

Guilt, Embarrassment, and the Existence of Character Traits

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Introduction

Much has been written in recent years about the bearing of experimental results in social psychology on the existence of character traits. Gilbert Harman and John Doris are what we might call *global trait eliminativists* – on the basis of the psychological data, they reject the existence of all character traits which are cross-situationally consistent and iteratively stable over time. A number of advocates of Aristotelian virtue ethics, on the other hand, are *global trait realists* – they argue in various ways that the experimental results are compatible with the existence and at least modest possession of global character traits such as compassion and honesty.

In a number of recent papers, I have avoided this debate between eliminativists and Aristotelians, and instead focused on developing a novel positive story about character traits that is informed by the empirical literature.¹ Like others in this discussion, I have chosen to focus on helping behavior and acts of kindness and charity, and have outlined an account of character traits associated with helping which is a form of global trait realism. At the same time, what I call “global helpings traits” are rather different from how Aristotelians understand the virtue of compassion. Thus I see my view as an intermediate position between global trait eliminativism and the traditional Aristotelian form of global trait realism.

The first section of this paper briefly summarizes my positive view of global helping traits. The remaining sections then develop the view in two new directions by examining the

¹ See Miller 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2010.

relationship between guilt, embarrassment, and helping behavior. It turns out that guilt and embarrassment reliably and cross-situationally enhance helping behavior, but in such a way that is incompatible with the nature of compassion as traditionally understood.

1. Global Helping Traits²

It is customary to think that adult human beings have a number of character traits. Some people are said to be shy, others talkative. Some are generous, others stingy. Still others are compassionate, while plenty of people seem cruel. In the philosophical literature on character traits, there is a now familiar distinction between global and local traits. Here is a rough way of making the distinction:

Global character traits are character traits which are:

- (a) cross-situationally consistent, so that they causally influence the performance of trait-relevant behavior in a wide variety of trait-eliciting circumstances, and
- (b) iteratively stable, so that they causally influence the performance of trait-relevant behavior in repeated instances of the same trait-eliciting circumstances over time.

Local character traits are character traits which are iteratively stable but not cross-situationally consistent.³

Thus we normally think that someone who is honest would tell the truth in a wide variety of circumstances such as in the courtroom, at a party, and before his class, as well as in repeated instances of those same circumstances. On the other hand, if a person just has a local trait of honesty in the classroom, for instance, then we would expect him to tell the truth reliably to his students, without this necessarily carrying over to his truth-telling behavior in other circumstances.

As we said already, Harman and Doris are global trait eliminativists; they reject the existence of any global character traits on the basis of their reading of the social psychology

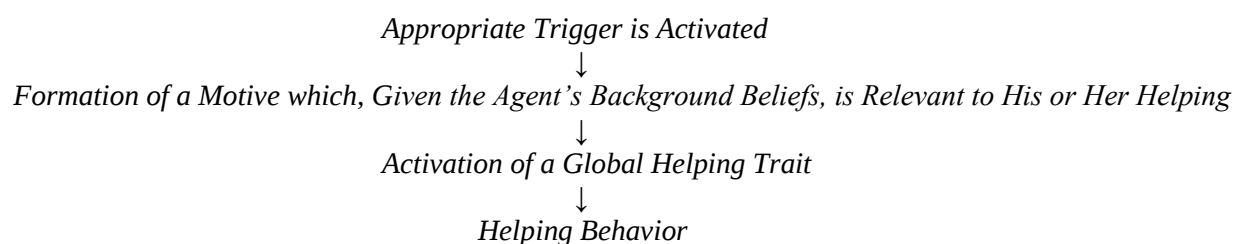
² This section of the paper draws in part on my 2010.

³ This characterization of the distinction follows Doris 2002: 22.

data.⁴ At the same time, Doris at least is willing to countenance the existence of local character traits.⁵ Traditional Aristotelians, on the other hand, are global trait realists, they accept the existence of traditional traits of character such as courage, greed, and honesty, and they take the cultivation of those global traits which are virtues to be one of the main goals of the ethical life.

Here I ignore the studies from social psychology which Harman and Doris use to motivate their view, as well as the defensive moves that Aristotelians have made in response. Rather, my only purpose in mentioning these two approaches is to use them to help situate my own position, which aims to be a non-Aristotelian version of a global realist view. To simplify the presentation, I also just focus on helping behavior, which for Aristotelians is connected to the virtue of compassion.

My view starts with global helping traits (GHTs), which are dispositions people can come to possess which pertain to their trying to help others thought to be in need and whose activity is sensitive to a number of different “triggers.” The presence of one of these triggers, other things being equal, causally influences whether the agent attempts to help when in situations where helping opportunities are thought to be available. Diagrammatically, the picture is as follows:



where the arrows signify causal influence. For example, the trigger of a moderately bad mood might lead to the formation of a motive to eliminate that mood. Given the agent’s background

⁴ See Harman 1999, 2000 and Doris 1998, 2002.

⁵ Doris 2002: 23, 25, 64.

belief that he or she is in a position to help certain people, this motive could activate the relevant GHT which in turn leads to the agent's trying to do so.

The past forty years of research in social psychology have shown that helping behavior is remarkably sensitive to the following psychological factors (among others):

Moderately Good Moods⁶
Moderately Bad Moods in Certain Conditions⁷
Empathy⁸

These triggers can lead to the formation of distinctive motives of their own, such as a motive to promote the well-being of another person in the case of empathy or a motive to maintain a good mood in the case of positive affect. Such motives in turn might be just as effective as the motive to relieve a bad mood in leading to helping behavior.

But what exactly is the contribution that GHTs are supposed to make to a story about helping behavior? I take GHTs to stand for certain clusters of mental states – beliefs, desires, intentions, and the like – which in many cases play a causal role in mediating the relationship between the presence of a trigger on the one hand, and elevated or reduced helping behavior on the other. Let me elaborate by returning to bad moods and helping. We said that such a mood can give rise to a motive to relieve it. An agent with a GHT will have a cluster of mental states related to helping and mood. These might include:

- (a) Beliefs about the relationship between helping others and various personal costs, such as lost time, money, alternative activities, and so on.
- (b) Beliefs about the relationship between helping others and various social reactions, such as being thanked, applauded, reciprocally helped in the future, and so on.
- (c) Beliefs that these personal costs can extend whereas the social reactions can alleviate the agent's bad mood.
- (d) A motive to help when doing so will contribute towards alleviating the bad mood, and a motive to not help when doing so will perpetuate or worsen the bad mood.

⁶ See Isen 1987, Carlson, Charlin, and Miller 1988, and Schaller and Cialdini 1990.

⁷ See Manucia et al. 1984, Batson et al. 1989, and Schaller and Cialdini 1990. My 2009b examines the relationship between both good and bad moods and helping.

⁸ See Batson 1987, 1991, 2002, and Batson et al. 2003. My 2009c examines the relationship between empathy and helping.

Thus the agent might have a motive to relieve his bad mood, and a belief that a helping opportunity is available. The first two sets of beliefs above might lead him to an implicit judgment about what social reactions and personal costs might ensue if he actually helped. And the third set of beliefs might lead him to connect the personal costs and social reactions to alleviating his bad mood. Finally, this might bring to bear a motive to help or to not help in connection to the bad mood. For example, if the helping task is very costly for the agent and outweighs the perceived benefits, this might lead to a motive to not help, simply because helping might be thought to not contribute to relieving the bad mood.

On my view, the default condition for most people with GHTs is that none of the appropriate triggers is typically present, and that frequently a GHT is not activated even in helping-relevant circumstances. This claim is in line with experiments in social psychology on helping behavior in which, for many helping tasks, only a small percentage of control subjects seems to attempt to help. However, when activated in one of the relevant ways, and other things being equal, GHTs should lead a person to try to help both in a wide variety of circumstances and in repeated instances of the same circumstance.⁹

As character traits which are alleged to be widely possessed, GHTs are meant to play a robust explanatory and predictive role. Concerning the latter, they allow us to formulate conditionals which can offer fairly precise, testable empirical predictions for helping behavior. For instance, for moderately good moods we might get the following:

- (a) If an adult possesses a GHT and is experiencing intermediate levels of increased positive affect, that person will probably engage in helping-relevant behavior in moderate helping-relevant circumstances.

⁹ At the same time, we would expect such continued helping behavior to be performed *provided that* the motive which led to the GHT's being triggered is still present at a suitable strength. To take the same example, the motive to relieve a bad mood can trigger a GHT which in turn motivates several instances of helping behavior. But if such behavior is actually successful at relieving the mood, then we would expect the helping behavior to dissipate.

The ‘moderate’ qualifier in the consequent is intended to exclude what are taken by the agent to be extremely demanding acts of assistance, which we can predict are not likely to be performed very frequently. Similarly for a trigger like empathy:

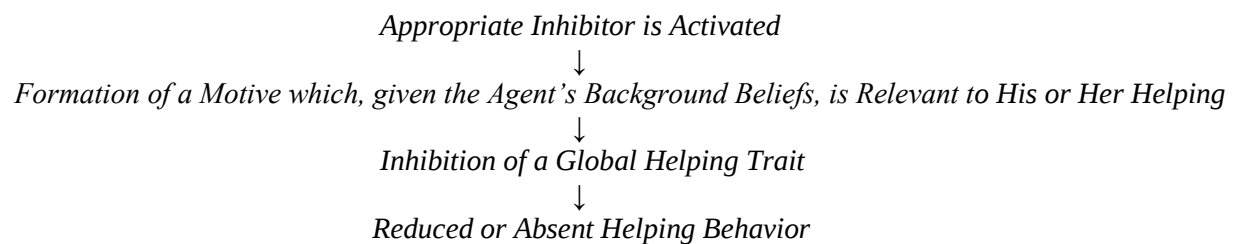
- (b) If an adult possesses a GHT and is experiencing intermediate levels of increased empathy, that person will probably engage in helping-relevant behavior in moderate helping-relevant circumstances.

However, if no inputs are present to trigger a GHT, then:

- (c) If an adult possesses a GHT which has not been triggered, that person will probably not engage in helping-relevant behavior in moderate helping-relevant circumstances.

Here it is assumed that various other relevant considerations are being held equal, i.e., that the person is not also experiencing depression or an intense emotion like anger or fear.

It is worth noting that GHTs might not only be triggered, but also *inhibited*. As we know from social psychology experiments, some control subjects will still perform a given helping task. But it turns out that in certain conditions, subjects will help at rates much *lower* than controls, which suggests that there is some factor present which is making it even more unlikely that they will help than was the case to begin with. Here the picture of GHTs looks like the following:



Examples of such inhibitors include the following (among others):

Anger.¹⁰
Moderately Bad Moods in Certain Conditions.¹¹
Fear of Being Blamed.
Perceived Situational Ambiguity.¹²

¹⁰ See Schaller and Cialdini 1990: 278.

¹¹ See Weyant 1978.

¹² For these last two, see Latané and Darley 1968, 1970.

As with triggers, I take the default case to be that many people with GHTs do not have any relevant inhibitors activated much of the time, but when they are activated, they can significantly reduce the probability of that person's helping, other things being equal.

In previous papers, I have discussed at length experimental work in social psychology on helping behavior and its relationship to (i) the triggers of moderately good moods, certain moderately bad moods, and empathy, as well as to (ii) the inhibitors of certain moderately bad moods, fear of being blamed, and perceived situational ambiguity.¹³ Here I extend my previous work by focusing on guilt, embarrassment, and helping. It turns out that numerous studies support the view that guilt and embarrassment serve as triggers for helping, while fear of guilt and fear of embarrassment serve as inhibitors.¹⁴ In the remainder of this paper, we shall thus attempt to further clarify, extend, and support the picture of global helping traits.

2. Characterizing Guilt and Embarrassment

In the psychology literature, it is customary to find guilt and embarrassment listed under the heading of self-conscious emotions. In contrast to more basic emotions such as anger, fear, and disgust, self-conscious emotions involve the self in their evaluations. More precisely, self-conscious emotions typically involve an implicit awareness of normative standards, of the self's individual responsibility for living up to those standards, and of the self's standing in relation to those standards. Success or failure in living up to these norms can elicit guilt, shame, pride, and/or embarrassment, among other self-conscious emotions.¹⁵

¹³ See my 2009b, 2009c, and 2010.

¹⁴ Given limitations of space, I omit discussion of fear of guilt and fear of embarrassment as inhibitors, although I do address the latter in the context of group effects and helping in my 2010.

¹⁵ For more, see Caprara et al. 2001, Tangney et al. 1996: 1264, 2007a, 2007b, Tracy and Robins 2007, Basil et al. 2008, Menesini and Camodeca 2008, Lewis 2008, and Hosser et al. 2008.

*(a) Guilt and Shame*¹⁶

Concerning the concept of guilt,¹⁷ we can start with the commonsense observation that typically one feels guilt when one (i) performs an action (or omission) that violates one or more of the agent's normative standards for behavior, (ii) those standards have some significant degree of importance to the agent, and (iii) the action is such that the agent takes him or herself to bear some personal responsibility for performing it in the first place.¹⁸ For instance I periodically feel guilt over not donating more money to famine relief because such an omission violates my moral norms about which I care a great deal, and is an omission for which I am thoroughly responsible.¹⁹

How do psychologists go further and try to distinguish guilt from the other self-conscious emotions, and specifically from shame? Unfortunately there is no consensus in the literature, but three approaches can be quickly dismissed:

- (a) One approach is to distinguish guilt on the basis of the types of situations which elicit it.

Unfortunately, studies have found that the very same situations involving lying, failing to

¹⁶ This subsection draws on my 2009a.

¹⁷ This paper is not concerned with legal guilt, where we say that a criminal is guilty of having broken the law. Rather, our focus is on the negative subjective experiences of guilt for actions we have performed that go against our normative standards. For different uses of the term 'guilt,' see Baumeister et al. 1994: 245.

¹⁸ For similar claims see, e.g., Kugler and Jones 1992: 318, Baumeister et al. 1994: 245, Lindsay-Hartz et al. 1995, Eisenberg 2000: 667, Sinnott-Armstrong 2005: 199-202, and Basil et al. 2006. These are not offered as anything like strict necessary conditions but rather as generalities. For instance, the phenomenon of collective guilt for the moral failures of others does not fall neatly under heading (iii) (see Baumeister 1994: 251-2, Estrada-Hollenbeck and Heatherton 1998: 216, and Tangney et al. 2007a: 358-9, 2007b: 28. Sinnott-Armstrong (2005: 202) proposes a nice revision to accommodate these cases.). Similarly, there is some evidence that guilt can arise just as strongly in response to accidental transgressions, which again is not in line with (iii) (Baumeister et al. 1994: 249). See Baumeister et al. 1994 for a thorough discussion of the complexities involved here.

Nor are these conditions proposed as jointly sufficient. Some psychologists, for instance, stress the role of punishment in guilt (Kugler and Jones 1992: 325, Caprara 2001, and Zemack-Rugar et al. 2007: 929; for criticism see Baumeister et al. 1994: 245). Others claim that regret over wrongdoing plays a central role (Kugler and Jones 1992: 325 and Eisenberg 2000: 667).

¹⁹ Here we are referring to a state of guilt, or an occurrent feeling of guilt which arises consequentially from the performance of a particular action, the formation of a certain intention, or the omission of a specific behavior. State guilt is to be distinguished from the proneness to guilt or trait guilt, a disposition to experience a state of guilt in a wide variety of guilt-eliciting circumstances specific to that agent's normative standards. For discussion compare Kugler and Jones 1992, Jones et al. 1995: 308, and Tangney et al. 2007a: 347, 2007b: 22.

help, stealing, and so forth can elicit guilt in some subjects and shame in others (and both guilt and shame in still others).²⁰

(b) Another approach is to claim that guilt is a more “private” emotion involving painful feelings of conscience, whereas shame is a more “public” emotion involving public disapproval. Again though, the empirical data points in the other direction. Subjects have been found to experience both guilt and shame in public contexts, and shame can be experienced in just as solitary and private a way as guilt.²¹

(c) A third approach claims that guilt is a strictly moral emotion, whereas shame arises in both moral and nonmoral contexts. However, just our ordinary experience alone suggests that people can feel guilty as a result of committing certain non-moral transgressions as well, such as violating certain rules of etiquette or breaking laws which are not clearly part of morality.²²

Setting aside these approaches then, we can more positively distinguish guilt from shame by following the leading approach in the literature today, namely the self-action view initially developed by Helen Block Lewis in her 1971 book *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis*.²³ The heart of this approach is that guilt involves a focus on a specific action or series of actions, whereas the object of shame is the self in general. Hence I feel guilty for having *done* something, such as lying to a friend, whereas I might be ashamed of *myself* for having lied to my friend. As Jennifer Manion writes, “one’s feeling of guilt concerns a rule or rule-like constraint that one has broken,

²⁰ For discussion, see Tangney 1998:4, Eisenberg 2000: 668, and Tangney et al. 2007a: 348, 2007b: 25.

²¹ See Tangney et al. 1996: 1257, 2007a: 348, 2007b: 25, Tangney 1998: 4, Sinnott-Armstrong 2005: 201, and Lewis 2008: 748.

²² See Tangney 1995: 116 and Tangney et al. 1996: 1262. For a contrary view, see Eisenberg 2000: 668 and Sinnott-Armstrong 2005: 201.

²³ For employment of this approach, see among many others Tangney et al. 1992, 1996, 2007a: 349, 2007b: 25-6, Baumeister et al. 1994: 245, Barrett 1995: 28, Tangney 1995, Quiles and Bybee 1997, Bybee and Quiles 1998: 274, Estrada-Hollenbeck and Heatherton 1998: 216, Tangney 1998: 5, Eisenberg 2000, Caprara 2001, Manion 2002, Sinnott-Armstrong 2005: 200, Amodio et al. 2007: 528, Lewis 2008: 748, Menesini and Camodeca 2008, and Hosser et al. 2008. For an opposing view, see Roberts 2003: 223.

the harm that has ensued and the people affected by the harmful act . . . the feeling of shame indicates a profound disappointment in the kind of person one thought one was” (2002: 76).

This basic conceptual point has a number of implications for the role that shame and guilt play in our psychological lives, only three of which will be briefly mentioned given limitations of space:

- (a) Shame often produces feelings of worthlessness as one “shrinks” from the world and tries to avoid public condemnation. A person’s self feels exposed, even if there is no actual public observing the perceived deficiency. Guilt typically does not produce these particular feelings and reactions.²⁴
- (b) Because of the connection to the self, shame can inspire feelings of helplessness and an inability to do anything about one’s condition, whereas a similar connection has not been found with guilt.²⁵
- (c) Closely related to the previous two consequences, shame tends to lead to avoidance of the shame-eliciting circumstances and more generally to social withdrawal, whereas guilt tends to lead to a focus on the action and correlates positively with attempts at reparation.^{26 27}

²⁴ Tangney et al. 1992: 469, 1996: 1257, 2007a: 349, 2007b: 26, Lindsay-Hartz et al. 1995: 278, 283, 295, Barrett 1995: 41, Tangney 1998: 5, Manion 2002: 76, 80, Amodio et al. 2007: 529, Menesini and Camodeca 2008: 184, Lewis 2008: 748, and Hosser et al. 2008: 139.

²⁵ Tangney 1998: 7, Bybee and Quiles 1998: 274, Caprara 2001: 221, Tangney et al. 2007a: 349, 353, Amodio et al. 2007: 528, and Hosser et al. 2008: 139.

²⁶ Barrett 1995: 41, Tangney 1995: 119-120, 1998: 7-8, Tangney et al. 1996: 1257, 2007a: 350, 2007b: 26, Estrada-Hollenbeck and Heatherton 1998: 216, Eisenberg 2000: 668, Sinnott-Armstrong 2005: 201, Menesini and Camodeca 2008: 184, Lewis 2008: 748, and Hosser et al. 2008: 139.

²⁷ Some additional implications include the following (drawn from my 2009a):

- (d) Both externalization of blame and feelings of anger have been positively correlated with trait shame and occurrent shame, with the externalized blame mediating the anger. Neither has been positively correlated with guilt (Tangney 1995: 120-129, 1998: 7, Lindsay-Hartz et al. 1995: 296, Eisenberg 2000: 669, Tangney et al. 2007a: 351-2, 2007b: 27, and Hosser et al. 2008: 139).
- (e) Similarly by focusing on the self shame impedes empathetic feelings, whereas guilt typically has the opposite effect (Baumeister et al. 1994: 254-5, Tangney 1995: 129-133, Lindsay-Hartz et al. 1995: 296, Eisenberg 2000: 668, Manion 2002: 81, and Tangney et al. 2007a: 350, 2007b: 26-7).

Hence we have seen that guilt and shame are both self-conscious or regulative emotions, and they are both negatively valenced. They are concerned with moral norms, although not exclusively with such norms. And they can arise privately or publically in response to many of the same eliciting situations. But despite these similarities, we also see that these two emotions are significantly different in a variety of respects.

(b) Embarrassment and Shame

Another self-conscious, negatively valenced emotion is embarrassment. Typically feelings of embarrassment arise when the following conditions obtain: (i) an agent conceives of a particular public image, persona, or self-presentation for her behavior in a given set of circumstances, (ii) the agent cares about maintaining that public image in those circumstances, (iii) when actually in those very circumstances, the agent's thoughts, behavior, character, or other potential objects of embarrassment go against her self-presentation in a way that the agent does not desire them to, and (iv) the agent thinks that this failure has been detected or imagines it

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- (f) Shame is typically considered to be the more painful of the two emotions, precisely because it is focused on the self rather than on just an instance of behavior (Tangney et al. 1992: 469, 2007a: 349, 2007b: 26, Tangney 1995: 117, 1998: 5, Eisenberg 2000: 667-8, Manion 2002: 77-78, Sinnott-Armstrong 2005: 201, and Lewis 2008: 748).
 - (g) Proneness to shame has been correlated with a number of psychological deficits, such as low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder. Indeed many psychologists consider shame to be maladaptive (see Tangney et al. 1992, 1995, 2007a, 2007b: 27. For cautionary notes about this claim, see Manion 2002 and Menesini and Camodeca 2008.). The case of guilt is more complex. On the one hand, ordinary occurrences of guilty feelings, which stem from a guilt predisposition, have been found to correlate with lower hostility, reduced depression, and other signs of mental health. On the other hand, a recurring condition of chronic guilt, which is detached from the immediate actions performed by the agent, has been found to correlate positively with symptoms of depression and psychopathology. This has led some psychologists to distinguish between two distinct kinds of guilt, chronic and predispositional, and in the remainder of this paper our concern will only be with the latter. For helpful discussion of these two kinds of guilt, see Estrada-Hollenbeck and Heatherton 1998: 224, Eisenberg 2000: 669-70, and especially Quiles and Bybee 1997, Bybee and Quiles 1998. And for guilt and mental health in general, see Tangney et al. 1992 and Tangney et al. 2007a: 351-354.
 - (h) As we will see in detail in the next section, guilt is positively correlated with subsequent prosocial behavior. In addition, it is worth noting that proneness to guilt is also related to decreases in the likelihood of problematic behaviors such as theft, drug abuse, unsafe sex, using risky needles, and inmates' post-release recidivism. Fewer such correlations have been found in the case of shame (Bybee and Quiles 1998: 270, Tangney et al. 2007a: 354-5, Hosser et al. 2008, and especially Stuewig and Tangney 2007. For cautionary notes about this claim, see Manion 2002 and Menesini and Camodeca 2008.).

being detected by others to whom she wants to maintain the public self-presentation, thereby fostering unwanted social evaluation.²⁸ To take an example, most people are embarrassed when they trip and fall in public because such behavior goes against the image of themselves that they want to project to others. And even if no one is actually around at the time, the mere likelihood of someone coming on the scene soon is often enough to foster feelings of embarrassment. On the other hand, tripping and falling on a deserted island might make a person annoyed or angry, but not embarrassed without an audience present.²⁹

Other kinds of circumstances which give rise to embarrassment also fit this picture.³⁰ For instance, a student who is being teased by a bully in front of his friends might become embarrassed because the bully is making him appear to his friends in a much worse way than he wants himself to appear publically. Or when a person forgets the name of a good friend when introducing her, he can easily become embarrassed because he is presenting an image to his friend and to the others present which does not reflect the public self-presentation he had aspired

²⁸ See also Edelmann 1987, 1990, Babcock and Sabini 1990, Szabados 1990, Harré 1990, Gonzales et al. 1990, Miller 1995, 1996, 2007, Sabini and Silver 1997: 11, and Purshouse 2001. As with guilt, these conditions are not proposed as strictly necessary or sufficient, but rather as an attempt to cover central cases of embarrassment. In stating them, I follow the leading approach in the psychology literature to conceptualizing embarrassment, namely the social evaluation model. For discussion of this approach and criticism of rival views, see Harré 1990, Miller 1995, Purshouse 2001, and especially Edelmann 1987 and Miller 1996: chapter seven.

One difficult kind of case for the above conditions involves embarrassment felt as a result of the behavior of others, such as a drunken friend who makes a fool of himself at a wedding. One way to handle such cases might be to broaden the role of public images to include not only the agent's own behavior, but also that of others in situations he is participating in where he attaches some importance to their behavior. Thus I might be embarrassed by the drunken person at the wedding, even if we have never met before, because of the way in which he is violating the public image or self-presentation I wanted *all of us* to convey. On this proposal, everyone is made to look bad to a certain extent in my eyes as a result of his actions. For relevant discussion along similar lines, see Miller 1995: 330, Purshouse 2001, and Roberts 2003: 232-233.

²⁹ But what about cases where a person is embarrassed for actions he performed earlier in life, even if there was no one there to observe them at the time? Note, though, that while he might not have been embarrassed at the time, he is embarrassed now precisely *because* a new audience is present, namely his present self judging the public image his prior self was projecting. For related discussion, see Szabados 1990: 346 and Purshouse 2001: 534-536.

³⁰ For an extensive taxonomy of circumstances which give rise to embarrassment, see Edelmann 1987: 47-54 and Miller 1995, 1996: 46-70.

to. Similar points could be made about cases involving unintended nudity, or wardrobe malfunctions, or failures to control various noises or gases.³¹

How then should we distinguish embarrassment from shame? Here again several approaches seem unpromising:

- (a) One attempt is to claim that actions which give rise to feelings of shame are intentional, whereas embarrassing actions are unintentional. This might be true in many cases, but counterexamples abound. For instance, some people are ashamed by their height or skin acne, whereas others are embarrassed when caught intentionally misbehaving. When two lovers are discovered where they should not be by a group of tourists, they might immediately blush and run off in embarrassment.³²
- (b) According to Robert Solomon, embarrassing actions are ones in which the agent judges him or herself to be innocent, whereas shameful actions are ones for which we bear responsibility.³³ But again some people are ashamed by their height, while our naughty lovers were embarrassed about being discovered doing something for which they were clearly responsible and can understand being justifiably criticized.
- (c) Perhaps the most intuitive approach of the three would be to claim that shame involves some kind of moral failing, whereas embarrassment involves a breach of

³¹ It is tempting to limit embarrassment to only negative actions on the part of the agent or others in the circumstances, and indeed some accounts do just that. But often times speakers experience embarrassment when they are given long and generous introductions, and it is hard to see either the content of what was said about them or the manner by which the introduction was delivered in a negative manner. Here the above proposal would understand such cases as arising from a concern on the part of the speaker that she might be coming across as potentially prideful, arrogant, immodest, or in some other way out of line with the self-presentation she wants to project. Hence many speakers will begin with a humorous or self-deprecating remark which alleviates their embarrassment by, they hope, appropriately restoring their public image.

For related discussion, see Harré 1990: 187-9, Lewis 1995: 211, 2008: 750, and Miller 1996: 34, 126-7. Such a case provides a nice illustration of why embarrassment is conceptually and phenomenologically distinct from shame, and does not count as even a milder version of the latter.

³² See also Edelmann 1987: 44-47 and Babcock and Sabini 1990: 162-6. For an opposing view, see Harré 1990: 186-7.

³³ 1976: 305. For criticism see Szabados 1990: 342 and Purshouse 2001: 521-2.

norms pertaining to social conduct, such as norms of etiquette, poise, and so forth. But we have already seen that shame ranges more widely than morality. And it is easy to come up with cases involving both embarrassment and morality. For instance, an agent might be telling a lie at a party, and could feel guilt immediately afterwards for doing so and be ashamed at himself for being a liar, but he could *also* experience embarrassment once the lie was pointed out by someone in the audience.³⁴

With the failure of these attempts, one might wonder whether there really is a significant difference between shame and embarrassment. Indeed, it is common to find psychologists treat them interchangeably, or at most claim that embarrassment is simply a milder former of shame.³⁵ However, the characterization of embarrassment above gives us a natural starting point. Embarrassment, we said, involves a concern about what *others* are thinking about the agent. Someone who is experiencing feelings of embarrassment is concerned that others are taking him to be behaving in a certain undesirable way which does not align with what he wants his public image to be. Shame, on the other hand, involves what the agent *himself* thinks about himself. In our liar example, the agent might be ashamed with himself for being a liar, even if the lie goes undetected and helps to bolster his public image.³⁶

This simple conceptual distinction also has a number of implications for the role that shame and embarrassment play in our psychological lives, which again can only be briefly mentioned given limitations of space:

³⁴ For related discussion, see Tangney et al. 1996: 1262. For an opposing view, see Harré 1990.

³⁵ See, e.g., Lewis 1971 and Kaufman 1989: 24. Michael Lewis (1995, 2008) distinguishes between two types of embarrassment – embarrassment as mere exposure, and embarrassment as less intense shame. The latter category includes negative self-evaluations, and so includes most of the paradigm cases of adult embarrassment.

³⁶ For similar remarks, see Babcock and Sabini 1990, Szabados 1990, Miller 1996: 21-27, Tangney et al. 1996, and Sabini and Silver 1997: 11.

- (a) Embarrassment tends to be both shorter in duration and milder in intensity than shame, which follows naturally from the difference between self-condemnation versus a concern about what others are thinking about you the agent.³⁷
- (b) Embarrassment tends to arise from more surprising and accidental events than shame, perhaps because such events are the ones which increase the risk of something going wrong with our intended self-presentations.³⁸
- (c) Embarrassing situations are typically viewed by the agent as more humorous and light-hearted than shameful ones, since they often do not strike as close to our characters and the manner in which we fundamentally view ourselves as people. The same is true for how audiences often view embarrassed people (laughter, amusement, sympathy) versus shameful people (seriousness, disgust, avoidance).³⁹

Hence again we see that despite their superficial similarity, shame and embarrassment differ in a number of crucial respects.

Having disentangled the emotion of shame from the two emotions of guilt and embarrassment which are central to this paper, we can set shame to one side for our purposes here. But by having brought shame into the picture, we can now see much better that guilt is a response to a failure to behave in accordance with one's important, privately held norms for behavior, whereas embarrassment arises when one's behavior publically violates, in an undesirable way, the image one is trying to convey to others.

3. Guilt and Helping⁴⁰

³⁷ Miller 1996: 26, 2007: 246, Tangney et al. 1996, 2005: 45, and Eisenberg 2000: 666.

³⁸ Miller 1996: 26, Tangney et al. 1996, 2005: 45, and Eisenberg 2000: 667.

³⁹ Miller 1996: 24, 2007: 246, Babcock and Sabini 1990: 155, and Tangney et al. 1996, 2005: 45.

⁴⁰ This section draws extensively on my 2009a.

In this section I want to do two things: (i) provide a broad overview of empirical studies on the relationship between guilt and prosocial behavior, and (ii) carefully distinguish between competing motivational explanations for this relationship.

Over forty years of work on guilt and helping has consistently found a strong positive correlation between the two. Subjects who are induced to feel guilty in both laboratory and natural settings reliably help at statistically higher rates than control subjects. As a representative study, Regan et al. (1972) had a male confederate approach a woman in a shopping mall and ask her to take his picture using an expensive looking camera. He told the subject that the camera was rather sensitive, and each subject who then tried to take a picture found that the shutter did not work. Control subjects were subsequently told that the camera “acts up a lot” and that the subject did not do anything wrong. The second group of subjects was told that they must have done something wrong and jammed the camera, and that it would have to be fixed. The confederate then left the subject; a few stores away a second confederate walked across the path of the subject carrying a “bag of groceries from which a corner at the bottom had been torn, such that if she walked, candy fell out of the bottom of the bag” (43). The measure of helping behavior was whether the subject let the second confederate know about the candy falling out of the bag. The results were as follows (44):

	Guilty Subjects	Control Subjects
Helped	11	3
Did not Help	9	17

Thus 55% of guilty subjects helped compared to only 15% of controls (44).⁴¹

⁴¹ In a similar experimental design, Konečni (1972) studied the behavior of subjects on the streets of Toronto. In the guilt condition, the experimental confederate walked towards the subject carrying three expensive-looking books. After absent-mindedly running into the subject and dropping the books, the confederate exclaimed, “They are not mine, and you have to do this” and walked away. Fifty to seventy five yards later, the subject came across another person walking out of a doorway who had forty computer-punched cards drop out of a folder. This confederate,

These correlations are not limited to only mundane prosocial behavior. In a longitudinal study of six German prisons and 1,243 inmates, Hosser et al. (2008) examined the relationship between guilt and shame on the one hand, and criminal convictions after release from prison on the other. They found that twenty-four months after being released, 54.1% of inmates who felt guilt, but no shame, during imprisonment had no new convictions, compared to 39.7% of those who felt shame but no guilt (146).^{42 43}

The above only scratches the surface of the experimental work on guilt and prosocial behavior – literally dozens of other studies show similar trends.⁴⁴ So let us accept a robust positive correlation for now, and indeed go further and claim that it is *because* subjects are

while bending down to pick up the cards, said to the subject, “Please don’t step on them.” Control subjects did not have the guilt manipulation but just came across the confederate and the dropped cards. The helping variables were the number of subjects who collected cards and how many they collected, which came out as follows (32):

	% of subjects who collected cards	Mean number of cards collected
Control	16	1.29
Guilty	42	4.77

Once again we see a significant difference in helping behavior correlated with prior feelings of guilt, provided that the guilt manipulation is effective in this case.

⁴² And robust correlations have been found not only between actual experiences of guilt and prosocial behavior, but also between *anticipated* guilt and such behavior. Lindsey (2005), for instance, found a strong correlation between anticipated guilt over not helping those in need of a life-saving bone marrow donation, and both the intention to and actual compliance with requests to be tested as a possible donor. 146 undergraduate students were brought into the lab twice with 7-10 days in-between their visits. Subjects who were given a high anticipated guilt message had correlations of .63 between the message and anticipated guilt, .84 between anticipated guilt and behavioral intent, and .42 between behavioral intent and actual behavior (469).

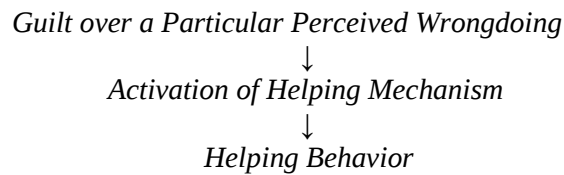
See also Basil et al. 2006 on anticipatory guilt and charitable donations.

⁴³ It is important to note a complication. For while guilt seems to engender prosocial behavior, it has also been associated with avoidance behavior in certain instances, especially with respect to inhibiting the very action which prompted the guilty feelings in the first place (see Freedman et al. 1967, Baumeister et al. 1994: 258, and Amodio et al. 2007). But as Amodio et al. (2007) argue, there need be no tension here between these two motivational facets of guilt. On their view, the initial experience of guilt “functions to halt the interpersonal damage being caused by the transgressive behavior” and to “survey the damage, and learn from mistakes” (525). Helping behavior, on the other hand, could be a subsequent effect of guilty feelings aimed at promoting one or more of the motivational goals described below. Amodio and his colleagues used electroencephalograph recordings of cortical activity to study racial prejudice and guilt reactions, and found empirical support for this proposal.

⁴⁴ See, e.g., Freedman et al. 1967, Carlsmith and Gross 1969, Donnerstein et al. 1975, Harris et al. 1975, Harris and Samerotte 1976, Cunningham et al. 1980, Baumeister et al. 1994: 257, Quiles and Bybee 1997, Estrada-Hollenbeck and Heatherton 1998, Zhong and Liljenquist 2006, and Basil et al. 2008. For a very helpful list of early studies, see Salovey and Rosenhan 1989. Even subjects high in guilt proneness who were primed with subliminal guilt adjectives helped more than both (i) similarly primed subjects who were low in guilt proneness and (ii) sadness primed subjects (Zemack-Rugar et al. 2007).

It is important to stress that these studies do not pertain to chronic guilt, which as noted in footnote 27 is a different kind of guilt which would not be expected to correlate positively with prosocial behavior. See Quiles and Bybee 1997: 122.

feeling guilty that they are exhibiting such behavior at higher rates than controls. Then we have the following:



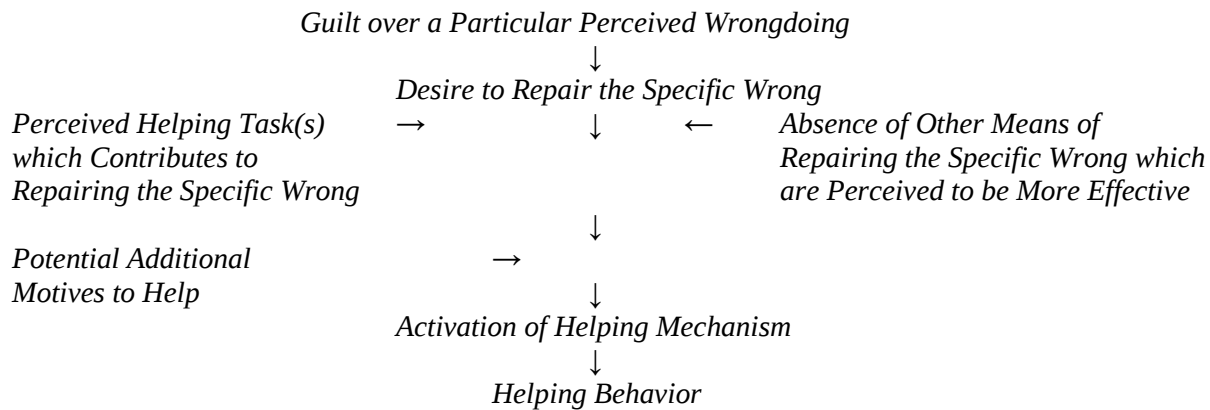
Naturally it is assumed in this diagram that other things are being held equal since if, for instance, there are no opportunities to actually help, or if something else besides the feelings of guilt is much more psychologically salient at the moment, then we would not expect increased helping behavior to result.

What psychological factors might best account for this relationship? More precisely, what motivational state(s) does guilt give rise to which in turn often fosters prosocial behavior?⁴⁵ Here the literature in social psychology is much less helpful, as a number of incompatible proposals have been offered, and in many cases with very little refinement or care in stating them. In the remainder of this section, I mention some of the leading candidates:

Desire to Repair the Specific Wrong. On this proposal, a state of guilt causes the formation of a desire to repair the specific perceived wrong performed by the agent, which in turn motivates helping behavior aimed at repairing the fault. Thus if I feel guilty for having stolen something from you, this could lead to the direct formation of a desire to atone for this wrong towards you in some way. There might be a variety of ways of doing so, such as making financial compensation, buying a replacement item, and so forth. But it might turn out that the best way I can see to make restitution for this wrong is to help you in some significant way. In

⁴⁵ To simplify the discussion, in the remainder of the section I focus mainly on (i) consequential guilt upon performing an action deemed wrong rather than anticipatory guilt, and (ii) states of guilt rather than guilt traits.

those cases, and holding other things equal, we would expect the agent to help at a significantly higher rate than otherwise. Diagrammatically we would have the following:

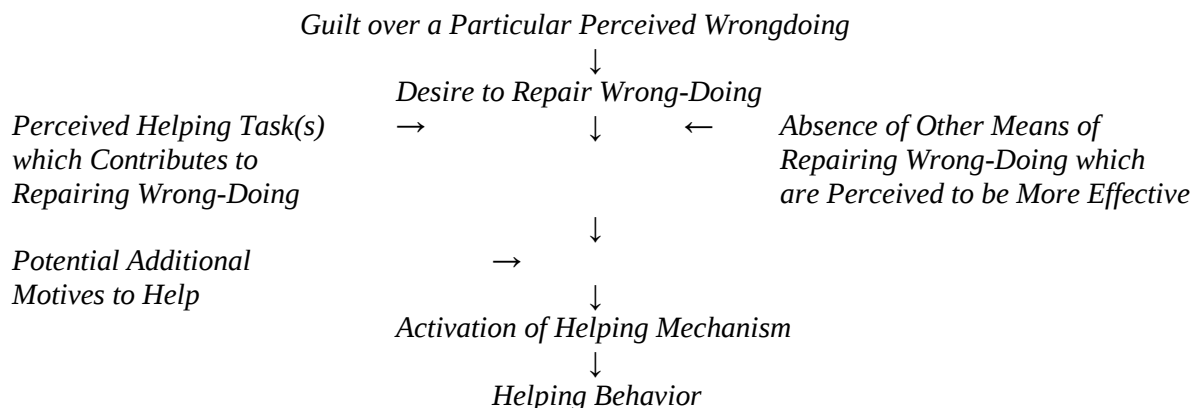


Thus one consequence of this model would be that subjects who are experiencing guilt would *not* help at increased rates when the helping task would not have any connection to repairing the specific wrong committed.

Unfortunately, despite this model's simplicity and elegance, it is clearly *too* simplistic as stated. As we saw in Regan et al. (1972) above, 55% of guilty subjects helped, compared to only 15% of controls when it came to informing a confederate about the hole in her bag. This task clearly had no bearing on atoning for the specific action of breaking the camera. Even more striking is a series of experiments by Freedman et al. (1967). In one experiment, they had a room arranged so that subjects would likely knock over the carefully arranged index cards of a graduate student in his office. Half of subjects in this guilt condition were later asked to volunteer for an experiment by the same graduate student, whereas the other half were asked to volunteer for an experiment run by an unrelated student. In general 75% of subjects who knocked over the cards volunteered, whereas less than 39% of controls did. Strikingly, though, a

significant difference emerged only for the request to assist the graduate student not connected to the office or the cards (122).⁴⁶

Desire to Repair Wrong-Doing as Such. The problem with this first model can be easily addressed if we switch from positing a desire to repair the specific wrong done, to a more general desire to repair the commission of a wrong as such. Manifestations of such a desire might include confessing the wrong action, attempting to make adequate reparation, making amends in some other way if reparation to the one wronged is not possible, punishing the self, committing to refrain from such wrong actions in the future, pleading for forgiveness, offering some form of penance over and above reparation, and so forth.⁴⁷ Thus in the Regan study, by notifying the confederate about the hole in her bag, subjects would be taking a step towards atoning for the fact that they earlier broke someone else's camera. The diagram for this model would have to be adjusted as follows:



Such a model would generate a number of testable predictions. One is that actions which serve to eliminate the agent's guilt without contributing in any way to repairing wrong-doing, should not

⁴⁶ An advocate of this first model could respond by positing a second desire to avoid confronting someone whom the agent has harmed. Indeed, Freedman et al. suggest this very possibility (123). However, this response would still leave unexplained the host of studies like Regan et al. 1972 which show increased helping in unrelated subsequent tasks.

See also Carlsmith and Gross 1969, who found that "guilt can lead to compliance even when there is no opportunity to make amends to the injured party" (238). Also relevant are Darlington and Macker 1966 and Harris and Samerotte 1976.

⁴⁷ See Lindsay-Hartz et al. 1995 for related discussion.

significantly diminish subsequent helping behavior. Another is that whether a guilt-induced subject is independently experiencing positive affect (positive mood) should have little to no bearing on helping rates since the positive mood presumably would not satisfy the desire to repair the commission of a wrong.

The above model seems to have a strong following in the literature on guilt and helping.⁴⁸ At the same time, there seem to be a number of studies with results which are incompatible with the above predictions. Let me briefly mention only one study given limitations of space. Zhong and Liljenquist (2006) asked subjects to recall an ethical or unethical action they performed in their past. Next subjects either used an antiseptic wipe to cleanse their hands or they did not. After completing a survey about their emotional state, they were given an opportunity to be an unpaid volunteer for a desperate graduate student in another research study. The results were that 74% of subjects who did not use the wipes volunteered to help, whereas only 41% who did use the wipes volunteered (1452). Note that the cleansing involved here was not a moral cleaning such as going to confession, which might be considered a means of trying to repair wrong-doing; rather it was simply an act of physical cleansing for eliminating germs from the person's hands.⁴⁹ Thus it seems that some subjects might have otherwise volunteered were it not for their performance of an action which had no bearing on repairing their prior unethical behavior, which contradicts what the above model should imply.⁵⁰

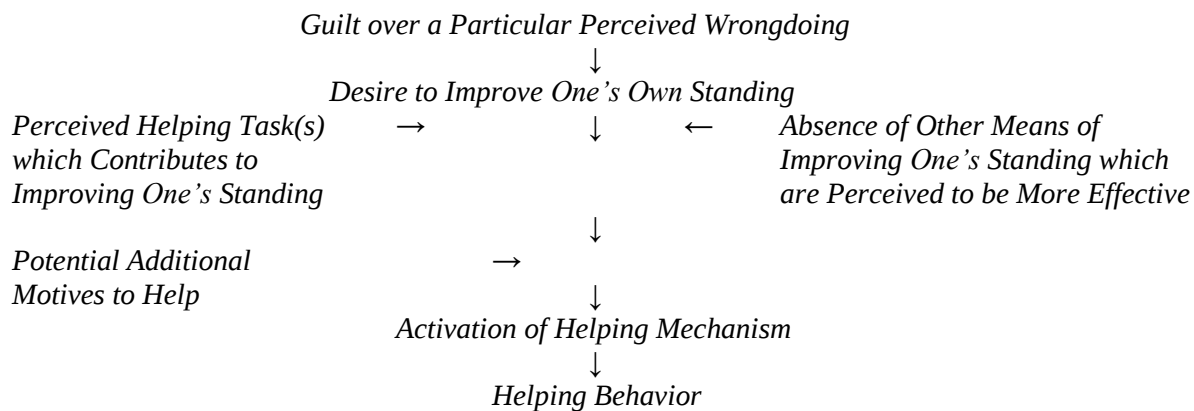
⁴⁸ See, e.g., Freedman et al. 1967: 117, Baumeister et al. 1994: 257, Tangney 1995: 120, Roberts 2003: 225, Amodio 2007, and especially Lindsay-Hartz et al. 1995.

⁴⁹ For the effect of confession on helping behavior, see Harris et al. 1975.

⁵⁰ Regarding the second prediction, Cunningham and colleagues (1980) examined the relationship between positive mood, guilt, and helping. Positive mood was manipulated by having subjects find a free dime in the coin return slot of a pay phone. Guilt was manipulated by following the broken camera technique developed by Regan et al. 1972. And the helping task was assisting a confederate pick up papers which had been dropped in front of the subject. The results were as follows (184):

	Guilt	No Guilt
Positive Mood	33%	73%
No Positive Mood	80%	40%

Desire to Improve One's Own Standing. The previous model posited a desire which is not directly concerned with the agent in question, but rather with morality itself and the importance of repairing a failure to live up to the agent's moral standards. In order to help explain the relationship between guilt and helping, we could instead posit a desire that the agent might have to improve his (actual or perceived) moral purity, worth, virtue, social image, social attachments, social and communal relationships, moral standing in the community, or the like.⁵¹ The diagram here would look like this:



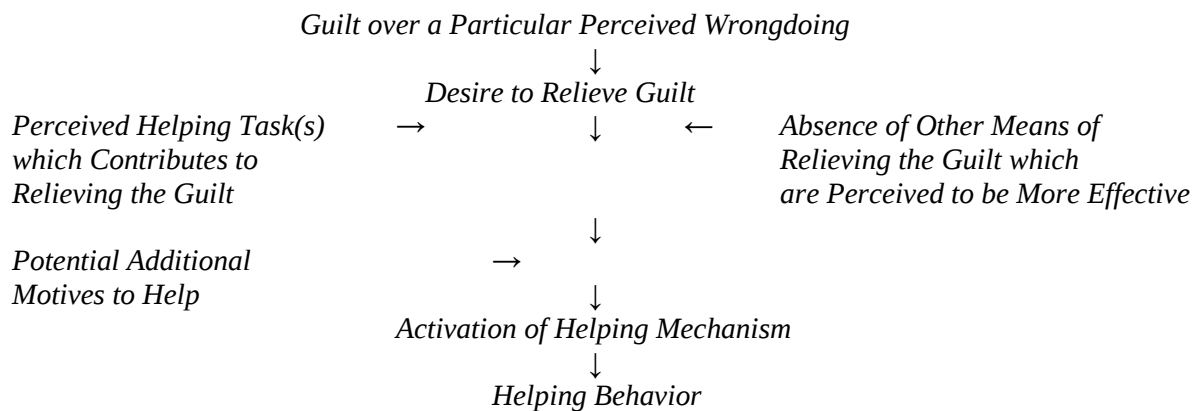
Note that this model would generate some of the same predictions as the previous one: (i) actions which eliminate guilt without improving moral or social standing should not significantly diminish subsequent helping behavior, and (ii) since positive moods would not improve the agent's standing, they should have little bearing on helping rates. Thus the studies which are troublesome for the previous model should cause problems for this one as well. For instance, using antiseptic wipes has no bearing on one's actual or socially perceived standing, and yet served to significantly reduce volunteering rates among guilty subjects.⁵²

Hence whereas merely guilty subjects helped at much greater levels than controls, when subjects felt both guilty and in a positive mood, they did not. So contrary to the second prediction of this model, experiencing a positive mood does have an important bearing on helping behavior amongst individuals experiencing guilt.

⁵¹ See Carlsmith and Gross 1969: 239, Jones et al. 1995, Zhong and Liljenquist 2006, and especially Baumeister et al. 1994.

⁵² Advocates of this model could focus on certain specific variants of the desire to improve one's standing, such as a desire to restore one's moral purity, and argue that there is a psychological association between such a desire and a

Desire to Alleviate One's Guilt. The fourth and final motivational model to be mentioned here holds that guilt states often cause the formation of a desire to eliminate or reduce the agent's guilt. Since helping is one very common way of making oneself feel better and no longer guilty about a prior wrong act, it is only to be expected that guilt would be positively correlated with helping, other things being equal. On this picture then, helping is treated as an instrumental means for promoting the agent's subjective well-being. Thus we get the following:



Such a model would imply, among other things, that whether a person experiencing guilt helps is in large part a function of whether the helping task would be more costly than the benefit derived from relieving the guilty feelings.⁵³

Such a guilt relief model is perhaps the leading proposal in the psychology literature today,⁵⁴ but even this view has met with some recalcitrant data. For instance, Zemack-Rugar and colleagues (2007) compared the helping behavior of subjects who were high in guilt-proneness and who had been subliminally primed with guilt adjectives, with that of similarly primed subjects low in guilt-proneness and also subjects primed with sadness adjectives. After the priming procedure and emotion measures were administered by a computer, subjects were told of

desire for physical cleansing. Thus by physically cleaning one's hands, one is also in the process undergoing an indirect form of moral cleansing. See Zhong and Liljenquist 2006 for discussion.

⁵³ For related discussion, see Batson et al. 1986.

⁵⁴ See, e.g., Donnerstein et al. 1975, Cunningham et al. 1980, Baumeister et al. 1994:255-6, Quiles and Bybee 1997: 104, Estrada-Hollenbeck and Heatherton 1998: 221, and Lindsey 2005.

another study that involved “an array of annoying, boring, and repetitive tasks designed to assist a charity in formulating its research questionnaires.” Subjects were asked how much time (between 0-20 minutes) they would like to volunteer to help the charity as unpaid volunteers.⁵⁵

The mean number of minutes volunteered was as follows (935):

High guilt proneness, guilt prime:	8.4 minutes
High guilt proneness, sadness prime:	3.9 minutes
Low guilt proneness, guilt prime:	3.1 minutes
Low guilt proneness, sadness prime:	2.2 minutes

But it is unclear why guilty subjects would be so much more inclined to become dedicated volunteers for what seems to be a very costly task if helping behavior is being influenced by cost-benefit assessments pertaining to guilt relief and if there would likely be plenty of subsequent opportunities available to relieve guilt in other ways.⁵⁶

Let me conclude this section with some comments about these models. First, they clearly each need to be developed more carefully than has been done above, although even this presentation is more detailed than one typically finds. Furthermore, each of the models is really just a label for a family of closely related proposals. For instance under the heading of the desire to improve the agent’s standing, we can distinguish a desire to improve the agent’s *actual* moral standing given the agent’s personal set of norms, versus a desire to improve the agent’s socially *perceived* moral standing. Clearly these two desires could lead to the performance of different actions in certain cases. In addition, while recalcitrant empirical results were mentioned for each of the four models, they should not be taken as decisive problems but rather as initial concerns. And finally, these models need not be regarded as exclusive – it might turn out that some agents

⁵⁵ The initial experiment was also cleverly rigged to supposedly last 60 minutes but proceeded quickly enough so that subjects could volunteer for the entire 20 minutes if they wanted to without scheduling conflicts.

⁵⁶ For another study involving guilt and an unpleasant helping task, see Darlington and Macker 1966. For critical discussion of this fourth model, see Zemack-Rugar et al. 2007: 934 and especially Lindsay-Hartz et al. 1995.

instantiate one of these kinds of desires whereas others instantiate another kind, and it might even be the case that some agents instantiate two or more of these desires at the same time when feeling guilty.

3. Embarrassment and Helping

This section follows the same pattern as the previous one by providing a broad overview of empirical studies on the relationship between embarrassment and prosocial behavior, and then carefully distinguishing between competing motivational explanations for this relationship. Fortunately, since many parallel claims apply to embarrassment as were made about guilt and helping, we can proceed much more briefly here.

Comparatively speaking, far less experimental work has been done on embarrassment and helping. Nevertheless, the studies that we do have show a significant positive correlation between the two. For instance, Cann and Blackwelder (1984) had an undergraduate student confederate approach subjects who were alone and within three feet of a lavatory door after they had gone to the bathroom. Each subject was asked, “I am in a big hurry and I have a friend who needs these notes. I wonder if you could take them to her?” If the subject agreed, he or she was instructed where the friend would be, which was approximately 40 meters away. Subjects in the control condition were approached in the same way on another floor of the building, but this time they were merely walking down the hallway in the same area. The results were as follows (224):

Agreed to Deliver Notes	
Lavatory Condition	80%
Control Condition	45%

So according to Cann and Blackwelder's interpretation of the results, we can see a dramatic difference in compliance with a minor helping task as a function of the embarrassment people feel after using a public restroom (225).⁵⁷

What motivational state(s) does embarrassment give rise to which in turn causally influences prosocial behavior?⁵⁸ Here the literature in social psychology has even less help to offer, particularly in the form of experiments designed to test competing hypotheses. Nevertheless, let me briefly mention some of the leading candidates, while omitting the diagrams for each proposal in the interest of space:

Desire to Correct One's Damaged Image in the Situation. On this proposal, being embarrassed in a given situation because of a public misstep causes the formation of a desire to repair the damage that has been done to one's image in that situation, which in turn motivates helping behavior. Thus when the person forget his friend's name when introducing her at a party, he could form a desire to repair his image in the eyes of his friend and the other people around him, and thereby show that he is a good friend after all. There might be a variety of ways of doing so, such as offering an excuse, providing a justification, diverting everyone's attention, and so forth. But it might turn out that the best way I can see to save face is to help in some significant way. In those cases, and holding other things equal, we would expect the agent to help at a significantly higher rate than otherwise. In parallel to our first model of guilt-induced

⁵⁷ For additional studies of embarrassment and helping, see Foss and Crenshaw 1978, Edelman et al. 1984, and Gonzales et al. 1990. These studies indicate that while actual feelings of embarrassment might serve to enhance the frequency of helping behavior, anticipated embarrassment has an opposite, inhibitory effect. For instance, Foss and Crenshaw (1978) found that 72% of subjects would help in some manner if a confederate seemed to unknowingly drop a box of envelopes, whereas only 47% helped when what was dropped was instead a box of Tampax tampons (244). See also Edelman 1987: 137-9, Edelman et al. 1984, and Miller 1996: 161-4.

⁵⁸ As we did in the previous section, to simplify the discussion I focus mainly on (i) consequential embarrassment rather than anticipated embarrassment, and (ii) states of embarrassment rather than embarrassment traits. Furthermore, I assume a causal relationship exists between embarrassment and helping, rather than just a positive correlation.

helping, one consequence of this model would be that subjects who are experiencing embarrassment would *not* help at increased rates when the helping task would not have any connection to repairing their image in the specific situation.⁵⁹

Once again, this kind of model is clearly too simplistic as stated. In the main study designed to test this hypothesis, Apsler (1975) had subjects in the high-embarrassment condition perform a range of tasks including singing the *Star Spangled Banner* while a confederate was known to be watching from another room. In the low-embarrassment condition, subjects were watched performing tasks such as reading a book. Controls were not asked to perform any task. Afterwards the confederate asked the subject to help with his class project by filling out a daily questionnaire for anywhere between 0-20 days. The compliance scores were as follows (149):

Mean Number of Days Volunteered	
High Embarrassment	14.9
Low Embarrassment	8.7
Control	5.0

Most importantly for this first model, similar results were found when the confederate making the helping request was known by the subject to have *not* previously observed the embarrassing tasks (150).

Desire to Correct One's Damaged Image. Again the easy revision to the first model is to posit a general desire to improve one's image and show people that you are after all a normal, or respectable, or coordinated, or some other kind of person in line with your intended public self-presentation.⁶⁰ One implication of this model is that, other things being equal, we should not expect embarrassed subjects to show a significant increase in activities which do not pertain to

⁵⁹ Apsler (1975: 146) interprets Goffman (1959) as advocating this model.

⁶⁰ See Gonzales et al. 1990, Miller 1996: 127, 169-175, and Roberts 2003: 233.

correcting their damaged image, and certainly not activities which might make their images even worse. And yet Rowland Miller and colleagues (1996) found that the leading response to embarrassment among 257 reports was evasion at 28%. Flight came in fifth at 9%.⁶¹

Desire to Raise One's Self-Esteem. Another proposal to explain what mediates embarrassment and helping is a self-esteem management hypothesis, whereby embarrassment reduces an agent's self-esteem, causing the formation of a desire to improve his or her self-esteem.⁶² Helping will sometimes be one such way of making oneself feel better, provided the cost-benefit calculations for self-esteem come out correctly. Unfortunately for this view, however, studies have repeatedly found that reduced self-esteem plays only a marginal role in cases of embarrassment.⁶³

Desire to Alleviate One's Embarrassment. Finally we have the hypothesis that embarrassed subjects desire to eliminate their feelings of embarrassment, which can lead to all kinds of behavior including flight, evasion, providing excuses, offering justifications, using humor, and if the circumstances are right, helping. Indeed, one might help to correct one's damaged image in the situation or in general, but note that on this view correcting one's image would only be a means of alleviating feelings of embarrassment. Of the four proposals sketched in this section, this is the one which seems to have the most support in the psychology literature at the present time.⁶⁴

⁶¹Miller 1996: 173. Of course more needs to be said here. For instance, we saw in footnote 43 that guilt has been associated with avoidance behavior in some instances, perhaps in order to prevent any further damage from being done and to learn from one's mistakes. At the same time, this is compatible with increased helping behavior being a subsequent effect of these guilty feelings which is aimed at promoting one or more of the motivational goals outlined in the previous section. A similar idea could apply here – evasion and flight could be initial defensive mechanisms in many embarrassed subjects, but this is compatible with subsequent helping behavior aimed at improving the subject's image.

⁶²For discussion, see Apsler 1975: 152.

⁶³For a review, see Miller 1996: 118-121.

⁶⁴See, e.g., Apsler 1975, Cann and Blackwelder 1984, Edelman 1987: 142, and Miller 1996: 4.

Once again, the same caveats apply to these accounts of what mediates embarrassment and helping – they are all just sketches of actual detailed models, they each encompass several more precise proposals, the problematic studies mentioned above are not intended to be decisive, and the four approaches can also be combined with each other.

4. Guilt, Embarrassment, and Character Traits⁶⁵

With this admittedly quick overview in mind of the psychology literature on guilt, embarrassment, and helping behavior, let us draw four implications which should be important to any discussion of the existence and nature of character traits pertaining to helping.

(a) The default state for most human beings is to not help. Recall that control subjects almost never helped. Regan et al. (1972) had only 16% of controls notify a woman that her bag was leaking candy, and Konečni (1972) found that only 15% of controls would stop to help pick up dropped computer cards. This would not be surprising if the helping tasks were very demanding or time consuming, but note how trivial these tasks are.⁶⁶ Thus the first implication is that, apart from the boost provided by guilt, embarrassment, or one of the other triggers which were mentioned in the first section, most people tend to not exhibit helping behavior even with respect to simple helping tasks.

(b) Helping which is significantly influenced by guilt or embarrassment seems to be cross-situationally consistent. While the experimental literature on guilt, embarrassment, and

⁶⁵ This section draws in part from my 2009a.

⁶⁶ The same lack of helping behavior for control subjects is found in a variety of studies on other variables associated with helping such as good moods, bad moods, and empathy See my 2009b and 2009c for an overview of these studies. Indeed, not only do many control subjects not help, an omission which itself is often morally problematic, but they often go further than that. For instance in Konečni's study involving dropped computer cards, "the control subjects tended to make a fairly large and unnecessary semicircle around the pile of cards, and hardly ever commented on what had happened" (1972: 32).

helping has involved a wide variety of eliciting circumstances (such as singing the *Star Spangled Banner* in public, breaking a camera, and knocking over books) as well as helping opportunities (such as carrying papers, volunteering for an experiment, and notifying someone about a torn bag), a remarkably consistent pattern has emerged that subjects experiencing guilt or embarrassment help at higher levels than do subjects who do not, other things being equal. We have every reason to expect this trend to continue in future experiments involving new eliciting circumstances and helping tasks. Thus there is a remarkable degree of cross-situational consistency in the experimental results.

This consistency allows us to make what should be fairly accurate predictions about the helping behavior of individuals experiencing guilt or embarrassment. Or rather, such would be the case once we have a better idea as to what the correct model is of the motivational states which mediate guilt, embarrassment, and helping. Suppose, for instance, that in the case of guilt the guilt-relief model is correct. Then we can formulate conditionals which attempt to accurately capture certain trends in helping behavior. Here are two such conditionals:

- (C1) Other things being equal, if an agent is *not* experiencing guilt as a result of some perceived wrong the agent has committed, and:
 - (i) Is presented with a helping opportunity.
 - (ii) Takes himself to be able to perform the helping task.that agent will probably *not* attempt to perform the helping task.
- (C2) Other things being equal, if an agent *is* experiencing guilt as a result of some perceived wrong the agent has committed, and:
 - (i) Is presented with a helping opportunity.
 - (ii) Takes himself to be able to perform the helping task.
 - (iii) Takes the benefits of helping in terms of guilt relief to outweigh the perceived costs associated with helping.
 - (iv) Does not take there to be any more effective means available for relieving the guilt.that agent *will* probably attempt to perform the helping task.

Note that the consequents of the conditionals are stated in terms of what the agent will “probably” do – none of the studies showed that all of the subjects in the guilt condition helped, just as none of them showed that all of the subjects in the control condition did not help.⁶⁷

(c) *Motivation to help which arises from guilt or embarrassment is not altruistic.* Genuine altruistic motivation to perform an action is motivation concerned with the good of another person, independently of whether the action will directly benefit the agent or not. While it used to be popular to think that there is no such motivation, the tide seems to be shifting given Batson’s work on empathy and altruism.⁶⁸ However, whatever might be true of empathy-influenced helping behavior does not seem to hold for the motivational contribution that guilt and embarrassment make. Take again our models from the previous sections. The first two for guilt involved moralistic motivation:

Desire to Repair the Specific Wrong.
Desire to Repair Wrong-Doing as Such.

Here the primary concern is with what morality demands, rather than with, say, the interests of someone in need. To the extent to which it stems from such a desire, helping the other person is thereby treated as instrumental to satisfying normative standards, and so is not genuinely altruistic action.

⁶⁷ So the claim is not that each individual will always try to perform some helping task when experiencing guilt and when the conditions in (C2) obtain. Rather, what we would expect to find if we monitored that person’s behavior and guilt levels over time is a significant difference in the *frequency* of his helping versus not helping which positively correlates with his experiences of guilt, other things being equal.

Unfortunately, while we have a wealth of data on how different individuals react to particular helping opportunities when feeling guilty, what we do not have is a number of longitudinal studies focused on the *same* individuals as they experience guilt on multiple occasions and are confronted with various opportunities to help. So we can only speculate at this point that the same helping trends we see across subjects involved in the same experiment, will also apply with the same subjects over time.

⁶⁸ Over the course of the past thirty years Batson and his colleagues have provided a wealth of experimental evidence for the empathy-altruism hypothesis, or the claim that “empathy evokes motivation directed toward the ultimate goal of reducing the needy person’s suffering; the more empathy felt for a person in need, the more altruistic motivation to have that need reduced” (2002: 92). For reviews, see Batson 1987, 1991, 2002, and Batson et al. 2003 as well as my 2009c.

Similarly, the remaining models were the following:

Desire to Improve One's Own Standing.

Desire to Alleviate One's Guilt.

Desire to Correct One's Damaged Image in the Situation.

Desire to Correct One's Damaged Image.

Desire to Raise One's Self-Esteem.

Desire to Alleviate One's Embarrassment.

And these are egoistic desires. If they give rise to helping behavior, then a person in need is being treated as a means to achieving one of these goals that the agent has. So in having such a desire, the agent does not really care about the person in need for his or her own sake, and indeed would not even help in the first place if another, more attractive means of achieving the desire were available.

The upshot then is the following. If one or more of the leading models of motivation to help produced by guilt or embarrassment is correct, then the action which results will not be altruistic to the extent that it depends on such motivation. Furthermore, while it is still a good thing in most cases that the person helps, we might conclude that the helper's action deserves no moral worth, although properly examining such a question is beyond the scope of this paper.⁶⁹

(d) *Most people do not possess compassion.* In light of the first three implications, we can conclude that other things being equal, most people do not have the virtue of compassion. To see this, consider the following familiar claims about what a virtuous person with the character trait of compassion would be like:

⁶⁹ This is plausible in the case of egoistic motivation such as a desire to alleviate one's guilt; to adapt Michael Stocker's famous example, if you are in the hospital and find out that your best friend has come to visit you in order to alleviate her guilt, then while you are glad that your friend is visiting, her action deserves no moral worth whatsoever. Indeed, it calls into question the extent to which she really is your best friend (Stocker 1976).

In my view, the same is true in the case of moralistic motivation, although as we know from Kant's famous discussion of moral worth in the *Groundwork*, here the issues are much more complex and unfortunately there is not adequate space to investigate them here. Let me only note that if your friend comes to visit due in large part to a desire to repair the moral damage done by a series of wrongdoings that she had performed towards someone else earlier in the day, such an action does not show any special attachment towards you and is likely to strike many people as cold and impersonal. Thus, not only it is not clear that guilt-produced motivation to help is altruistic, it is also not clear that it bestows on the action any significant degree of moral worth.

- (a) A person who is compassionate will, other things being equal, typically perform simple and straightforward helping tasks when in helping-relevant circumstances.
- (b) A compassionate person's helping behavior which arises solely from his or her trait of compassion will, other things being equal, not be dependent on the presence of morally problematic or morally insignificant factors such as whether he or she is feeling guilty/embarrassed or not.
- (c) A compassionate person who helps someone solely out of his or her trait of compassion, other things being equal, always does so for morally admirable reasons and motives.

For example, we would expect a compassionate person to help pick up dropped computer cards, to do so regardless of whether she is feeling guilty/embarrassed or not, and to do so for virtuous motives. On the other hand, we have seen that the following claims appear to in fact be true:

- (a*) Most people will, other things being equal, typically *not* perform simple and straightforward helping tasks when in helping-relevant circumstances.
- (b*) The helping behavior of a person *will*, other things being equal, often be dependent on the presence of morally problematic or morally insignificant factors such as whether he or she is feeling guilty/embarrassed or not.
- (c*) A person who helps someone primarily out of a motive arising from guilt or embarrassment, other things being equal, often does *not* do so for morally admirable reasons and motives.

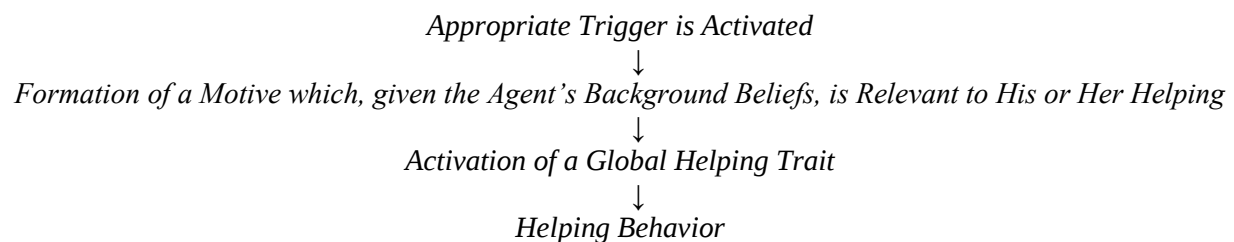
Thus a person might often not help pick up dropped computer cards, and even when he does help, he might do so as a result of feeling guilty or embarrassed, thereby making the helping behavior at least partially if not entirely dependent on morally suspect motives like a desire to eliminate his guilt.⁷⁰

Having said this, the experimental data on guilt and helping is compatible with the existence of a *few* people who might have the virtue of compassion to some degree. It turned out that 15% of controls still stopped to help pick up the computer cards in Konečni's study, and

⁷⁰ One qualification should be noted here. Researchers have repeatedly found a positive correlation between guilt and empathy. If it turns out that (i) by focusing the agent on the harm caused to others by his or her wrong action, feelings of guilt will in some instances *give rise to* empathetic feelings for another's suffering or misfortune, and if (ii) Batson's empathy-altruism hypothesis is correct, *then* motivation to help which arises from empathy for the other person's situation, rather than directly from one of the four guilt-produced desires in section two, would typically be altruistic and so be compatible with compassionate motivation. But even here it is unlikely that *all* cases of guilt-influenced helping are mediated by empathy, rather than just some. And even if all were, that would still not call into question claims (a*) and (b*) above. For more on guilt and empathy, see Tangney 1995: 131-133 and Tangney et al. 2007a: 350-351.

16% of controls called attention to the torn bag in Regan's study. Indeed the existence of a few, rather than many compassionate people might be just what we would expect given our ordinary experience of the world and the course of human history.

Let us end this section by returning to global helping traits. It should be apparent that what we have said about guilt and embarrassment can be readily integrated into the following framework:



As we said, when a trigger is not present, subjects will typically not help perform even simple helping tasks. However, when triggered, GHTs causally increase the frequency of cross-situational consistent and iteratively stable helping behavior. These claims are in line with the patterns of helping behavior we have seen for guilt and embarrassment.⁷¹

Finally, this discussion helps to clarify the distinctive nature of my positive account of character traits pertaining to helping. By positing *global* traits, such a view is clearly distinct from the global trait eliminativism of Harman and Doris. At the same time, we just have seen in

⁷¹ Furthermore, we can unpack what a GHT would look like in the case of embarrassment. Suppose the fourth, embarrassment-relief model is correct. Then an agent with a GHT which pertains to embarrassment might have a cluster of mental states such as the following:

- (a) Beliefs about the relationship between helping others and various personal costs, such as lost time, money, alternative activities, and so on.
- (b) Beliefs about the relationship between helping others and various social reactions, such as improved self-image, approval, gratitude, praise, and so forth.
- (c) Beliefs about how these various personal costs and social reactions contribute towards alleviating the agent's feelings of embarrassment.
- (d) A motive to help when doing so will contribute towards alleviating the feelings of embarrassment, and a motive to not help when doing so will perpetuate or worsen the feelings of embarrassment.

It should be clear why, on this model, helping behavior would be augmented when the agent is experiencing feelings of embarrassment and takes the right kind of helping opportunities to be available. And the same could be said about guilt as well.

(a*) through (b*) above that the pattern of helping pertaining to guilt and embarrassment is incompatible in three fundamental respects from that of a truly compassionate person. Thus there should be a clear difference between the following two statements:

- (i) Many people have the trait of compassion to some degree and not a global helping trait.
- (ii) Many people have a global helping trait to some degree and not the trait of compassion.

My view is that the social psychology literature casts serious doubt on (i), but does not undermine (ii). Thus I take my view to be a legitimate alternative to the Aristotelian approach. Admittedly, many contemporary Aristotelians might themselves reject (i) and instead only accept this weaker claim:

- (i*) Only a few people have the trait of compassion to some degree and not a global helping trait.

And this is a claim that I have no reason to reject and indeed find plausible; furthermore even a global trait eliminativist like Doris has admitted that he is happy to accept a claim like (i*).⁷² The Aristotelian would thereby be conceding that she has no story having to do with the possession of virtues which either explains or predicts much of the helping behavior that most people *actually* exhibit.⁷³

⁷² See Doris 2002: 60, 65.

⁷³ This paper is an expanded version of my 2009a, which examined the relationship between guilt and helping. For very helpful comments I am grateful to Jessie Lee Miller.

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