

I

“And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.” So ends Chapter 2 of Genesis. Chapter 3 narrates the Fall and its aftermath: “The eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.” Presumably, they made themselves aprons to cover their nakedness, because they were now ashamed.

Why were Adam and Eve ashamed? And why hadn't they been ashamed before? The text of Genesis 3 suggests that they became ashamed because they realized that they were naked. But what realization was that? They were not created literally blind, and so they weren't seeing their own skin for the first time. The realization that they were naked must have been the realization that they were unclothed, which would have required them to envision the possibility of clothing. Yet the mere idea of clothing would have had no effect on Adam and Eve unless they also saw why clothing was necessary. And when they saw the necessity of clothing, they were seeing—what, exactly? There was no preexisting culture to disapprove of nakedness or to enforce norms of dress. What Genesis suggests is that the necessity of clothing was not a cultural invention but a natural fact, evident to the first people whose eyes were sufficiently open.

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Or, rather, this fact was brought about by their eyes' being opened. For when we are told at the end of Chapter 2 that Adam and Eve were naked but not ashamed, we are not meant to suppose that they had something to be ashamed of but didn't see it, like people who don't know that their fly is open or their slip is showing. The reason why Adam and Eve were not ashamed of their nakedness at first is that they had no reason to be ashamed; and so they must not have needed clothing at that point. But in that case, the opening of their eyes must have produced the very fact that it enabled them to see: their eyes must have been opened in a way that simultaneously made clothing necessary and enabled them to see its necessity. What sort of eye-opening was that?

According to the story, their eyes were opened when they acquired a knowledge of good and evil. But this description doesn't answer our question. Although a knowledge of good and evil prompted them to remedy their nakedness—as evil, we suppose—we are still not meant to suppose that their nakedness had been evil antecedently. So the knowledge of good and evil didn't just reveal some evil in their nakedness; it must also have put that evil there. The question remains, what item of knowledge could have had that effect?

I am going to propose an account of shame that explains why eating from the tree of knowledge would have made Adam and Eve ashamed of their nakedness. Ultimately, this account will yield implications for current debates about the shamelessness of our culture. The way to recover our sense of shame is not, as some moralists propose, to recover our former intolerance for conditions previously thought to be shameful. I will propose an alternative prescription, derived from my diagnosis of how Adam and Eve acquired a sense of shame.

II

The story of Genesis makes little sense under the standard philosophical analysis of shame as an emotion of reflected self-assessment. According to this analysis, the subject of shame thinks less of himself at the thought of how he is seen by others.¹ The problem is to explain how the shame of

1. My characterization of the standard analysis is intended to be vague, so as to encompass the views of several philosophers, including John Deigh, "Shame and Self-Esteem: A Critique," *Ethics* 93 (1983): 225–45; Gabrielle Taylor, *Pride, Shame, and Guilt; Emotions of*

Adam and Eve could have involved a negative assessment of themselves.

In modern society, of course, public nakedness violates social norms and consequently elicits social censure, which can be echoed by self-censure on the part of its object. But assessments of this kind would have been unknown in the pre-social conditions of Eden. Adam and Eve's shame might still have reflected an observer's assessment if they thought of themselves as being judged by a natural rather than social ideal, but what could that ideal have been? It couldn't have been, for example, an ideal of attractiveness: Adam and Eve didn't think of themselves as being unattractive to one another. In any case, shame is more likely to arise in someone who feels all too attractive to an observer, such as the artist's model who blushes upon catching a glint of lust in his eye.²

This famous example might be taken to suggest that the knowledge acquired by Adam and Eve was knowledge of sex. What they suddenly came to see, according to this interpretation, were the sexual possibilities of their situation, which put lust in their eyes and then shame on their cheeks at the sight of the other's lust. Unlike the artist's model, however, Adam and Eve had no pretensions to a professional or purely aesthetic role from which they might have felt demoted by becoming sexual objects to one another. So the requisite assessment of the self remains elusive.

Self-Assessment (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), Chapter 3; Roger Scruton, *Sexual Desire: A Moral Philosophy of the Erotic* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), pp. 140–49; Simon Blackburn, *Ruling Passions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 17–19; and Richard Wollheim, *On the Emotions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), Chapter 3. Other authors include only some of these elements in their accounts of shame. For example, some analyze shame in terms of a negative self-assessment, without reference to any real or imagined observer (e.g., John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971], pp. 442–46; Michael Stocker and Elizabeth Hegeman, *Valuing Emotions* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], pp. 217–30; Jon Elster, *Strong Feelings: Emotion, Addiction, and Human Behavior* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999], p. 21). Others analyze shame as a response to the denigrating regard of others, without requiring a negative assessment of the self (e.g., Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993], Appendix 2).

2. This example is discussed by Gabrielle Taylor, *Pride, Shame, and Guilt*, pp. 60–61; and by Richard Wollheim, *On the Emotions*, pp. 159–63. Wollheim traces it to Max Scheler, "Über Scham und Schmagefühle," in *Schriften aus dem Nachlass* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1957), Vol.

III

This last interpretation also requires the implausible assumption that what the Creator sought to conceal from Adam and Eve, in forbidding them to eat from the tree, was the idea of using the genitals that He had given them. And God would hardly have created anything so absurd as human genitals if He intended them to have no more use than the human appendix. I don't deny that the knowledge initially withheld from Adam and Eve was sexual knowledge in some sense. But it must have been a special kind of sexual knowledge, involving more than the very idea of getting it on. I suggest that what they didn't think of until the Fall was the idea of not getting it on—though I admit that this suggestion will take some getting used to.

Here I am imagining that the knowledge gained from the tree was not physically extracted from the fruit itself; rather, it was knowledge gained in the act of eating the fruit. And this knowledge was gained in practice only after having been suggested in theory, by the serpent. What the serpent put into Eve's ear as a theory, which she and Adam went on to prove in practice, was the idea of disobedience: "You don't have to obey."

One might wonder how this piece of knowledge could have qualified as sexual. What was there for Adam and Eve to disobey when it came to sex? The Lord had already enjoined them to "[b]e fruitful and multiply," further explaining that "a man ... shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be one flesh." And since the Lord expected Adam and Eve to cleave to one another in the fleshly sense, he must have equipped them with the sexual instincts required to make the flesh, so to speak, cleavable. With everything urging them toward sex, they would hardly have associated sex with disobedience.

But that's just my point. Everything urged them toward sex, and so there was indeed something for them to disobey—namely, the divine and instinctual demand to indulge. The serpent's suggestion that Adam and Eve didn't have to obey the Lord implied, among other things, that they didn't have to obey His injunction to be fruitful, or the instincts with which He had reinforced that injunction. So the serpent's message of disobedience did convey a piece of sexual knowledge, after all.

I may sound as if I'm saying, paradoxically, that the sexual knowledge imparted by the serpent was the idea of chastity: "You don't have to obey" could just as well be phrased "Just Say No." But I would prefer to say that

the sexual knowledge imparted by the serpent amounted to the idea of privacy. What Adam and Eve hastened to cover up after the Fall would in some languages be called their “shameful” parts: their *pudenda* (Latin), *aidoia* (Greek), *Schamteile* (German), *parties honteuses* (French). But in English, those parts of the body are called private parts.³ The genitals became shameful, I suggest, when they became private. And the advent of privacy would have required, if not the idea of saying “no” to sex, then at least the idea of saying “not here” and “not now.” So the idea of disobeying their sexual instincts could well have been instrumental in the development of shame, via the development of privacy.

I am not going to argue that shame is always concerned with matters of privacy: matters of privacy are merely the primal locus of shame. Similarly, the genitals are the primal locus of privacy—which is why our creation myth traces the origin of shame to the nakedness of our first ancestors. After I interpret the myth, however, I will explain how privacy extends beyond the body, and how shame extends beyond matters of privacy, to express a broader and more fundamental concern. My analysis will thus proceed in stages, from the natural shamefulness of the genitals, to the shamefulness of matters that are private by choice or convention, to the shamefulness of matters that do not involve privacy at all.

IV

The philosopher who comes closest to understanding shame, in my view, is St. Augustine. According to Augustine, man’s insubordination to God was punished by a corresponding insubordination to man on the part of his own flesh, and this punishment is what made our sexual organs shameful:⁴

3. A recent report on the BBC World Service described a criminal defendant who appeared on the witness stand stark naked, “with nothing but a plastic clipboard to hide his shame.” Here the reporter replaced the English “private parts” with a translation of the Latin, French, or German expressions.

4. *The City of God*, Book XIV, chapter 15, transl. Marcus Dods (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 463: “[B]y the just retribution of the sovereign God whom we refused to be subject to and serve, our flesh, which was subjected to us, now torments us by insubordination.” I am grateful to George Mavrodes for directing me to these passages discussed below.

[T]hese members themselves, being moved and restrained not at our will, but by a certain independent autocracy, so to speak, are called “shameful.” Their condition was different before sin. For as it is written, “They were naked and were not ashamed”—not that their nakedness was unknown to them, but because nakedness was not yet shameful, because not yet did lust move those members without the will’s consent; not yet did the flesh by its disobedience testify against the disobedience of man. For they were not created blind, as the unenlightened vulgar fancy; for Adam saw the animals to whom he gave names, and of Eve we read, “The woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes.” Their eyes, therefore, were open, but were not open to this, that is to say, were not observant so as to recognise what was conferred upon them by the garment of grace, for they had no consciousness of their members warring against their will. But when they were stripped of this grace, that their disobedience might be punished by fit retribution, there began in the movement of their bodily members a shameless novelty which made nakedness indecent: it at once made them observant and made them ashamed.

This passage has provided many of the elements in my discussion thus far. For reasons that I’ll presently explain, however, I think that the passage puts these elements together backwards.

Augustine says that the genitals became pudenda when they produced the “shameless novelty” of moving against their owners’ will—in other words, when Adam lost the ability to control his erections, and Eve her secretions. The idea of their ever having possessed these abilities may seem odd, but it has a certain logic from Augustine’s point-of-view. Augustine thinks that Adam and Eve did not experience lust before the Fall.⁵ Yet he also thinks that the Lord’s injunction to be fruitful and multiply must be interpreted literally. The combination of these thoughts leaves Augustine with a sexual conundrum. How was copulation supposed to occur without lust, which serves nowadays to produce the necessary

5. *Ibid.*, Chapter 21, p. 468: “Far be it, then, from us to suppose that our first parents in Paradise felt that lust which caused them afterwards to blush and hide their nakedness, or that by its means they should have fulfilled the benediction of God, ‘Increase and multiply and replenish the earth;’ for it was after sin that lust began.”

anatomical preparations? Augustine's answer is this: "The man, then, would have sown the seed, and the woman received it, as need required, the generative organs being moved by the will, not excited by lust."⁶ And it was because of being governed by the will, according to Augustine, that the genitals of Adam and Eve were not initially shameful.⁷ They subsequently became shameful because they were removed from their owners' voluntary control, in punishment for original sin.

Let me introduce my disagreement with Augustine by pointing out how we differ on the relation between shame and punishment in Genesis. According to Augustine, bodily insubordination to the will, and the resulting shame, were inflicted on Adam and Eve as retribution for their disobedience. In Genesis, however, the Lord discovered the disobedience of Adam and Eve only by discovering that they were hiding from Him in shame; and so their shame must have preceded their punishment. Their punishment consisted rather in being banished from the garden and condemned to a life of toil and sorrow.

What's more, Augustine does not attribute Adam and Eve's shame to the knowledge that they acquired from eating the forbidden fruit. He attributes their shame to their loss of voluntary control over their bodies, which was inflicted on them as punishment for their disobedience, which involved the tree of knowledge only incidentally, because that tree happened to be the one whose fruit was forbidden to them. Thus, eating from the tree of knowledge led to their shame indirectly, by angering God, who then hobbled their wills in a way that made their nakedness shameful. According to the text of Genesis, however, Adam and Eve were told by the serpent that eating from the tree of knowledge would open their eyes by itself, and it really did open their eyes, whereupon they were instantly ashamed. That this progression was antecedently predictable is implicit in the Lord's detective work: seeing their shame, He knew that they must have disobeyed. The text thus suggests that their shame was a predictable result of their eating from the tree of knowledge, not the result of any subsequent reengineering of their constitutions.

Note that the constitutional alteration to which Augustine attributes the shame of Adam and Eve could not have been brought about by the

6. *Ibid.*, Chapter 24, p. 472.

7. *Ibid.*, Chapter 19, p. 467: "[T]hese parts, I say, were not vicious in Paradise before sin, for they were never moved in opposition to a holy will towards any object from which it was necessary that they should be withheld by the restraining bridle of reason."

mere acquisition of knowledge. Having their eyes opened would not in itself have caused Adam and Eve to lose voluntary control that they previously possessed. But a slightly different alteration could indeed have been brought about by the acquisition of knowledge—and, in particular, by that knowledge of good and evil which Adam and Eve acquired in eating from the tree. For suppose, as I have already suggested, that this episode taught them about good and evil by teaching them about the possibility of disobeying God and their God-given instincts.⁸ In that case, they must previously have been unaware that disobeying God and Nature was a possibility, and so they must have been in no position to disobey. They would have slavishly done as God and their instincts demanded, because of being unaware that they might do otherwise. And if they slavishly obeyed these demands, without a thought of doing otherwise, then their free will would have been no more than a dormant capacity, which they wouldn't exercise until they discovered the possibility of alternatives on which to exercise it. That discovery, imparted by the serpent, would thus have activated the hitherto dormant human will, thereby making it fully effective for the first time since the Creation.

On this interpretation, the reason why Adam and Eve weren't ashamed of their nakedness at first is not that their anatomy was perfectly subordinate to the will but rather that they didn't have an effective will to which their anatomy could be insubordinate. In acquiring the idea of making choices contrary to the demands of their instincts, however, they would have gained, not only the effective capacity to make those choices, but also the realization that their bodies might obey their instincts instead, thus proving insubordinate to their newly activated will. Hence the knowledge that would have activated their will could also have opened their eyes to the possibility of that bodily recalcitrance which Augustine identifies as the occasion of their shame.

V

What remains to be explained is why the insubordination of the body to the will should be an occasion for shame. The explanation, I believe, is

8. Presumably, good and evil corresponded to the will's obedience and disobedience, respectively. But how could the good have consisted in obedience to instinct? The answer, I assume, is that human instincts were adapted to the conditions of Paradise in such a way that their promptings were unfailingly good.

that the structure of the will provides shame with its central concern, of which the central instance is a concern for privacy.

Privacy is made possible by the ability to choose in opposition to inclination. To a creature who does whatever its instincts demand, there is no space between impulse and action, and there is accordingly less space between inner and outer selves. Because a dog has relatively little control over its impulses, its impulses are legible in its behavior. Whatever itches, it scratches (or licks or nips or drags along the ground), and so its itches are always overt, always public.

By contrast, our capacity to resist desires enables us to choose which desires our behavior will express. And we tend to make these choices cumulatively and consistently over time.⁹ That is, we gradually compile a profile of the tastes, interests, and commitments on which we are willing to act, and we tend to enact that motivational profile while also resisting inclinations and impulses incompatible with it. This recension of our motivational natures becomes our outward face, insofar as it defines the shape of our behavior.

Putting an outward face on our behavior sounds like an essentially social enterprise, but I think that this enterprise is inherent in the structure of the individual will. Even Robinson Crusoe chose which of his desires to act on, and his need to understand and coordinate his activities required him to make choices by which he could consistently abide. He therefore lived in accordance with a persona that he composed, even though there was no audience for whom he composed it. Or, rather, he composed this persona for an audience consisting only of himself, insofar as it was designed to help him keep track and make sense of his solitary life. So even Robinson Crusoe had distinct overt and covert selves—the personality that he acted out, and a personality that differed from it by virtue of including all of the inclinations and impulses on which he chose not to act.

VI

In order to make sense and keep track of his life, Robinson Crusoe had to engage in a solitary form of self-presentation—displaying, if only him-

9. In this and the following paragraph, I draw on a conception of agency that I have developed elsewhere. See my *Practical Reflection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,

self, behavior that was predictable and intelligible as manifesting a stable and coherent set of motives. Self-presentation serves a similar function in the social realm, since others cannot engage you in social interaction unless they find your behavior predictable and intelligible. Insofar as you want to be eligible for social intercourse, you must offer a coherent public image.¹⁰

Thus, for example, you cannot converse with others unless your utterances can be interpreted as an attempt to convey a minimally consistent meaning. You can't cooperate with others, or elicit their cooperation, unless your movements can be interpreted as attempts to pursue minimally consistent goals. In sum, you can't interact socially unless you present others with an eligible target for interaction, by presenting noises and movements that can be interpreted as the coherent speech and action of a minimally rational agent.

Indeed, fully social interaction requires that your noises and movements be interpretable, not merely as coherent speech and action, but also as intended to be interpretable as such. Only when your utterances can be recognized as aiming to be recognized as meaningful do they count as fully successful contributions to conversation;¹¹ only when your movements are recognized as aiming to be recognized as helpful do they count as fully successful contributions to cooperation; and even a competition or a conflict is not full-blown until the parties are recognized by one another as trying to be recognized as opponents. Full-blown social inter-

1989), also available at <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~velleman/>); *The Possibility of Practical Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), esp. Chs. 1, 7, and 9; and "The Self as Narrator," to appear in *Decentering Autonomy*, ed. Joel Anderson and John Christman.

10. See Georg Simmel, "The Secret and the Secret Society," Part IV of *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, transl. Kurt H. Wolff (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1950), pp. 311–12:

All we communicate to another individual by means of words or perhaps in another fashion—even the most subjective, impulsive, intimate matters—is a selection from that psychological-real whole whose absolutely exact report (absolutely exact in terms of content and sequence) would drive everybody into the insane asylum—if a paradoxical expression is permissible. In a quantitative sense, it is not only fragments of our inner life which we alone reveal, even to our closest fellowmen. What is more, these fragments are not a representative selection, but one made from the standpoint of reason, value, and relation to the listener and his understanding. ... We simply cannot imagine any interaction or social relation or society which are *not* based on this teleologically determined non-knowledge of one another.

11. Here I am simply making the familiar Gricean point about the content of communicative intentions; in the remainder of the sentence, I extend the point to other modes of social interaction.

course thus requires each party to compose an overt persona for the purpose, not just of being interpretable, but of being interpretable as having been composed partly for that purpose.

Note, then, that self-presentation is not a dishonest activity, since your public image purports to be exactly what it is: the socially visible face of a being who is presenting it as a target for social interaction.¹² Even aspects of your image that aren't specifically meant to be recognized as such are not necessarily dishonest. There is nothing dishonest about choosing not to scratch wherever and whenever it itches. Although you don't make all of your itches overt, in the manner of a dog, you aren't falsely pretending to be less itchy than a dog; you aren't pretending, in other words, that the itches you scratch are the only ones you have. You know that the only possible audience for such a pretense would never be taken in by it, since other free agents are perfectly familiar with the possibility of choosing not to scratch an itch. And insofar as your persona is a positive bid for social interaction, you positively want it to be recognized as such. Not being recognized as a self-presenter would entail not being acknowledged as a potential partner in conversation, cooperation, or even competition and conflict.

You thus have a fundamental interest in being recognized as a self-presenting creature, an interest that is more fundamental, in fact, than your interest in presenting any particular public image. Not to be seen as honest or intelligent or attractive would be socially disadvantageous, but not to be seen as a self-presenting creature would be socially disqualifying: it would place you beyond the reach of social intercourse altogether. Threats to your standing as a self-presenting creature are thus a source of deep anxiety, and anxiety about the threatened loss of that standing is, in my view, what constitutes the emotion of shame. The realm of privacy is the central arena for shame, I think, because it is the central arena for threats to your standing as a social agent. As Thomas Nagel has put it, "Naked exposure itself, whether or not it arouses disapproval, is disqualifying."¹³

12. See Thomas Nagel, "Concealment and Exposure," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 27, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 3–30, p. 6: "The first and most obvious thing to note about many of the most important forms of reticence is that they are not dishonest, because the conventions that govern them are generally known."; "[O]ne has to keep a firm grip on the fact that the social self that others present to us is not the whole of their personality ... and that this is not a form of deception because it is meant to be understood by everyone" (p. 7).

13. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

VII

Because of your interest in being recognized as a social agent, failures of privacy can set off a sense of escalating exposure. When something private about you is showing, you have somehow failed to manage your public image, and so an inadequacy in your capacity for self-presentation is showing as well, potentially undermining your standing as a social agent. Stripped of some accustomed item of clothing, you may also feel stripped of your accustomed cloak of sociality, your standing as a competent self-presenter eligible to participate in conversation, cooperation, and other forms of interaction. This escalating exposure is implicit in Bernard Williams's description of shame when he says that "[t]he root of shame lies in exposure ... in being at a disadvantage: in ... a loss of power."¹⁴ Failures of privacy put you at a disadvantage by threatening the power inherent in your role as a participating member of the community, and the resulting anxiety constitutes the emotion of shame.

I say "failures of privacy," not "violations." When people forcibly violate your privacy, no doubt is cast on your capacity for self-presentation. But then, violations of privacy do not properly occasion shame. If you learn that someone has been peeping through your bedroom keyhole, you don't feel ashamed at the thought of what he might have seen; or, at least, you shouldn't feel ashamed: you should feel angry and defiant. Proper occasions for shame are your own failures to manage your privacy, as symbolized in childhood culture by open flies and showing slips. In the case of the bedroom keyhole, the one who should be ashamed is the peeping Tom, who lacks the self-possession to keep any of his curiosity covert.¹⁵ His naked curiosity is what should occasion shame, not your properly closeted nakedness.

The same goes for your intentional violations of your own privacy, which do not qualify as failures, either. Deliberately exposing yourself in public would not cause you to feel shame if it represented an unqualified success at publicizing your privates rather than a failure at concealing them. (That's why people don't usually feel ashamed of having posed for *Playboy* magazine.) Deliberate self-exposure occasions shame only when it entails some unintentional self-exposure as well—when you take off

14. Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, p. 220.

15. The example is Sartre's, *Being and Nothingness*, transl. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), pp. 261–62.

more than you meant to, or your taking it off exposes impulses that you didn't mean to expose. For only then do you feel vulnerable to the loss of your standing as a self-presenting person.

Although deliberate self-exposure doesn't necessarily occasion shame, there remains a sense in which public nakedness is naturally suited to occasion it and can therefore be called naturally shameful. What makes nakedness naturally shameful, I think, is the phenomenon adduced by St. Augustine—namely, the body's insubordination to the will. And I'm now in a position to explain why I agree with this much of Augustine's analysis.

VIII

Why does our culture tolerate frontal nudity in women more than in men? The politically correct explanation is that the culture is dominated by men and consequently tends to cast women as sex objects. An alternative explanation, however, is that male nudity is naturally more shameful.

Male nudity is more shameful because it is more explicit, not only in the sense that the male body is, as Mr. Rogers used to sing, fancy on the outside, but also in the sense that a man's outside is liable to reveal his feelings in a particularly explicit way, whether he likes it or not. The unwanted erection is a glaring failure of privacy. The naked man is unable to choose which of his impulses are to be public; and so he is only partly an embodied will and partly also the embodiment of untrammelled instincts. In such a condition, sustaining the role of a social agent becomes especially difficult.

Equally explicit, I think, is the curiosity expressed in looking at the naked male body. Viewing the naked female can easily be, or at least purport to be, an aesthetic exercise; whereas it's fairly difficult to look at the male organ without the thought of its sexual role, and hence without experiencing an undeniably sexual curiosity.

Thus, our double standard about nakedness may confirm St. Augustine's hypothesis that what's shameful about nakedness is the body's insubordination to the will.¹⁶ And my account of privacy may explain

16. Here is a piece ethnographic of evidence. In some cultures, men wear almost nothing other than penis sheaths, which have the effect of making every penis look erect. This mode of dress represents an alternative solution to the problem of keeping male arousal

this hypothesis by explaining why the insubordinate body threatens to put its owner in a socially untenable position, by undermining his standing as a self-presenting person. What my explanation implies is that the impulse to cover one's nakedness out of shame is not, in the first instance, the impulse to hide something whose exposure might occasion disapproval. It's rather the impulse to guard one's capacity for self-presentation and, with it, one's standing as a social agent.

This explanation makes sense of my earlier suggestion that the sexual knowledge imparted to Adam and Eve by the serpent was the idea of not indulging. Only after Adam and Eve recognized the possibility of saying "no"—or, at least, "not now"—to their sexual impulses did they attain a standing that could be undermined if their genitals proceeded to signal "yes" instead. Hence only after they recognized their freedom with regard to sex could they find their nakedness inherently shameful.

IX

The relation between shame and bodily insubordination is also illustrated by the physiological response to shame, which is blushing. A familiar feature of this response is that one blush can set off a cascade of ever deeper blushes. The reason is that the blush itself is insubordinate to the will: one's complexion foils any attempt to conceal one's impulse toward concealment, or to keep private one's inflamed sense of privacy. This response to failures of privacy is in itself a further failure of the same kind.¹⁷

Having blushed can therefore be an occasion for blushing again. Subsequent blushes don't express or reflect any disapproval of the previous

private, since it entails that an erect-looking penis is no longer a sign of arousal (just as wearing a yellow star in occupied Denmark was not a sign of being Jewish). Of course, the sight of penis sheaths can be alarming to outsiders if they belong to a culture that favors outright concealment over camouflage. Another piece of evidence, I think, is that the traditional focus for women's shame about their bodies is not the genitals as such but rather menstrual blood, which is unlike female sexual arousal, but like male arousal, in being visibly insubordinate to the will.

17. On this feature of blushing, and its relation to sexual arousal, see Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, pp. 63–68. Another aspect of the reflexive response to shame is a sudden sense of confusion and disorientation: one's head spins, one's ears ring, and the lights may seem to go dim. A way of describing this aspect of the shame-response would be to say that shame causes a loss of self-possession; but I would prefer to say that shame is the experience of self-possession already lost. The occasion for shame is a failure to compose oneself in the manner distinctive of persons, and this failure comes to be felt as a loss of composure.

ones: there's nothing wrong or bad about blushing. Subsequent blushes merely express the sense that the previous blushes have further compromised one's capacity for self-presentation.

Of course, the face often betrays many feelings, and the question therefore arises why a bare face isn't considered even more shameful than naked genitals. The answer is that the face is also the primary medium for deliberate self-presentation. The face is indeed shameful insofar as it defies the will and thereby foils self-presentation; but insofar as it is instrumental to self-presentation, the face is essential to the avoidance of shame—which may be why a shameful turn of events is described metaphorically as a loss of face.¹⁸ Some cultures use veils or fans to cover the face in situations conducive to shame. But face is to be saved only for the sake of being effectively displayed; and most cultures therefore favor facial disciplines other than concealment.

X

My account bears a complex relation to the standard account of shame as an emotion of reflected self-assessment.¹⁹ Mine might be assimilated to the standard account as an instance thereof, since I say that to feel shame is to feel vulnerable to a particular negative assessment, as less than a self-presenting person. But this assimilation of the two accounts would obscure an important difference. In my account, the essential content of shame has no place for an assessment of the self in terms of ethics, honor, etiquette, or other specific dimensions of personal excellence. Of course, one can be ashamed of being greedy, cowardly, rude, ugly, and so on. But these specific value judgments cannot play the role of the

18. Also relevant here are various terms for shamelessness, such as 'barefaced', 'cheek', and 'effrontery'. The shameless person holds up his or her face in circumstances where self-presentation has been discredited and should therefore be withdrawn. (See also notes 25 and 27, below.)

19. Of the existing accounts of shame, Sartre's is the one with which I most agree. For Sartre, the thought involved in shame is that "I *am* as the Other sees me." And this thought is in fact the recognition that I am an *object*: "I am put in the position of passing judgment on myself as on an object, for it is as an object that I appear to the Other" (*Being and Nothingness*, p. 222). Hence the reflected self-assessment in Sartre's analysis of shame is an assessment of the self as less than a freely self-defining person: thus far, I agree. As I understand Sartre, however, he also thinks that this assessment includes the attribution of a specific flaw or failing, such as vulgarity, which is attributed to the self as to an object; and here I disagree, for reasons explained below.

self-assessment that is involved in the very content shame, according to my account. These judgments stand outside the content of the shame that may be associated with them; and so shame can also occur without them. Let me explain, then, how specific value judgments acquire their contingent association with shame.

These judgments are associated with shame because they often serve as grounds for relegating aspects of ourselves to the private realm. This connection has already made a brief appearance, in my description of the peeping Tom, who may feel shame at having exposed his sexual curiosity. Many of our moral failings consist in impulsive or compulsive behavior in which we fail to keep some untoward impulse to ourselves. To acknowledge such behavior is to realize that some untoward impulse is showing, such as our greed or our cowardice, and this realization can induce the anxiety that amounts to shame, in my view. If our reason for wanting to keep these impulses private is that we perceive or imagine disapproval of them, then our shame at their exposure will also be associated with a reflected assessment of the sort posited by the standard account. But shame would not be associated with that assessment in the absence of any sense of compromised self-presentation—for example, if we acted on the same impulses with abject resignation or brazen defiance.

Once we acquire the idea of privacy by learning that we can refuse to manifest some of our impulses, or manifest them only in solitude, we can think about excluding other, non-motivational facts from our self-presentation. We can think about omitting our ancestry or our income or our physical blemishes. Again, we wouldn't try to leave out these features of ourselves if we didn't think of them as somehow discreditable, and so our shame at their exposure is indeed associated with reflected disapproval. But if their exposure did not somehow compromise our efforts at self-presentation, they wouldn't cause us shame. If we humbly admitted to our discreditable ancestry, then our response to real or imagined disapproval of it would amount to no more than a feeling of frank inferiority.

The possibility of responding to denigrating regard with humility shows that the perception of facing such regard is not sufficient for shame. That perception doesn't lead to shame unless it leads to a sense of being compromised in our self-presentation. Humility preempts this sense of being compromised by deflating our pretensions and thereby rendering

our self-presentation consistent with the criticism that we face. Feeling humbled is thus an alternative to, and incompatible with, feeling humiliated or ashamed.

What isn't incompatible with shame, however, is pride—which goes to show that a perception of denigrating regard is not necessary for shame either. We keep some things private not because we fear disapproval of them but rather because we fear approval of a sort that we would experience as vulgar or cheap.²⁰ Even if we think that others would admire our poetry, for example, we may not like the idea of exposing it to their undiscerning admiration. And then if we mistakenly leave it in view, we may feel shame and pride together—a mixture of feelings that is not at all incongruous, because we needn't feel denigrated in order to feel undermined in our self-presentation.

XI

As the foregoing examples have illustrated, we can feel shame at many kinds of exposure other than nakedness, because our natural sense of privacy can be extended by choice to cover many things other than our bodies. Conversely, we can go naked without shame, if our natural sense of privacy has been modified by social norms.

Although a free will necessarily draws a line between the public and the private, individuals have considerable latitude in drawing that line, and society may therefore lay down norms for how to draw it. Because norms of privacy dictate that particular things ought to be concealed, they are implicitly norms of competence at self-presentation. The awareness of being seen to violate such norms induces the sense of vulnerability constitutive of shame—a sense of vulnerability, that is, to being discounted as a self-presenting social agent. Hence norms of privacy are implicitly norms of shame as well.

Such norms can modify or even nullify the natural shamefulness of things like nakedness or blushing.²¹ These phenomena are naturally

20. Williams mentions this possibility: “people can be ashamed of being admired by the wrong audience in the wrong way” (*Shame and Necessity*, p. 82).

21. Here is an example, which arose in discussion with members of the Philosophy Department at the University of Manitoba. It was pointed out that whereas men's locker rooms have communal showers, women's locker rooms have private showers, because women are less willing to be seen naked, even by other women. How can this difference be recon-

shameful only in the sense that they involve bodily insubordination, which is naturally suited to undermine self-presentation and thereby to cause the relevant sense of vulnerability. But which failures of self-presentation actually cause a subject to have or to feel this vulnerability can be modified by social norms. Just as a society may dictate privacy for things that aren't naturally shameful, so it may permit publicity for things that are. And if a society rules that particular bodily upheavals aren't incompatible with competent self-presentation, then they are unlikely to undermine the subject's status as a self-presenting person. So what naturally caused shame in Eden may not have caused shame at all in Sodom and Gomorrah.

XII

Moreover, failures of privacy are not the only occasion for shame, although I do believe that they are the central occasion. One's standing as a self-presenting agent can be threatened without the exposure of anything specific, or of anything that one had specifically hoped to keep private. The result may be that one feels shame about things that are quite public, or about nothing in particular at all.²²

Why does my sixteen-year-old son feel shame whenever his peers see him in the company of his parents? I don't think that he is ashamed specifically of us, in the sense of finding us especially discreditable as parents: we're no dorkier than the average mom and dad. The explana-

ciled with my claim that male nakedness is naturally more shameful? The answer may be that our greater toleration for images of female nudity has resulted in more specific and more demanding standards of beauty for the naked female body than for the male. Although female nakedness is naturally less shameful, then, women are more likely to regard their bodies as ugly and to keep them private for that reason—a reason that applies in the locker room no less than elsewhere. Men generally keep their bodies private on account of their natural shamefulness, which is based in sexuality, whose relevance to the locker room is vehemently denied by social fictions of sexual orientation.

22. The fact that one can feel shame without being ashamed of anything in particular entails that an analysis of the emotion cannot simultaneously be an analysis of the word and all of its cognates. Not every instance of shame can be described in terms of what the subject is ashamed of. By the same token, a subject need not feel shame in order to be described as ashamed of something, since it may be something that the subject tries and succeeds at keeping private, with the result that it never occasions the emotion of shame. The words 'shame' and 'ashamed' have many uses that are related only indirectly to the emotion. I have not offered an account of the words, only an account of the emotion itself, as a sense of being compromised in one's standing as a self-presenting social agent.

tion, I think, is that being seen in the company of his parents tends to undermine the self-presentation that he has worked so hard to establish among his peers. Within his teenage milieu, he has tried to present himself as an independent and autonomous individual, and being seen with his parents is a public reminder that he is still in many ways a dependent child. Yet I think it would be wrong to say that his continuing subordination to parents is something that he has tried to keep private; rather, he has tried to relegate this unavoidably public fact about him to the background of his public image, while promoting to the foreground various facts that are in tension with it—facts such as his having a driver's license and a telephone. His efforts at self-presentation include not only separating what is to be public about him from what is to be private, but also, within the public realm, separating what is to be salient and what is to be inconspicuous. His self-presentation can therefore be undermined by failures of obscurity as well as by failures of privacy.

A person can be shamed even by aspects of himself that he accepts as conspicuous, if they are so glaring as to eclipse his efforts at self-presentation. Someone who is obviously deformed may experience shame if he senses that he is perceived solely in terms of his deformity, to the exclusion of any self-definition on his part. His shame doesn't depend on a sense that his deformity is unattractive, since he might similarly be shamed by any glaring feature, from bright red hair to unusual height or an extraordinary figure. Even great beauty can occasion shame in situations where it is felt to drown out rather than amplify self-presentation.

A similar effect can befall victims of social stereotyping. The target of racist remarks is displayed, not just as "the nigger" or "the hymie," but as one who has thus been captured in a socially defined image that leaves no room for self-presentation. When he responds by feeling shame, he may accuse himself of racial self-hatred, on the assumption that what he feels is shame about his race. Yet he needn't be ashamed of his race in order to feel shame in response to racism; he need only feel the genuine vulnerability of being displayed as less than the master of his self-definition and therefore less than a socially qualified agent.²³

23. For a deeper discussion of this issue, with references to relevant literature, see Cheshire Calhoun, "An Apology for Moral Shame" (MS). Calhoun argues that shame experienced in the face of racism or sexism may be a perfectly legitimate response that does not betray self-hatred. But Calhoun reaches this conclusion from a rather different analysis of shame and its place in the practice of morality. Liz Anderson has directed me to an apt

As my account would predict, one defense against the shame of being stereotyped is to play the part, at the price of self-esteem. When someone paints blackface on his black face, he is trying to make the role his own, by incorporating the stereotype into a deliberate self-presentation; and he is thus trying to strike a compromise with racism, surrendering any positive image of his race in order to retain some shred of his role as a self-presenting person. Of course, observers may feel that performing in blackface is itself shameful, but their feeling rests on the belief that the performer is only deceiving himself about being left with any real scope for self-presentation.

A better defense against racist remarks is to muster a lively contempt for the speaker and hearers, since regarding others as beyond one's social pale is a way of excluding them from the notional audience required for the emotion of shame. If one doesn't care about interacting with particular people, then one will not feel anxiety about being disqualified in their eyes from presenting a target for interaction. Hence the victim of a racist remark can rise above any feelings of shame if he can disregard the present company as contemptible racists, so as not to feel vulnerable to their disregard. Unfortunately, this defense can be undermined by the presence of a sympathetic observer whose recognition the victim hopes to retain. A racist incident can therefore be rendered more shameful for the victim if a friend is present to see him stripped of his social agency.

No amount of racial pride can protect the target of racism from the shamefulness of his position. Pride would protect him from self-hatred, but it can't protect him from shame, which is anxiety about disqualification rather than disapprobation, an anxiety that cannot be allayed by a sense of personal excellence, and especially not by a sense of racial excellence, which tends to be formulated in further stereotypes. What the victim of shame needs to recover is, not his pride in being African-Ameri-

passage in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, where the narrator describes the shame he felt to find himself enjoying a yam: "What a group of people we were, I thought. Why, you could cause us the greatest humiliation simply by confronting us with something we liked. . . . This is all very wild and childish, I thought, but hell with being ashamed of what you liked. No more of that for me. I am what I am!" [*Invisible Man* (New York: New American Library, 1952), pp. 230–31]. The thought behind this shame is not that liking yams is wrong or bad; it is that liking yams is part of a stereotype that a black man must escape in order to be self-defining. Enjoying his yam, the narrator feels "I am as the Other sees me"—which is Sartre's formulation of the thought involved in shame. For further discussion of this formulation, see note 19, above.

can or Jewish, but his social power of self-definition, which he can hardly recover by allowing himself to be typed, even by his friends.²⁴

XIII

The shame induced by racism is a case of utterly inchoate shame, whose subject is successfully shamed without being ashamed of anything in particular. Inchoate shame typically results, as in this case, from deliberate acts of shaming.

Consider, for example, the shaming carried out by the Puritans by means of the pillory. The standard account of shame would imply that the pillory shamed a wrongdoer by exposing him to his neighbors' disapproval of his wrongdoing. But he would have been exposed to that disapproval anyway, as he went about his daily business. And surely the pillory was designed to inflict shame on him even if—indeed, especially if—his neighbors' disapproval left him unashamed.²⁵ My account of shame suggests how the pillory could have had such an effect. The physical constraints of the pillory—applied to the head and hands, which are the primary instruments of self-presentation—ensured that the wrong-

24. Of course, positive stereotypes offer roles that are easier to play with that sense of conviction which feels like authorship. Hence people often fail to experience the shame that they ought to feel in letting themselves be co-opted into positive stereotypes, including such current favorites as The Good Liberal or The Right-Thinking Multiculturalist. But these stereotypes are only a further form of self-compromise, which might be described as putting on whiteface.

25. Here I disagree with Nathaniel Hawthorne, who says: "There can be no outrage. . . more flagrant than to forbid the culprit to hide his face for shame; as it was the essence of this punishment to do." (*The Scarlet Letter* [New York: Bantam Books, 1986], p. 53). According to Hawthorne, the essence of the pillory was to prevent culprits from alleviating shame that they already felt—presumably, for their wrongdoing. I believe that the pillory was designed to inflict shame even on wrongdoers who were not ashamed of what they had done: it was a device for teaching shame to the shameless. To be sure, the shamefaced culprit was prevented by the pillory from alleviating his shame, but only by being denied the means of self-presentation. Hiding one's face in shame is a symbolic act, since it neither hides one from view nor spares one the awareness of being viewed. It is rather a symbolic admission of having failed to manage one's public self: one withdraws one's botched self-presentation, symbolized by the face, as if to set it right before returning it to public view. The pillory prevented this gesture of withdrawal, thereby preventing the culprit from symbolically re-establishing self-possession and, with it, his or her claim to socially recognized personhood. It was by preventing this restorative self-presentation that the pillory blocked the wrongdoer's recovery from shame. As I argue in the text, this was only one means of self-presentation that the pillory denied the wrongdoer.

doer was simultaneously displayed to the public and disabled from presenting himself, so that he was publicly stripped of his social status as a self-presenting person. Forcibly displaying him in this position had the effect of shaming him whether or not he was ashamed of what he had done.²⁶

This effect is illustrated by another practice, which survives today and may be the closest that any of us has come to the pillory. As children, many of us were forced to perform for household guests, and our shame on these occasions did not necessarily involve any negative assessment of our performance. Being exposed against our will, and hence displayed as less than self-presenting persons, was enough to make our position shameful. It never helped for our parents to say that we had nothing to be ashamed of, because we weren't ashamed of anything in particular: we were merely sensible of being shamed.²⁷

Try to imagine a culture in which heroes and paragons are displayed to the public in a pillory, the better to receive their neighbors' admira-

26. Another cultural practice of shaming is described by Jon Elster in *Strong Feelings*, pp. 100–101:

In nineteenth-century Corsica, contempt for the person who failed to abide by the norms of vengeance was expressed by the *rimbecco*, “a deliberate reminder of the unfulfilled revenge. It could take the form of a song, a remark, a gesture or a look, and be delivered by relatives, neighbors or strangers, men or women. It was a direct accusation of cowardice and dereliction:”

[...] “In Corsica, the man who has not avenged his father, an assassinated relative or a deceived daughter can no longer appear in public. Nobody speaks to him; he has to remain silent. If he raises his voice to emit an opinion, people will say to him: avenge yourself first, and then you can state your point of view.” The *rimbecco* can occur at any moment and under any guise. It does not even need to express itself in words: an ironical smile, a contemptuous turning away of the head, a certain condescending look — there are a thousand small insults which at all times of the day remind the unhappy victim of how much he has fallen in the esteem of his compatriots. [Quoted from S. Wilson, *Feuding, Conflict, and Banditry in Nineteenth-Century Corsica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 203]

Elster interprets this practice as inducing shame in its victim by expressing the community's contempt. The practice does express contempt, of course, but it also conveys the victim's loss of credentials as a self-presenter. His every attempt to present himself to others is met with a reminder that their knowledge of his situation has rendered them deaf and blind to anything else about him.

27. One might think that what is felt on these occasions is embarrassment rather than shame. Let me respond by explaining how I distinguish between the two. Note that ‘embarrassment’ is not, in the first instance, the name of an emotion at all. The primary meaning of the verb ‘to embarrass’ is “to impede or encumber,” and the noun ‘embarrassment’ refers either to the encumbrance or the state of being encumbered. (Hence the concept of “financial embarrassments,” which are not so called because they tend to make one blush.)

tion. I find such a culture impossible to imagine, because forcibly displaying someone cannot help but seem like a means of shaming him.²⁸ The only way to bear up under admiring attention is to receive it actively or at least voluntarily—preferably not by strutting and preening, of course, but at least by holding up a pleased or grateful or even a modest face. Those who are afraid of actively presenting themselves to admiring attention may experience the attention as pinning them down, and so they may experience praise itself as a kind of pillory.²⁹ That's why praise alone can make some people blush with shame, even though they have nothing to be ashamed of.

With these examples, I have completed the promised progression, from the natural shamefulfulness of the naked body, to the shamefulfulness of matters considered private by choice or convention, to the shamefulfulness of

Insofar as 'embarrassment' refers to a mental state, it refers to the state of being mentally encumbered or impeded—that is, baffled, confounded, or flustered. In this generic sense, embarrassment can be a component or concomitant of any disconcerting emotion, including shame. In recent times, 'embarrassment' has also come to denote a particular emotion distinct from shame. (This use of the term is little more than a hundred years old, according to the Oxford English Dictionary.) This emotion begins with the sense of being the focus of undue or unwelcome attention—typically, ridicule or derision—and it culminates in self-consciousness, the self-focused attention that hinders fluid speech and behavior (and that consequently counts as embarrassment in the generic sense). Being flustered in the face of laughter is the typical case of the emotion called embarrassment. This emotion differs from shame, first, because it involves self-consciousness rather than anxiety and, second, because it involves a sense of attracting unwelcome recognition rather than of losing social recognition altogether. Being ridiculed is an essentially social kind of treatment. Self-consciousness in the face of ridicule is therefore different from anxiety at the prospect of social disqualification. Whereas the subject of embarrassment feels that he has egg on his face, the subject of shame feels a loss of face—the difference being precisely that between presenting a target for ridicule and not presenting a target for social interaction at all. Returning to the example under discussion in the text, I grant that some children may suffer no more than embarrassment when forced to perform for guests, if they feel merely self-conscious about being the center of attention. But other children experience their position more profoundly, as a threat to their social selves, undermining their prospects of being taken seriously as persons.

28. Several readers have pointed out that our culture has a pillory of just this kind: the tabloids. But then, celebrities feel shame about being displayed in the tabloids, insofar as they are displayed in ways that undermine rather than enable self-presentation on their part.

29. Of course, these people may be afraid of actively receiving admiration because they would be ashamed of the vanity or exhibitionism that such a self-presentation would reveal. They consequently find themselves in a bind, with nowhere to turn without shame. Others may feel no more than embarrassment in the same circumstances: see note 27, above.

circumstances not involving privacy at all. In all of these cases, I have argued, shame is the anxious sense of being compromised in one's self-presentation in a way that threatens one's social recognition as a self-presenting person.

XIV

My account of shame has a present-day moral. We often hear that our culture has lost its sense of shame—an observation that I think is largely true. Some moralists take this observation as grounds for trying to re-scandalize various conditions that used to be considered shameful, such as out-of-wedlock birth or homosexuality. These moralists reason that nothing is shameful to us because nothing is an object of social disapproval, and hence that reviving disapproval is the only way to reawaken shame.

In my view, however, nothing is shameful to us because nothing is private: our culture has become too confessional and exhibitionistic.³⁰ The way to reawaken shame is to revive our sense of privacy, which needn't require disapproval at all. To say that people should keep their sexual practices to themselves is not to imply that there is anything bad or wrong about those practices. "What!" exclaims St. Augustine, "does not even conjugal intercourse, sanctioned as it is by law for the propagation of children, legitimate and honorable though it be, does it not seek retirement from every eye?"³¹

What's responsible for the exhibitionism of our culture, I think, is a mistake that I warned against earlier, about the dishonesty of self-presentation.³² People now think that not to express inclinations or impulses is in effect to claim that one doesn't have them, and that honesty therefore requires one to express whatever inclinations or impulses one has. What they forget is that the overt personas we compose are not interpreted as accurate representations of our inner lives. We have sex in private but—to quote again from St. Augustine—"Who does not know what passes between husband and wife that children may be born?"³³ No one

30. This point is the main theme of Nagel's "Concealment and Exposure."

31. *The City of God*, Chapter 18, p. 466.

32. See the quotations from Nagel in note 12, above.

33. *The City of God*, Chapter 18, p. 467. See again the quotations from Nagel in note 12, above.

believes that our public faces perfectly reflect our private selves, and so we shouldn't be tempted to pretend that they do, or to accuse ourselves of dishonesty when they don't.

XV

The moralists are wrong, in my view, not only about the means of reawakening shame, but also about its proper objects. Although sexual behavior calls for privacy, for example, the homosexual variety calls for no more privacy than the heterosexual and is therefore no more an occasion for shame.

That said, I should add that the moralist's view of homosexuality as inherently shameful strikes me as intelligible. The politically correct interpretation of this view is that it is a blatant prejudice if not in fact a mental illness diagnosable as a phobia. I do think that this view of homosexuality is a grievously harmful mistake, but I also think that it is an understandable mistake, given the nature of shame.

People who think that homosexuality is shameful tend to be people who don't know any homosexuals—or, more likely, don't realize that they do. For them, heterosexuality is very much the default condition, and homosexuality is therefore especially salient. The fact that someone is a homosexual, if it ever comes to their attention, tends to occupy their attention in connection with that person.³⁴ And this fact is, after all, a very private fact about the person, involving the anatomy of his bedmates and what passes between them in bed. If someone's sexual orientation is especially salient to people, then his very presence will cause them to think about his private life in ways that will occasion shame—vicarious shame on his behalf, for the imagined exposure of his sexuality, and shame on their own behalf, for the sexual curiosity aroused.

If they conclude that the homosexual ought to be ashamed, then the moralists (as I've called them) are behaving like outraged peeping Toms, mistaking their invasion of someone's privacy for a failure of privacy on his part. The mistake in this case is both less and more understandable: less, because the moralists are seeing the homosexual behavior only in

34. As Liz Anderson has pointed out to me, this effect is aggravated by the moralists' tendency to think that homosexual relationships are all about sex and not at all about love and friendship, so that the social appearance of homosexual partners seems as indecent as the appearance of a heterosexual man with his prostitute.

their imaginations; more, because they cannot control their imaginations, which makes them feel that they are being forced to see, as if they were the victims of an exhibitionist.

The remedy for all of this shame, of course, is to get used to the fact of the person's homosexual behavior, so that it can be put out of mind. Moralists are simply wrong in thinking that they should induce the homosexual to share the vicarious shame that they feel on his behalf. For the homosexual to flaunt his sexuality, however, can at most be a means of forcing this error into the open; it cannot be part of the ultimate resolution, since the moralists have got at least this much right, that sexuality requires a realm of privacy.

To say that the homosexual should not, in the end, be flaunting his sexuality is not at all to suggest a return to the closet, since privacy is not the same as secrecy or denial. Everyone knows that most adults have sex with their dates or domestic partners (among others), and no reasonable norm of privacy would rule out discussion or display of who is dating or living with whom. But allowing people to know something should not be confused with presenting it to their view. There's a difference between "out of the closet" and "in your face," and what makes the difference is privacy.

In short, Adam and Eve were right to avail themselves of fig leaves. Although the term "fig leaf" is now a term of derision, I think that fig leaves are nothing to be ashamed of. They manifest our sense of privacy, which is an expression of our personhood.