

Topics in Ancient Greek Philosophy: Shame and the Good Life

Proposed Syllabus, Marta Jimenez

Course Description

This course explores the place of shame in the good life in the thought of Plato and Aristotle.

- (1) We will start with an overview of one of the traditional referents with which these authors are in dialogue: the **Homeric world**.
- (2) Then, we will turn to the figure of **Socrates** as presented in the early and middle Platonic dialogues with the aim of extracting some conclusions about the role that shame plays in Socrates' life and in his philosophical mission. Socrates gives great importance to shame in his philosophical exchanges, and he seems to believe that the right kind of shame is a necessary condition for living well. We will analyze some of these dialogues and attend to why shame is a central factor in the Socratic method.
- (3) The next section of the course will be devoted to the role that shame plays in **Plato's mature political thought**.
- (4) The final section will be devoted to the role of shame in **Aristotle's Ethics**.

Outline of Readings and Topics

Plato: Complete Works, ed. by J.M. Cooper and D.S. Hutchinson, Hackett 1997.

Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics, trans., intr. & com. by S. Broadie & Ch. Rowe, OUP 2002.

There will be a course package with additional readings.

1. Antecedents: From 'Shame Culture' to 'Guilt Culture'? In this first week we will become familiar with the ancient Greek notion of shame and acquire some critical tools to avoid 'progressivist' readings of Ancient texts. To this aim, we will discuss Dodds' famous chapter on "shame culture" in *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951). Dodds used the expression "shame culture" to refer to the *Iliad's* heroic societies in which honor and social status were pivotal in the lives of individuals. We will explore the meaning and limits of this designation.

Readings: Dodds (1951), Ch. 2; Williams (1993), Ch. 4: 'Shame and Autonomy'

2. Heroic Shame (I): Hector and Diomedes in the *Illiad*. We will examine the examples of Hector and Diomedes as paradigmatic cases of shame-directed behavior. We will analyze the deliberative process by which they make decisions in the battlefield and inquire what those deliberations and decisions indicate about their value system.

Readings: *Iliad* (excerpts)

3. Heroic Shame (II): Socrates and Achilles in Plato's *Apology*. In *Apology* 28a^{ff}. Socrates compares his own attitude towards death with that of Achilles, and uses the example of the hero to illustrate his approach to the good life. We will analyze the *Apology* with the aim of gaining some clarity in relation to Socrates' double notion of shame.

Readings: *Apology*

4. Shame and Persuasion in the *Gorgias*. Plato's *Gorgias* is often used as a clear example of Socrates' usage of shame in his cross-examinations. We will pay especial attention to the meta-dialogical aspects of the work, since beyond the questions of rhetoric and the good life, there are numerous reflections on what shame reactions might mean in a Socratic conversation. Particular attention will be paid to the contrast between nature and convention.

Readings: *Gorgias*; Optional Readings: Moss (2005); Kahn (1983)

5. Eros and Shame in Plato's *Symposium*. We will explore the relationship between *eros* and shame, and discuss their connection through beauty. We will pay particular attention to Phaedrus' claim that an army of lovers would be invincible because soldiers would draw great strength from the presence of their beloved and to Alcibiades's last speech about Socrates, where he reveals the effect that his shame in front of Socrates has had on his life.

Readings: *Symposium*; Optional Readings: Nussbaum (2001)

6. Shame, Madness and Temperance (*sophrosynē*) in *Phaedrus*. In the *Myth of the Charioteer*, Plato associates shame with the docile horse, a lover of the noble. We will explore the connections between shame and temperance, and after an analysis of Socrates' praise of madness we will discuss the double aspects of shame and virtue that the *Phaedrus* reveals.

Readings: *Phaedrus*

7. The Shame from Zeus in Protagoras' *Great Myth*. In his myth about the origin of humans and political life, Protagoras presents shame and justice as the two main virtues that make society possible. He characterizes shame as the direct cause of friendship, and as a necessary element in democracy insofar as it opens room for harmonious dissidence. We will discuss Protagoras' view on the role of shame in the city and analyze Socrates' reaction to it.

Readings: *Protagoras*

8. Shame and Political Unity in *Republic*. In *Republic* V Plato culminates his project of political unity and offers an image of the city as a body, where everyone says "mine" and "not mine" about the same things. In this framework, shame (as respect for elders and tradition) is central to promote cohesion in the city.

Readings: *Republic* V; Optional Readings: Nussbaum (1981)

9. The Shamelessness of the Democratic Man in the *Republic*. We will explore the features of the democratic man's upbringing that lead him to be shameless and the political consequences of that lack of shame.

Readings: *Republic* IX

10. Shame and *Nemesis* as Non-Virtuous Means in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. In *NE* 2.5 Aristotle presents an apparently clean classification of the different "things in the soul" into emotions, capacities and dispositions. However, these clear lines blur when we try to apply them to particular cases. We will study Aristotle's characterization of the different elements or aspects of the soul and some of the reasons behind his classificatory project. We will also discuss the puzzling case of the "non-virtuous means" (*NE* 2.7).

Readings: *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.1-2.9; 4.9

11. Aristotle on Shame and Civic Courage. In *NE* 3.8 Aristotle associates shame with civic courage and argues that, although not a virtue, civic courage reveals that agents have the right attitude concerning nobility and shamefulness. We will discuss the notion of political virtue, and reflect on why this kind of virtue is linked to shame both in Plato and Aristotle.

Readings: *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.8

12. Aristotle on Shame as the Proto-Virtue of the Learner. We will study the role that Aristotle gives to shame in moral development. We will compare shame with *akrasia*, *enkrateia* and virtue with the aim of gaining a complete picture of the relationships between reason and desire in Aristotle.

Readings: *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.9, 10.9; Optional readings: Burnyeat (1981).

13. Final Considerations