

**Dustin Peone, *Shame, Fame, and the Technological Mentality*, New York: Lexington Books, 2021, 194 pp., \$95.00, ISBN 978-1-7936-4222-6**

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A key theme in Dustin Peone's work, *Shame, Fame and the Technological Mentality*, is that when human life is exposed to the world without the protection of privacy and security, its vital quality is destroyed. He raises the concern that today we see the world through the lens of materialism and techniques which undermine the realm of human behavior. The technologies of today, particularly computer technologies, are no longer mere supplements to human organs but their replacements. He argues that technology controls the direction of civilization today.

For Peone, the computer replaces the organic functions of the human brain and does so with much greater efficiency. Technology has leveled human talent and transformed the manner in which human beings interact with and relate to one another. While he notes the obvious increase in the material standard of life that technology has delivered, he presents the view that, as a consequence, our current technological mentality is replacing our social culture to such an extent that the contemporary world is one of post-culture.

Peone argues that the realm of human behavior, which is not governed directly by the legal system but by socially accepted norms, is the key constitutive element of society. The philosophy of the ancients placed great emphasis on the sense of real social utility and social virtue. Peone proposes that historical fame was an honor that extended beyond local boundaries and affirmed one in one's course of action. It reinforced one's sense of pride and encouraged further endeavor, feelings that socialize. The idea of immortal fame served as a positive modifier. From the dawn of civilization, the great heroes and famous humans were centers according to which a tribe or society could orient itself. Individuals filled these roles through their character and personal excellence.

Myth and storytelling supported the necessary culture for the continued advancement of societies. This historical realm was policed by shame and character. Shame acted as a negative modifier of social behavior and isolated one from society. Peone proposes that these traditional constitutive elements of social behavior have been abandoned, and shares Vico's concern that once this stage has been reached, the likely outcome is the dissolution of society.

The observation is made that many people today seem to view shame and fame as outworn ideas. Peone suggests that today we may be shameless people with no regard to the things that once mattered to Western societies: courage, honor, good form. Thus, the sense of shame has lost much of its power to modify behavior. Similarly, the connection between fame and virtue is severed and fame no longer results in real social benefit. Fame simply becomes an end in itself and is the reward for promoting not the ethos of the integrated community, but the ethos of the individual personality.

Communication technologies, particularly social networking, are exponentially increasing the subversion of shame and fame. For Peone, the hyperreality of social media is the height of shamelessness, as the Internet allows individuals to impose their own personas upon a community of uncritical, passive human beings. He questions the employment of technology to make it increasingly easy to attain fame without any basis in personal excellence. "The heroes manufactured by the culture industry, whether film stars, pop stars, political stars, or otherwise, personify the satisfaction of personal avarice and acquisitiveness and do nothing more."<sup>71</sup> In the contemporary world, fame is a reinforcer only of asocial and anti-social individuality. People of great spirit are irrelevant antiquities. While this fame is an index of the group's approbation, it does not carry moral authority.

Peone briefly puts forward two important considerations which warrant far greater development within the text. Firstly, this is something we need to own. As human beings, we have designed, built, and continued to develop the Internet. The Internet meets our existential need for recognition – it allows us to be seen and this expands our being.

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<sup>71</sup> Dustin Peone, *Shame, Fame, and the Technological Mentality* (Minneapolis: Lexington Books, 2021), 81.

Unaddressed is the question whether the Internet is only the enabler: is this a latent demand or something totally new?

The second consideration is that we may not realize the personal cost of these developments. The rise of social media marks the acceleration of the utter breakdown between the public and private spheres. Private life, instead of standing on its own autonomous merits, is now subject to comparison. Peone suggests that the person whose life is entirely public cannot cultivate the inner life, as the anonymous gaze of the other becomes much more intense and omnipotent. The technological society we are constructing is conducive to the success of the sociopath. Pathological narcissism is the psychological explanation for the allure of fame today. It promotes self-absorption and perverts the nature of human relationships by becoming the medium of human interaction, the medium of interpersonal life.

Peone offers two reasons for the degradation of our acute sensitivity to shame and false claims to fame. The first is technological progress, which is covered in sufficient depth. The second is intellectual enlightenment, which receives only brief coverage. No other historical phenomena are discussed. Naturally, given the title of the book, the focus is on technological society. However, more than just this is likely to influence the impact of Peone's proposals for determining the way forward.

Peone argues that new forms of control are needed and seems to offer three options. Firstly, the role of the philosopher is to give direction to the sense of shame so that all good men and women today can undertake the difficult task to resuscitate the sense of shame. Secondly, we must strive to create a new situation in which technology is once more an extension of man rather than man an extension of technology. We must instead insist that there are other modes of thought, other systems of value and other logics than the technical one. If we wish to build a sanctuary for ourselves in technological society, we must cultivate the virtues of prudence and humor as both depend on memory, imagination, and invention. A tantalizing third option is the question: are there other ways of seeing the world which stand on their own ground? If the current form of society is changing, what is the next stage of the human condition in the modern world?