but it was misplaced. I feel awkward and self-conscious.

Or I walk through a half closed door. I find two people in a hushed conversation. I instinctively say 'sorry' and withdraw. Or it may be that the same couple are embracing or even engaged in sexually intimacy. My discomfort is more intense. I

quickly stammer a blushing apology then make a fast retreat from a similarly red-faced couple.

Thirdly, I see a public figure covering his face with a newspaper on TV. I am not sure if he is a convicted criminal leaving a courthouse or someone innocent hounded by paparazzi. There is something instinctive about hiding from public gaze. The esteem of others is important for us. How mortified we would be if some of our most secret failures were ever exposed.

Finally, I think back to childhood as does Probyn, to the time as an eight year old when she made another girl cry. She teased her because she did not have the same name as her mother. The author recognizes that she was a child. She could not have appreciated that the little girl's mother had remarried and taken another man's name. But, even years later, this does not stop Elspeth Probyn from blushing. As with the other examples above, we can readily identify with the sense of feeling small and undone, even from the flash of memory of a shameful moment from our childhood.

What do these scenarios have in common? It is my body telling me that *I am out of place*. I have not been invited to join the person who seems to smile in my direction. Or in entering another's physical space, two people feel invaded and I, an intruder. I readily appreciate the bite of another's public exposure even if they are innocent. Or I may have demeaned and humiliated someone. I feel diminished in my diminishing of the other person. I remember how, in that instance, I was not the person I would like to be. What is common in these examples is that I have been *affected* in a bodily and psychological way. I am *emotionally* moved in that my body instantly senses that a boundary has been transgressed within the realm of those social/cultural patterns of how to act or not to act. This brings us then to our first marker.

Shame consistently entails values, self-evaluation and the contours of living a good life.



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Common to the above examples is blushing as ‘the body calling out its interest’ (*Blush*, 28). This is not in a dualistic sense. It is about embodied personhood. Probyn argues that the various ‘faces of shame’ reveal our desire for *connection* even the possibility of love.³ When it appears to be offered but isn’t, I feel exposed and even rebuffed. The same is true when I show interest in another and it is rejected. Again, I know that ‘mortified’ feeling if others know something I have done, or worse, I am caught in the act. What others think of me and how I think of others, is important to each of us. Shame is the register of those connections and the interest they

involve. There is something very wrong with a person who feels no shame.⁴

Shame and its accompanying interest (in myself, in others) entail what is *important* to me- the things and people I hold dear. Unlike guilt which can be dealt with and often put aside, shame ‘lingers deep within the self’ (*Blush*, 2, 45-6). When I am ashamed it is because of my strong interest to be good person, says Probyn. What shames you may not shame me. Shame is an involuntary re-evaluation of myself and my actions (64). It is revelatory – disclosing our ‘values, hopes and aspirations, beyond the generalities of good manners and cultural norms’ (*Blush*, x). It may even imply a radical shift in attitude and in embedded patterns of responding and acting (‘rerouting the dynamics of knowing and ignorance’, 105). There is a bridge between personal life and cultural practices. Thus shame comes, in a sociological term from Pierre Bourdieu, within the domain of *habitus*, a non-discursive knowing or ‘embodied

history, internalized as second nature' in which the body is 'a repository for the social and cultural rules that, consciously or not, we take on' (51, xvi).

Through shame, according to Probyn, we are consistently reminded that we are embodied beings. Whether at the interpersonal, social or cultural level, shame points to boundaries, to habitual patterns of how we see values and rules and respond to them. It is particularly reflected across cultures in the experience of the body 'being out of place'. For instance, Probyn tells of a journey to Central Australia and a visit to Uluru. She feels caught by a sense of being an outsider, 'I don't belong here'. She was intruding on another's space, that of the indigenous inhabitants of the continent.

Again, this is evident in awareness of what is private, even sacred, for instance, in the sexual area. Probyn says that sexuality (sexual identity) is commonly held 'as an area ripe for shame'. But she notes that it is not necessarily a 'site of shame' or 'the same site of shame for everyone' (*Blush*, x). Later, she writes of the people of Mt Hagen who speak of big *pipil* – the shame accompanying sexual activity in public or incest (32). While Probyn does not investigate sexual activity in depth, we are reminded that there are boundaries and norms of acceptable behaviour concerning its exercise in every culture. Its accompanying sensitivities are trampled over by, for instance, pornographers who, as Graham Ward notes citing George Steiner, 'parade the vital privacies 'and whispered vulnerabilities of sexual experience.'⁵

Finally, Probyn rightly stresses that shame makes us reflect on who we are and what our actions might set in motion (8, 34). Its positive role as self-evaluative and self-transforming emerges *only if it is acknowledged*. As with any 'negative' emotion, there is the need for conscious engagement with shame if it is to contribute to human well-being. Shame is integral to self-assessment. To live a good life involves deliberation and freedom. This is particularly the case if shame is not to remain an expression of the super-ego or of *habitus* expressed as the cultural unconscious holding individuals in self-destructive behaviour. It must move to the realm of adult conscience and in collaboration with self-awareness and responsibility. This brings us to Aquinas and his view of shame in the setting of virtue and chosen self-direction in one's life.

For *Aquinas*, emotions are essential to the moral life and human integration. Shame, closely associated with the body (especially touch), is part of the affective virtue of temperance or self-care. Aquinas' approach, contra the Stoics, is that of the average sensual person for whom friendship with God entails enjoyment and harmony in mental, bodily, sexual, emotional and social existence. While his method differs from that of Probyn, there are central insights that are common.

In one article in the *Summa Theologiae* (Henceforth *ST*), Aquinas asks (in carefully worded language) whether there is any emotion that is always good or evil 'by its very nature' (*ST* 1.2.24.4).⁶ From an earlier discussion (24.1), he argues that their moral status is discerned as guided by reason and only in a *relational* context. In the language of traditional moral theology, an emotion, like any action, can only be evaluated morally in terms of its object, end and circumstances.

Aquinas replies that there are two such emotions. An emotion evil by its very nature is *envy*. It is part of our humanity to recognize what is good in others and to have a basic response of pity and compassion to their suffering. To take pleasure in another's plight or be sad at their gifts or success indicates defective self-esteem. One's moral character is flawed.

Alternatively, an emotion that is good of its very nature is *shame* (*verecundia* or modesty). Citing Aristotle's *Ethics*, Aquinas says that *verecundia* is a praiseworthy emotion. He notes elsewhere that it is a virtue in the broad sense (*ST* 2.2.144.1) since 'feelings of shame' foster a disposition to avoid what brings disgrace or opprobrium (*ST* 2.2.144.2). Modesty (*verecundia*) is a fear of what is base or dishonourable in one's behaviour (*timor turpis*), that one's moral excellence is somehow sullied and brings a sadness at its inevitability (Reid, 1965, 189). In the specific article here (24.4), the Blackfriars version translates *timor turpis* as 'fear of unchastity' (Vol 19, 1967, 43).⁷ This rendition is debatable. However, for our purposes we can consider that this specific form of shame (*verecundia*) is representative of its wider meanings which all tend to revolve around self-respect. We can examine Aquinas' approach first in general and then in specific terms.

Firstly, for Aquinas, shame (*verecundia*) as an emotion is good or evil of its very nature in a relational context, namely, as being ‘in tune’ (*conveniens*, fitting) or out of tune (*dissonans*, not fitting) with right reason or authentic humanity. It answers the question ‘how would the practically wise or virtuous person respond in this situation?’ It is an emotion that enhances human flourishing, personally and socially. While shame is negative (makes us feel uncomfortable), its positive function emerges from its object, namely the value it is directed towards upholding and the attitude produced.⁸ In contemporary terms, by disposing our sensitivity to what can distort our moral horizon, shame is a sentinel guarding our personal self-transcendence in terms of the search for meaning, truth and value.

Aquinas is arguing that certain emotions such as shame, when understood and described carefully, have a built-in significance. It is not that they are morally neutral (psychological facts) and ones attitude to them makes them morally good. It is that the emotion itself crystallizes an habitual disposition to make, with ease and consistency, a ‘felt evaluation’ of an intentional object in that it is perceived as ‘fitting’ (good) or ‘not fitting’ (evil). This is precisely the understanding of Martha Nussbaum, cited by Probyn (120).⁹ Aquinas also holds that emotions and their level of moderation differ from person to person. Without resorting to ‘right’ or ‘good’ emotions being responses of ‘perfectly programmed’ automatons (an understandable concern of Probyn’s, 10), there are some ‘objects’ and situations that are arguably ‘fitting’ (right) and appropriate in our personal and social life. For instance, to feel no shame or sensitivity to another’s pain is not a desirable or even admirable state. For both Aquinas and Probyn, then, shame reveals both values and the moral configuration of a person. It is an emotion that reverberates in both the intra-personal and inter-personal domains.

We return to the specific aspect noted earlier, namely to shame in relation to sexuality. Aquinas’ cryptic, even elliptical, treatment assumes the reader’s awareness of the broader context of his discussion. First, Aquinas says that shame has a range of different bodily expressions (*ST* 2.2.144; Gilby, 1968, 55). Second, Aquinas’ treatment of the gift of sexuality is earthy and basic, without giving unchastity ‘the dreary eminence it has for later moralists’ (Gilby, 1968, xxiii). Third, he acknowledges human ambivalence in this area as in a certain ‘powerlessness’ over our

emotions or sexual movements (even with the virtuous exercise of one's sexuality, see *ST* 2.2.151.4). Fourth, and most importantly, it is not by chance that Aquinas' language about shame, especially in relation to the sexual sphere, suggests a concern with self-respect or the sacredness of the person. The word *verecundia* (shame, modesty) has its verb root in *vereor* (respect, fear, reverence). This is foundational for Aquinas. For him, shame's object is not the body or one's sexuality but the 'out of place' (*dissonans*) invasion of an area of embodied personhood that warrants respect. Hence, only with some difficulty can we construe Aquinas' view of shame simply as fear of sexual sin (the misuse of one's sexuality). In its broader setting, shame is prompted by a sense of *respect for the self* and sensitivity to one's moral ideals and character.¹⁰ This is evident in Aquinas' later discussion: a) healthy self love is an essential component of Christian living (*ST* 2.2.25.4; b) we must have love for our body as a gift from God (*ST* 2.2.25.5); c) concern for one's own good is integral to virtue or moral self-transcendence (*ST* 2.2.26.6). It is not surprising that, for Aquinas, there is some truth in saying that the more virtuous a person is, the more they will be sensitive to shame (*ST* 2.2.144.4).

Probyn (briefly) and Aquinas (in his more elaborated treatment) mirror what is common to all cultures, namely, a sacred 'space' around a person as a bodily, and especially as a sexual being. Shame implies reverence for vulnerability and the intimate whispers 'spoken in the night' alluded to earlier.¹¹ Aquinas himself speaks of a 'certain delicacy' needed in sexual matters and of 'a respect which is the opposite of shamelessness. It sets up a certain reticence and sense of impropriety about exposure' (*ST* 2.2.154.9). The intersection of personal and social life entails respect, care for oneself and boundaries. Transgression evokes an instinctual movement of shame and accompanying self-evaluation. This brings us to the second marker.

Shame is integral to healthy human functioning both personal and social.

In highlighting the productive role of shame ('as an essential part of yourself' (*Blush*, x) that we do 'well' together with the intimate connection between shame and interest, Probyn is indebted to the work of American psychologist Silvan Tomkin. Shame, like

fear or anger, is an emotion whose role is to make us feel uncomfortable. There are some things we should be ashamed of, just as there are things about which we should be angry or afraid. Like any emotion, especially those that we call 'negative', shame can be constructive or destructive. Feeling shame can sustain personal well-being and guide our responses in our relationships and social life. In this context, used properly, it can be a positive instrument for healing and reconciliation, as in processes of restorative justice (as with Maori and indigenous peoples, *Blush*, 90-98).

On the other hand, we cannot overlook shame's capacity to undermine the sense of self. For already damaged individuals, it can be 'lethal' (92). At the social and cultural level, it can be an instrument of reproach, power, control and submission. Such uses, especially under the 'guise of moral rectitude' can both unpalatable, even to be feared (94). There is the individual and collective historical experience of shame involving subordination as a 'pervasive affective attunement to the social environment' (*Blush*, 85). Women and ethnic groups are closely acquainted with this. Through the influence of structures of power and of *habitus*, especially at the unconscious level, shame and patterns of humiliation can be re-activated consistently unless the pattern is broken and a new *habitus* established. This demands conscious reflection, understanding and decision.

For *Aquinas*, shame, as part of the virtue of temperance or self-care, helps us to grow in the likeness of God. It is reflected in sensitivity to whatever demeans oneself as a person. Its companion is *honestas*, namely a sense of moral excellence and of love for its beauty. Shame makes one more sensitive to what threatens virtue, personal goodness, and, most importantly, what fosters or undermines our responsiveness in relationships (*ST* 2.2 142.4 and 144.1). Like Probyn, shame for *Aquinas* reflects interest in being a good person. Within the Aristotelian tradition of the virtues, *Aquinas* highlights the personal sphere, namely patterns of habitual response and action that are *virtues* or good moral habits. Alternatively, Probyn's access to the social sciences enables her to analyze the dynamics of social and cultural influences on personal life, especially in their destructive forms.¹² In dealing with such distortions, she is addressing what, in theological terms, could be understood as structural or social sin.

Aquinas certainly sees shame in terms of disapproval or loss of face with others (*ST* 2.2.144.3) and, in that sense, is located socially and culturally. This also suggests the influence of a collectivist, kin or shame-based culture. Aquinas' treatment of shame together with honour reflects his Greek and Stoic sources in that they see disgrace (*opprobrium*) largely as a matter of social reputation. Shame is present in Aquinas as a form of social control even though it is not explored, as in Probyn, in sociological terms of *habitus*.

However, in situating sensitivity to shame firmly within the virtue of temperance, Aquinas implies that it is primarily personal and relational. Further, as Gilby notes, its close relationship to a sense of sin (guilt) makes it more 'personal and agonizing than the fear of earning a bad name' (1968, 55). For Aquinas, humility is a corrective to the respectability of the 'good and important citizen' as it is to pride or any sanguine view of human nature and social life (*ST* 2.2.161-2; Gilby, Vol. 44, 1967, xv & xvi). Shame, for all its importance, reminds us of the reverberations of the primordial human sin and humanity's dissonance and destructive tendencies (*ST* 2.2.163-5). For Probyn as a writer, shame 'enforces modesty' (4). While she is conscious of shame's damaging potential, especially in culturally embedded attitudes and practices that shape individuals and behaviour, its theological dimension is beyond the scope of her work. This brings us to our final guidepost.

Shame as a universal capacity

We have noted that Probyn taps different disciplines in her discussion of shame. Psychology helps to tell us 'something about how our bodies dictate what we feel' (*Blush*, xxx). Anthropology and sociology open doors on different ways of engaging social and cultural life. More specifically, Probyn draws on anthropological studies in Melanesia and correlates them with the psychological theory and studies of Tomkin. 'Blushing' as the body calling 'out its interest' (28) has reverberations for the self in the social world, namely '[What] shame does to bodies and what bodies do to the organization of the social' (27). The breadth and consistency of these studies together with Probyn's self-reflection and the narratives of others indicate that all humans are born with the capacity for shame.

Given the ubiquity of shame as a bodily, emotional and social reality, what is to be lost, asks Probyn, by engaging with those who approach shame using other methods and vocabulary (*Blush*, 25)? Studies across different disciplines indicate that there is ‘something terribly important in shame – it is human to feel and to do it well’ (34). All humans blush. If the gagging reflex is an instinctual function to save the species from poisoning itself why not shame? Its innateness in our bodies and its organizing impact on social relations suggests that we are, by nature, social beings (34). Of course, she acknowledges, we cannot disregard cultural differences or the risk of promoting a Western model of affect. ‘*Essentialist* or *ethnocentric* epithets hover in the air’ as she says (28, italics in original).

Probyn proposes that we need to be open to the evidence that shame may be ‘biologically innate’ and see where that leads us. This does not imply that we all blush for the same reasons, namely that we experience shame in the same way or that some are not more vulnerable to shame, whether culturally or temperamentally. Why should there be any necessary opposition between what is particular and what is universal? ‘Why should innate or universal characteristic always reduce difference?’ (29). ‘The notion of innate affects provides a way to understand both how certain phenomena are universal to humans and also how they differentiate in their causes and expressions at an individual level and within social groups’ (29). While Probyn recognizes that this form of essentialism may, in some circles, be considered heretical (xiii), she suggests that it should at least be taken seriously, if only to stretch us out of our ‘intellectual comfort zone.’

Aquinas would not consider such essentialism as outside his ‘comfort zone.’ It is consonant with his classical world view. Human nature, with its biological reality and its rationality, provide the two wings of human experience as revelatory, namely the gateway to discerning the law of human nature. Moral life is built on this foundation. For all that, the varieties of shame and its relationship to individual and temperamental differences remind us how human nature, as a source of morality, is subject to much variation. *Aquinas* acknowledges that, beyond the very general, it is difficult to arrive at moral norms that are certain and universal when faced with so much variability and contingency in human life.

There is a strong case for seeing the desire for happiness as a justified underpinning of a moral theory. Emotions, such as shame, disclose who we are by pointing to what affects us. The more we are moved by the ‘fitting’ (right) objects, the more we come to human flourishing. This entails an order and harmony centred on love - in oneself (self-love), in ones relationship with God, towards others and the world in friendship and compassion. Aquinas uses the language of fittingness, of ‘being in or out of tune’ (*consonans/dissonans*) to describe the workings of human rationality since, in its wider setting, the human being is born to be ‘attuned to everything in so far as it is created in the image and likeness of God’¹³ The ethical naturalism underlying this is teleological and hence progressive. While, as Kerr further notes, things are ‘destined to a certain fulfillment, with appointed ends, modes and opportunities’,¹⁴ this involves the ongoing and free search for truth and value. ‘Right’ response and action are guided by who we ought to become (the divine image) and are paradigmatically embodied in the wise person.

Aquinas’ classification of emotions is built on the assumption of a common humanity. Cultural variations and cross-cultural differences are not controlling considerations for Aquinas. For all that, if one compares Aquinas’ study of the emotions, it stands up well to contemporary studies and models. He is remarkably modern in his approach to negative emotions such as fear, anger and shame. Carlo Leget suggests that Aquinas’ formal taxonomy is ‘open to many cultural adaptations while reserving a primary place to the concept of love’.¹⁵

The universal character of shame points to change and development as an historical consideration. Aquinas blends many influences from the twelfth century and specifically concerning the rise of the individual or of the self, traced by authors such as Colin Morris and Caroline Walker Bynum.¹⁶ There was a growing awareness, as Morris says, of a clear distinction between ‘my being and that of other people’.¹⁷ For Aquinas, it is not the modern self in terms of autonomy, namely of the self over and against the other. For him, God’s image is realized in the wisdom and virtue of a loving self that is responsive in the world of relationships.

Further, Aquinas himself was shaped by his social environment as a Dominican friar.

Democratic processes were present at the beginnings of the Dominican culture and experience. Understandably, there are traces of this in his theological method and his anthropology. For instance, Aquinas holds that the human person flourishes as the image of God when intellect, will, emotions and body work collaboratively.

Our considerations prompt a question on the relation between collective, kin-based cultures and those that are more individually orientated. Could it be argued that Aquinas straddles two worlds? We see in his writing on shame something of the shame-based culture with its strong sense of honour and of identity that is driven by community expectations and roles. But we can also detect hints of the emerging modern self with a sense of personal responsibility and self-direction.¹⁸ Could Aquinas be seen as a mirror of an incipient differentiation of consciousness, of a shift in cultural self-transcendence in the representation of truth and the appreciation of value? The controlling benchmark of Aquinas's moral theory is not honour, shame or even autonomy. While they have a role, the moral life is ultimately guided and animated by love. It is especially embodied in mercy and responsiveness to the other. In fact, God's power is most evident in divine mercy and compassion (See *ST* 2.2. 30.4) and we are called to be grow in the image of that God.

A contemporary parallel is in Gaita's *Romulus, my Father*.¹⁹ Romulus and his friend Hora believed that nothing mattered more than to live decently. They did not understand that their moral responses were informed by a different conception of morality. Its centre was goodness rather than the moral heroic virtues such as nobility, honour or autonomy.²⁰ *It was goodness whose scope was compassionate and merciful.* In Romulus and Hora two worlds met. As Gaita says, it meant that his father was often conflicted by this which made him a troubled and interesting man.

From what we have seen, one could argue that Aquinas adumbrates the transition from shame as a form of social control to one where it reflects the sensitivity required in a healthy personal and social life. Aquinas seems to anticipate the democratic sensibility within which Probyn is situated. Friendship is his ruling paradigm – with God and others. He sees shame within relationships that are, at the least, as much equal and mutual as they are unequal and hierarchical. Yet precisely as relationships animated by love and the Spirit, they have an internal impulse to expand

in scope and depth. In others words, can we detect in Aquinas the beginnings of a shift from ‘saving face’ to ‘facing the other’?

3. Final Observations

Probyn and Aquinas would agree that ‘blushing is the body calling out its interest’. The body is a register of the whole person, not just spatially, psychologically, socially but also morally. There is a convergence between shame, values, and well-being both personal and social. It is summed up by Gerald Coleman: ‘Since our capacity to know what we are feeling and to experience those feelings is rooted in bodily experience, to be ambivalent about or alienated from our bodies is to be estranged from ourselves.’²¹ Our discussion of shame highlights the extent to which Probyn and Aquinas, with their similarities and differences, complement each other.

What emerges from this is the interplay between shame and culture? Probyn is able to overtake Aquinas in exploring how we can be out-of-place by stumbling into ‘other people’s history, culture and beliefs of which we are ignorant’ (*Blush*, xvi, 94-99). Again, while Aquinas is conscious of family shame for a criminal forbear (*ST* 1.2 81.1 ad 6) as an analogy for original sin, Probyn points to the socially transforming aspect of shame/regret together with their relation to collective responsibility and reconciliation concerning indigenous peoples that is elaborated elsewhere by Gaita.²² This topic is outside the scope of this article. Suffice it to ask, building on Girard, whether the form of shame associated with a concern for victims is ‘the secular face of Christian love’?²³ Shame is now a cultural response that suggests a movement in self-transcendence, a further differentiation of consciousness in which perception of truth is broadened and responsiveness to value is refined. Shame is now intertwined with what Anthony Kelly suggests is an unprecedented ‘stirring of conscience’ that is the transforming effect of one particular ‘risen’ victim, a sign that the ‘paschal mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection is in fact penetrating human history in a surprising way.’²⁴ We seem to have uncovered another ‘face’ to shame.

Primary Sources or Commentaries

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John Patrick Reid, OP, Intro., Notes, Trans. of *Summa Theologiae* (1a.2ae.qq.40-48), Vol. 21 (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1965).

¹ Elspeth Probyn, *Blush: Faces of Shame* (Sydney, NSW: University of New South Wales Press, 2005). For ease of reading, I will give references to primary sources of Probyn and Aquinas (and commentaries) within the text and to other works as endnotes.

² These same emotions, in Aquinas' view, can be found in the spiritual, non-bodily dimension of human existence ('intellective appetite' and movements of the will called *affectus*) and may or may not have reverberations at the bodily level.

³ Shame is 'a kind of primal reaction to the very possibility of love – either of oneself or of another' (*Blush*, 3).

⁴ 'You have no shame on your skin, you are crazy' [Probyn, 33 citing a comment of a local of Mt. Hagen, PNG].

⁵ Graham Ward quotes George Steiner's discussion of the increasing banality [divorce of language and reality] with respect to the new pornographers 'who parade the vital privacies of sexual experience, taking away the words that were spoken in the night to shout them from midmorning rooftops.' Graham Ward, 'In the daylight forever?: language and silence' in Oliver Davies and Denys Turner [Eds.], *Silence and the Word: Negative Theology and Incarnation* [Cambridge: CUP, 2002], 159. Ward quotes George Steiner, 'Night Words' in *Language and Silence* [London: Faber, 1967], 40.

⁶ The phrase he uses for 'of its very nature' is *ex sua specie* or *secundum speciem suam*. Earlier, in q. 24, art. 1, Aquinas argues that emotions, considered in themselves, i.e., intrinsically (*secundum se*), namely as natural phenomena or psychological facts, cannot be called morally good or evil.

⁷ Gilby points out the while *verecundia* is linked with *pudicitia* (*pudeor*, to feel ashamed), it usually has a wider reference than the latter's focus on sexual reticence or fear of sexual sin (1968, 55).

⁸ This is clarified in the same article when Aquinas says that those emotions are good which 'create a favourable attitude towards something truly good or an unfavourable one towards something really evil; and those emotions are evil which create an unfavourable attitude

towards something truly good, or a favourable one towards something really evil' (*ST* 1.2. 24.4 ad 2, see Vol. 19, 1967).

⁹ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals in Thought: The Intelligence of the Emotions* (Cambridge, CUP, 2001).

¹⁰ This is consistent with Aristotle's view that appropriate self-regard (*philautia*) is integral to human flourishing. Shame is entailed in self-care as moral sensitivity to actions that could reflect, or have reflected, badly on oneself (and a sense of remorse and even a desire to atone). See Justin Oakley, *Morality and the Emotions* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), 74.

¹¹ Footnote 5.

¹² See *Blush* in particular Chapter 3 'The Shamer and the Shamed' and Chapter 4 'Ancestral Shame.'

¹³ Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford, UK: Blackwells, 2002), 31.

¹⁴ Kerr, *After Aquinas*, 31.

¹⁵ Carlo Leget, 'Martha Nussbaum and Thomas Aquinas on the Emotions', *Theological Studies* 64.3, 2004, 558-580 at 571.

¹⁶ Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual* (London: SPCK, 1987 (1972)). Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual' in her *Jesus as Mother: Studies in Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley and Los Angeles CA: University of California Press, 1984).

¹⁷ Morris, *The Discovery*, 47.

¹⁸ See *ST* 1. 93. 9 and the Prologue to *ST* 1.2, where, in speaking of the image of God in the person, Aquinas cites its two aspects: a) from the western tradition - the capacity to know and love God and b) from the eastern tradition, citing John Damascene, knowing and loving that is self-directed and creative through human freedom. Respect for human judgment and the exercise of personal freedom is reflected, interestingly, in a parallel issue. Recent studies have found that judicial due process in Western society has its roots in Church practice and its defense by canon lawyers from the eleventh century. See Jean Porter, 'Due Process and the Rule of Law: A Moral /Theological Challenge' in James Keenan, SJ (Ed.), *Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church: The Plenary Papers from the First Cross-cultural Conference on Catholic Theological Ethics* (New York/London: Continuum, 2007), 147-151.

¹⁹ Raimond Gaita, *Romulus, My Father* (Melbourne, Vic.: Text Publishing, 1998).

²⁰ 'Most of my father's friends, for example, came from a culture in which heroic virtues such as honour were the focal concept under which other values were organized. They therefore had little sympathy for his compassionate responsiveness to his wife who had betrayed him and to her loves who had been, and remained, a friend. "It's bad enough," they said, "that your friend cuckolded you. But to pay his rent when he lives with your wife is shameful and dishonourable.'" Raymond Gaita, 'Tackling the Tough Questions', Higher Education Supplement, *The Australian*, July 4, 2007, 24-5 at 25.

²¹ Gerald D. Coleman, SS, *Human Sexuality: An all-embracing gift*, (New York: Alba House, 1992), xv.

²² Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity: Thinking about Love & Truth & Justice* (Melbourne, Vic.: Text Publishing, 1999).

²³ René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), 161.

²⁴ Anthony J. Kelly, C.Ss.R, 'The Resurrection and Moral Theology: Does It Make Any Difference?', *The Australian Ejournal of Theology*, Issue 10, Pentecost 2007, 5.

Author

Rev. Dr. Tom Ryan, formerly of the University of Notre Dame Australia, is a Marist Priest, Adjunct Lecturer at the Australian Catholic University and a Visiting Fellow at Griffith University, Brisbane.

Email: tryansm@bigpond.net.au