Introductory Remarks

Our starting point

Shame interrupts us in an unwelcome way. It is hard to imagine any person who would like to feel the interrupting power of shame. Moreover, when we do feel shame, we search for ways to overcome it – in various responsive movements. This book is about shame from these perspectives. Hence, the title we have chosen.

Despite its often unwelcome occurrence, we regularly encounter the claim that shame serves some positive functions as well. But is that really the case? Can shame make a positive contribution to human life, or should we strive to make shame obsolete? This question forms the main background of the present book. To bring the short version of our conclusion to the fore: Shame is not so much a moral or non-moral phenomenon as it is an ambiguous and complex element in human life. It is part of an evolved composite cluster of interrelated emotional and cognitive abilities that makes possible the complexity of human interactions and relationships. As such, it may complicate the relationship that people have to their bodies, and in a religious context it is also often profoundly problematic. Accordingly, shame is not only one emotion among others; it is deeply rooted in the architecture of the self. Thus, shame plays an essential part in our self's complex becoming and being-in-the-world. We will attempt to elaborate this point in the following chapters. In so doing, we will focus on elements in human life that seem to closely condition intense experiences of shame: the body, religion, and morality. The reason for this limitation is apparent: these dimensions of human life have to do with basic elements in how we relate to ourselves and others, and they have a profound impact on self-experiences as well as on how we experience ourselves as beings in relation with others. Other dimensions

in human life are also connected to shame, and what we say about these three dimensions may have a bearing on and enhance understanding of how it functions in other dimensions.

Shame in the headlines

During much of 2016–17, shame appeared in the headlines of Norwegian newspapers in ways formerly unprecedented. This was connected to two phenomena: the first, and the one which received the most coverage, was a TV series about a group of Norwegian adolescents in their final years at high school. It depicted the struggles of ordinary young lives in easily recognizable ways. Therefore, it received much attention. The remarkable thing was that not only young people got "hooked" on this series – older viewers did as well. The name of the series, which ran for several seasons, is *Shame*.[1]

No one seems to have questioned the choice of name, even though shame is not explicitly thematized in the series. However, when we take a closer look, shame seems to function as a tacit organizing principle for the social interaction between the characters. Shame manifests itself when the characters define themselves as part of a group or outside of it, or when they conceal important life experiences such as abuse, homosexuality, or absent parents. That so many people were attracted to it and able to identify with the characters and the theme indicates that shame, although not often explicitly talked about, is nevertheless present and can be identified in peoples' lives. In the series, topics like body image, sexuality, belonging, moral dilemmas, and religion were negotiated in different ways.

Shame also reached the headlines of Norwegian newspapers in quite a different way. A small group of young women with an immigrant background declared themselves "the shameless Arabian daughters" in youth blogs and columns. They opposed the religiously and culturally defined uses of shame as an instrument of social control and discipline. It was both a feminist and a human rights-based protest directed against an idealized image of the "perfect Arabian girl," excluded and protected from the public sphere. One of the "shameless daughters", Nancy Herz, expressed her

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1   Julie Andem, „Skam," in *Skam* (Norway: NRK, 2015), Television.

anger and opposition to the use of shaming tactics: "If anyone ought to be ashamed, it is those who, due to their narrow-minded attitudes, condemn homosexuals, support murderers and legislation against blasphemy, and allow rotten imams to remain in their positions"[2] (*Aftenposten* 25/4/2016).

"The shameless Arabian daughters" received a great deal of attention and support, even in the Prime Minister's annual speech on New Years' Eve. It also initiated a public discussion on how shame and other social control phenomena were at play, especially in immigrant communities. Feminist contributors also revealed the gendered bias of shame as a mechanism of social control: far more women than men are subjected to shaming. They are told to behave properly to avoid tainting both themselves and their families with shame. Such attempts at discipline may involve an unhealthy mix of elements, such as body focus, religion, and presumed moral attitudes.

From a more distant perspective, the name the young women gave themselves, "the shameless Arabian daughters," was well chosen. It expresses a head-on challenge and confrontation with the old, culturally defined notion of what being shameless entails. Instead of a concept signifying lack of modesty, morality, and religious and cultural adherence, they presented shamelessness as a liberating concept, freeing it from its immoral and gendered use as an instrument of social control.[3]

As we write the final version of the Introduction, in the summer of 2020, the consequences of the #Metoo campaign have reached far into the corridors of power. In boardrooms and parliaments, holders of seats have toppled, and powerful men that earlier considered themselves to be invincible have found out otherwise. Many have discovered that shame can shift place. Victims of sexual abuse and sexual harassment experience that society has finally opened a social space for their narrative, and that the power of boardrooms is no longer influential enough to close down that space. They also experience that with the recognition of their stories, blame can finally be shifted – from the offended to the offender.

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2   Nancy Herz, "Vi er de skamløse, arabiske jentene – vår tid begynner nå," Column, *Aftenposten* (Oslo), 25th april 2016.

3   Thus, the "daughters" exemplify the need for diversity in the understanding of what shameless may mean in a moral and cultural context. This is a topic we will return to in Chapter 6, "Shame and Morality".

We claim that the above examples represent a noteworthy cultural and moral shift; they are examples of a Western and late-modern international rediscovery of shame. In both public and scholarly discussions, we see a new interdisciplinary and critical interest in the phenomenon. Surely, as a social phenomenon, shame has always been tacitly present in societal and relational mechanisms. But the critical discussion of shame has mainly belonged to the domain of psychotherapists and psychologists. The linguistic repertoire for the self-understanding of the *modern,* liberal and liberated human being contained few words and little space for shame, as it was abandoned as a cultural and societal remnant belonging to a pre-modern society without a sufficient level of liberty.

We argue that this lack of both linguistic repertoire and social space has, both scholarly and publicly, depleted the interpretative resources we have at hand for experiencing and understanding our human condition. The many faces of shame are present even when it is not identified, articulated, or understood. Therefore, we need to develop a nuanced interdisciplinary understanding of shame that captures both the ambiguity, the complexity, and the relevance of shame. The ambiguity and complexity not only suggest that it is sensitive to what goes on in different contexts and relations. It also suggests that different contexts may offer different resources for the identification, articulation, and handling of the manifested face of shame. This is the task we have before us and, like many other contemporary scholars, we find it important to establish a clearer and better understanding of how shame is a part of human reality.

A holistic interdisciplinary approach

The following is an interdisciplinary study where we attempt to draw on resources from different fields of research. But even though we will tangle with disciplines such as psychology, feminist studies, religious studies, and so on, we come to these scholarly fields from the viewpoint of philosophy/moral philosophy. Thus, a fundamental philosophical perspective has informed both our readings and the final analysis presented in this book. The foundation for our interdisciplinary approach is, therefore, to be identified in philosophy.

The success of natural science points to the importance of the physiological and biological factors in human life as important premises of both human existence and experience. We cannot ignore these factors when we discuss the phenomenon of shame. Shame is an embodied phenomenon. Nevertheless, when we ask what it takes to become human, we need to include other dimensions of experience than those studied by the natural sciences. In the following, we therefore speak about shame as expressed in different experiential dimensions. These dimensions are not separate "layers" of reality, but are only used to indicate how shame as a phenomenon is related to more than our inner, psychological structure or architecture. Shame has to do with our relational and social mode of being-in-the-world, and with culture and society, as much as being about society. Anthropologist Agustín Fuentes expresses it well when he points to how "humans need to be around each other for social, physiological and psychological reasons, and becoming (and being) human is a process that is simultaneously biological and cultural. We need to grow up around another to be fully human."[4] This means, for example, that we also need to see emotions as constituted by our relational mode of being-in-the-world.[5] Accordingly, we argue for *a holistic interpretation of human life,* and this is reflected in how we approach shame. We cannot ignore either psychological, social, or cultural dimensions of human experience of self and others. To reduce the study of human experience down to, for example, a reductionistic question of biology or psychology is especially unhelpful when it comes to an understanding of the complexities of shame.

Shame has many faces and many places in human experience

Human consciousness and our senses are not indiscriminately open, but are always intentionally directed and guided by a specific perspective. Moreover, the different dimensions of our experience cannot be fully separated

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4   Agustín Fuentes, *Race, Monogamy, and Other Lies They Told You: Busting Myths About Human Nature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 29.

5   In one way, this can be read as an argument for seeing shame as a social emotion. We will specify this later.

from each other. Our experience of the "inner world", such as our experience of love, is more often than not related directly to the experience of our family in the social-cultural dimension of experience. Furthermore, our experience of nature, for example our physical body, is contingent on how our body is experienced in the socio-cultural world. This interplay and interconnectedness contribute to how shame both manifests itself and functions in our complex world of experience. We may experience shame as an emotion, but at the same time, our cheeks may turn deep red in shame. The young child who has been subjected to demeaning sexual abuse may experience that both the terror and the shame he or she experiences are inscribed as automatic reactions deep in the limbic brain – as fight, flight or freeze responses, eye aversion, or in a body that automatically seeks to hide.

In recent philosophy, the complex interplay between the different dimensions of experience – the psychological, socio-cultural, and natural – is acknowledged as important for understanding human agency and interaction.[6] An analysis based on these dimensions makes it possible to differentiate between different factors in human experience and understand how they are expressed. As indicated, these dimensions cannot be separated from each other but are interdependent. They mutually condition our experience of ourselves and the world. This interdependency can be further elaborated. We cannot sufficiently access our inner dimension (of intentions, feelings, desires, and memories related to shame) without language (which belongs to the social and cultural dimension, i.e., symbolic world). Further, the symbolic world of language we use to articulate both shame and the conditions of shame cannot be explicated without also being related to the natural dimension and the body that harbors our desires and emotions.

Shame must be accessed: the role of signs and symbols

After birth, the infant immediately finds herself part of the social dimension and tries to make sense of it. The specific type of human sociality

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6   See, for example, Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Polity, 1984) and John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (London: Allen Lane, 1995).

would not be possible without interaction being enabled by signs, symbols, and language – features that are specific to the human species in the way they appear.[7] The infant must learn how to interpret the world through different signs. It is this capacity for semiotic engagement with the world, the capacity to understand and use signs and symbols, that makes social experience accessible.[8] However, that does not mean that the social dimension is only experienced through signs and symbols. As we grow older, it is through the development of the capacity for signs and symbols that shame can be cognitively accessed, articulated, and dealt with. Shame can be, for example, a bodily experience manifested in muscle tone, posture, and gaze. A body can also take on a semiotic function when shame is deliberately inscribed in both skin and flesh through self-mutilation or anorexia. If the semiotic resources are poor or diminished, our capacity for interaction with both ourselves and others may be impeded. To put it succinctly, our capacity to identify, articulate and understand shame depends on the semiotic resources available to us.

Obvious examples of this are Freud's version of psychoanalysis and Protestant theology's focus on guilt, which have both, to a large extent, rendered shame a neglected phenomenon. The cultural movements they represent reduced the resources for nuanced interpretations of the impact that shame has as an important phenomenon in human life. Philosopher Charles Taylor says that humans are self-interpreting animals.[9] Our abilities for such self-interpretation are dependent upon the resources we have at hand in the culture and the society in which we participate. This can explain the variations in the way shame is addressed and shaped in different cultural contexts. It is empirically evident both in history and

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7   Cf. the elaborations in Terrence William Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Brain*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).

8   It is possible to develop the understanding of this dimension in a very extensive manner, but there is no great point in doing that here. For an understanding of the social dimension of human life, see John R. Searle, *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) and *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995). For characteristic traits in human culture against the backdrop of evolutionary theory, cf. also J. Wentzel Van Huyssteen, *Alone in the World?: Human Uniqueness in science and Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2006), 222f.

9   Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 45–76.

in different social and cultural contexts in the present that the world of signs and symbols is dynamic, complicated and powerful and, accordingly, it makes shame a culturally manifold concept.[10] What is considered shameful in one social and cultural context may be considered entirely appropriate in another. The validity of the language used for shame is therefore dependent upon agreement on its use and its referents. We establish, negotiate, and renegotiate these normative conventions about what is shameful and what is not in our social world, and experience the impact of these conventions on social behavior. Thus, the interplay between signs and symbols on the one hand, and the users of these on the other hand, mirrors the shifting power-dynamics of society through changing conventions and what are conceived as acceptable practices. The "shameless Arabian daughters" and the #Metoo campaign we mentioned above are excellent examples of these shifting power dynamics, especially since the renegotiation of what and who is shameful, and what and who is shameless, is quickly made possible through social media. When power shifts, so too do signs and symbols; in this case, both the use of shame/shamelessness and what its referent is. Thus, shame does not exist without beings who are both embedded in these normative conventions, socialized into acting on them and, hopefully, able to renegotiate them towards greater liberty for their users.

Shame and our inner world

That some experiences are accessible to us only because of our capacities for language is perhaps most obvious in what we call the *inner* or psychological dimension of experience. Shame shapes and is itself shaped by elements such as emotion, memory, and self-perception. The inner dimension of experience develops and shifts through life, and the

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10 Cf. Daniel M. T. Fessler, "Shame in Two Cultures: Implications for Evolutionary Approaches," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 4, no. 2 (2004). See also Gershen Kaufman, *Shame: The Power of Caring* (Rochester: Schenkman Books, 1992), 220–25, and Emi Furukawa, June Tangney, and Fumiko Higashibara, "Cross-Cultural Continuities and Discontinuities in Shame, Guilt, and Pride: A Study of Children Residing in Japan, Korea and the USA," *Self and Identity* 11, no. 1 (2012); Richard A. Schweder, "Toward a Deep Cultural Psychology of Shame," *Social Research: An International Quarterly of Social Science* 70, no. 4 (2003).

changes have a lot to do with how we deal with our shame (or shame-lessness). Hence, shame is more than an affect when it comes to how it appears in human life. It is always framed and shaped within a life-story that is the result of our relational mode of being. As such, it is also tied to our intentions and our desires, be they acquired or innate. Therefore, we need to address shame from an angle that is broader than what we find in psychoanalytic theory or affect theory.[11] This is the reason why we draw on Heinz Kohut's self-psychology and Martha Nussbaum's philosophy in the coming chapters.

Our inner world is only *indirectly* accessible to us, for at least two rea-sons. First, we become aware of our shame by learning about ourselves through others. It is by communicating with others that we develop the ability or competence to find the appropriate words for what is going on.[12] Accordingly, access to this experience requires both a certain level of authenticity and self-consciousness (or self-awareness), and a type of self-knowledge that is developed through the use of everyday language and theoretical language as well. Thus, we cannot *appropriate* our inner world without learning about ourselves from others, that is, by using social and cultural resources that offer us an adequate language.[13] This

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11   Although we think that S. Tomkins points to important features in shame, his affect-theoretical approach to shame ignores the distinction between affect and emotion in a way that downplays some of the complexities that we want to highlight Chapter 3.

12   This indirectly accessible character has been a problem for the more direct, empirically oriented forms of psychology, which have partially rejected the necessity of speaking about the inner and instead focused on psychology as the study of human behavior (B.F. Skinner). This approach loses out on the points that we try to make, and we consider it rather restricted as the only way to speak about the inner life of humans – as that which matters most to us.

13   As we see it, this is one of the lasting insights of psychoanalysis. For further explanation on these points in a context of psychology and philosophy of religion, see Jan-Olav Henriksen, *Relating God and the Self: Dynamic Interplay* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), Chapter 3. Deacon points to how "language functions as a sort of shared code for translating certain essential attributes of memories and images between individuals who have entirely idiosyncratic experiences. This is possible because symbolic reference strips away any necessary link to the personal experiences and musings that ultimately support it. The dissociation allows individuals to supply their own indexical and iconic mnemonics in order to ground these tokens in new iconic and indexical representations during the process of interpretation […]. The "subjective distance" from what is represented confers a representational freedom to thought processes that is not afforded by the direct recall or imagining of experiences. This is crucial for the development of self-con-sciousness, and for the sort of detachment from immediate arousal and compulsion that allows self-control. Self-representation, in the context of representations of alternative pasts and fu-tures, could not be attained without a means for symbolic representation. It is this representation

fact suggests a point we will develop later, namely that *overcoming* shame to a large extent requires a competence acquired through social interaction and participation. Secondly, the articulation of our innermost emotions, our idiosyncratic history, and what we carry with us as individual personalities, are socially constructed. Our access to these elements depends on whether others have provided us with a language to understand ourselves, about what we think and feel, and what it may mean. But it is also dependent on our ability to access the inner world of others, which again, is dependent on their ability to articulate with authenticity *what* they experience.

The experiences of our inner world tell us something about the tight dynamic between our self-interpretation, our experiences, and how these experiences are made accessible to us through language and interaction with others. The content and shape of our lives and experiences are very much dependent on how we symbolically relate to the inner dimension, and to our "inner selves." Relating to ourselves through language is a way of opening up to a complex and interplaying experiential world where the experience of the body (as our "natural" mode) is central as well. Actually, as we shall see later on, the body's semiotic function as a carrier of signs and symbols seems to have attracted much focus in contemporary research.

Shame and embodiment

Because the embodied experience of being-in-the-world is usually recognized and articulated through the signs and symbols of language, the self-conscious phenomenon of shame normally presupposes language. However, as we mentioned above, that is not to say that language is always the only or the dominant way of expressing shame. Neurobiological research shows that children who are subjected to sexual abuse, for example, may find it difficult to both articulate and understand the terror they have experienced, but still, it may leave them with a sense of deep

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of self that is held accountable in social agreements, that becomes engaged in the experience of empathy, and that is the source for rational, reflective intentions." Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Brain*, 451.

and toxic shame. Due to processes deep in the structures of the limbic brain, such experiences can, for example, alter the way the brain perceives danger. When they lead to a shutdown of the thalamus, traumatic experiences can remain as horrific remnants of past experiences – as strong sensory images, such as sound and visual images – without being integrated into the autobiographical memory, thus evading both the time and space of a narrative.[14] Where ordinary memory is integrated, articulated, and interpreted through the axis of narrative time and space, traumatic memory can evade time and space. One of the language centers in the brain may also go into an off-line mode when children experience severe trauma.[15] Thus, wordless and narratively disintegrated fragments of past traumatic experiences can be left floating around in the subconscious, always threatening to break into consciousness through flashbacks of raw and isolated shards of painful and shameful experiences.[16] Reliving these sensations is not about reliving narratively ordered memories, but means actually reliving the experience.[17] Thus, the lack of a narrative, of a story ordering signs and symbols, makes it difficult to both cognitively access and articulate the shame these fragmented experiences can carry.

On the other hand, research also points to how experiences of shame seem to be necessary for the development of the infant's brain. In the infant's second year, such experiences contribute to the development of the orbitofrontal cortex, which is the region of the brain that is involved in social, emotional, motivational and self-regulatory processes. Thus, what we will later address as "optimal frustration" in the Chapter 3 has a biological or neurological counterpart that makes it possible for the infant to develop an adequate and sufficiently attuned mode of participating in the social world.[18]

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14   Bessel A. van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Viking, 2014), 70.

15   Ibid., 43f.

16   Terje Mesel, *Vilje Til Frihet. En Manns Fortelling Om Barndom Og Overgrep* (Kristiansand: Portal Forlag, 2017), 79f.

17   fMRI scans of flashback experiences show, for example, strong activity in Brodman's area 19, where sensory images are first registered in the brain. Thus, flashback experiences are not so much experiencing the past, as reliving what actually happened. Ibid., 80.

18   See Allan N. Schore, "Early Shame Experiences and Infant Brain Development," in Paul Gilbert and Bernice Andrews, *Shame: Interpersonal Behavior, Psychopathology, and Culture* (New York:

Even though shameful experiences may evade narrative articulation, at least to a certain extent, they may find other and coarser ways of expressing themselves. Thus, shame can manifest itself through the signs and symbols of the body. Unrecognized and unarticulated toxic shame can inscribe and express itself through the body and contribute to severe illness over time.[19]

The way forward

Our access to reality is dependent on our interpretative resources and competencies. So too with shame. Shame as a reality articulates itself in our physiology and biology, through our interactions in the social world, and in our psychological experiences of self (and others). How shame is experienced is also dependent on the conditions that exist in our biology, our social and cultural resources, and in our inner world. The human experience of shame is, therefore, not static, but dynamic, shaped in the interplay between different dimensions of experience. It is also very much a product of evolution, and of the evolvement of our symbolic capacities. These capacities are what allow us to express shame or contribute to shaming. The different dimensions of human experience we have described are all significant to the understanding of shame, and it would be a mistake to say that shame has its origin, significance or meaning in only one of them. The reality of shame articulates itself as a biophysical, socio-cultural and inner psychological experience. Accordingly, shame is not only multifaceted but potentially also deeply ambiguous. However, for the sake of the following analysis, we can unravel the complexity through a threefold "optic".

Oxford University Press, 1998); Allan N. Schore, *Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self: The Neurobiology of Emotional Development* (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994). Here referred to by Miryam Clough, *Shame, the Church and the Regulation of Female Sexuality* (Milton: Taylor and Francis, 2017), 46.

19   Anna Luise Kirkengen, *Inscribed Bodies: Health Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse* (Dordrecht; Boston: Kluwer Academic, 2001).

1. The first element is the **mechanisms of shame**. Shame has its roots deep in our evolutionary history, evolving into a complex phenomenon that presently adapts to the complexity of modern/postmodern societies. The mechanisms of shame answer to the question of what functions shame serves in the cultural complexity of modern/postmodern societies. The mechanisms of shame are the biologically and intra-psychological functions of shame as they are displayed in the current culture. One example may be that shame seems to serve a protective function, generating different strategies in different contexts.

2. Shame is always set in motion under a **set of complex defining conditions.** These are, for example, cultural and social conditions that define both the way shame is displayed and the coping strategies applied. For instance, shame is both displayed and coped with differently in a Chinese context compared to a Western European context. These sets of conditions are value-laden and can serve to impede or liberate both the display and the coping strategies of shame. One example here is how some religious or ideological norm-systems may serve as shame-inducing and oppressive social structures. "The shameless Arabian daughters" mentioned earlier are examples of both a rebellion against such oppressive conditions as well as a call for a more liberating religious norm-system where shame can be displayed, articulated and handled easier. Another example is the aforementioned #Metoo campaign, where the conditions for both articulating and coping with the shame of being a victim of sexual harassment have changed dramatically.

   However, material conditions also define the way the mechanisms of shame are displayed, articulated, and handled. Examples can be how material conditions, such as belonging to a vulnerable minority group, access to housing or food, and education, may be experienced as both shame-inducing and oppressive conditions that do not sufficiently allow for the articulation and handling of shame.

3. The third element deals with the **contextual consequences of shame**. The consequences of shame must be analyzed in view of both the identified mechanisms and conditions under which shame appears.

In this context, we aim at both a phenomenological description and analysis in order to trace the complexity of both mechanisms and conditions in a Western postmodern context.

Against the backdrop of these distinctions, we aim to proceed as follows in the next chapters: In Chapter 2, we present the main features in recent research on shame for the purpose of establishing a comprehensive approach that allows us to understand it as a complex phenomenon. Then, in Chapter 3, we show how this understanding relates to and is substantiated by important features in psychological research. Taken together, these two chapters lay the foundation for our analysis of how shame works within the three different realms that are important for many people in the Western world: shame related to body and embodiment, shame related to religion, and shame in the context of ethics and morality. These three contexts are, accordingly, dealt with in Part II of the book. We have chosen these areas because they appear to be obvious sites for the use of shame in contemporary culture. Moreover, we have also had first-hand experience of these areas in our own professional lives as professors of ethics and religion, and our concomitant dealings with students, as well as with other people who have crossed our paths. Hence, although the following is mainly based on research literature, our study also builds on perspectives that are rooted in our lives as relational human beings who have been exposed to the challenges and suffering of others. These meetings with real others have not been without impact on the topics on which we have chosen to focus.

By investigating the role that shame has in relation to the body, religion, and morality, we can substantiate further our main theses: a) That shame implies an interruption of human agency that depends on specific conditions and is actualized by mechanisms that go beyond the context in question, and b) that shame implies movements that display the relational character of human existence, as it entails an impetus towards moving away from others as well as to moving towards restitution of community. The analyses we make provide further nuances to the mechanisms and conditions for shame that we identify in the first part of the study. Against the backdrop of these analyses, we conclude that shame is not the

most helpful emotion to build and sustain mature agents in postmodern society.

It goes without saying that in a field like this, with so many research disciplines involved, it is not possible to comment in detail on all relevant material. Nevertheless, we hope that our fundamental approach to shame, and the way we demonstrate its relevance in the fields of embodiment, religion, and morality, may still contribute to a deeper understanding of shame and the conditions in which it operates in the contemporary world – despite the fact that it sometimes goes under the radar, or one lacks a sufficiently nuanced language for articulating how it works.