Temperance, Temptation, and Silence

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Introduction

While philosophy has always concerned itself with truth and so, to the degree truth demands, with truthfulness, it has not always taken this to imply two views taken for granted in much recent moral and political philosophy. Straight-off one might think truthfulness one virtue among others, subject as all are to the real if sometimes hazy limits of common human decency, but in that case one would not have grasped what truthfulness has come to mean for many. Today we are accustomed to see the celebration of truthfulness as the paramount virtue. This is *radical truthfulness,* and it involves first, the utter refusal of deception, and second, the demand that all moral and political beliefs be fit to survive publicity. Bernard Williams calls the former the requirement of transparency, the latter rationalism.[1] The desire for transparency is the desire that personal and social life not rest in some essential way on avoidable misunderstanding. False consciousness and the politics of the 'Noble Lie', deception and self-deception, lies and secrecy, all stand condemned. Rationalism goes a step further, insisting on behalf of truthfulness not only on freedom from the errors of misunderstanding, but that all that goes into personal and social life be, in principle, explicitly stateable; be such that it honours, at least in implication, the power of *Public Reason*. Rationalism commits us to the view that there is nothing which goes into moral and political life which may not be brought, and quite properly, into the light of reason. It is what George Orwell celebrates when he aims to praise Ghandi by writing:

> One feels of him that there was much that he did not understand, but not that there was anything that he was frightened of saying or thinking.[2]

[1] Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1985), pp. 100–101.

[2] Quoted in Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil: an absolute conception* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1990), p. 194.

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In this essay I raise a question both about the demand for transparency and about the demands of rationalism to argue that the attachment to radical truthfulness has blinded us to an important technique of virtue; a blindness that has thereby committed us to a conception of moral life that is, paradoxically, itself untrue to experience—at least, the experience of many of us. As well as the favoured strategies of explicitness, there are available those too of renunciation and withdrawal. The latter involve us in pursuing and sustaining a practice of *deliberative silence* about those purposes and ends which, as we see things, threaten us with corruption and the world with evil. It is one of the failings of the ethics of explicitness that in its eyes this manifestation of temperance and can only appear in the perverted form of self-deception, rather than as an exercise of false imagination in the service of virtue.

I do not mean in this to present myself as some sort of pessimistic romantic, nor a kind of subterranean Catholic, and certainly not as prophet of a new illiberal 'Dark Age', though I am aware some will take what I have to say in one, if not all, these ways. There are two points here. The first is that I am not, as is the rationalist's proclivity, arguing a universalist case. I am not saying that the strategies of explicitness the Enlightenment encouraged are, always, and of their nature, morally and psychologically mistaken or pernicious. I am saying that they are by no means the whole story, and that while for some, and in some circumstances, they may well work and be sufficient, as the whole story they involve a dogmatic emptying out of (the possibilities of) our moral lives. In particular, those people for whom *evil* has a phenomenological reality will often see explicitness as a threat, and not an aid to virtue. The second point is that *I am not rejecting the strict demands of truthfulnes*. It would be a mistake to read these thoughts as involving the defense and recommendation of 'blind prejudice', censorship or theological dogma. It is precisely the concern for truthfulness and opposition to prejudice that makes it important that our understanding in these matters not be tainted with its own arrogant prejudice. We should hesitate before turning the virtue of truthfulness into a weapon of indiscriminate and public intrusion. As a virtue truthfulness is a constituent element of practical wisdom, not the weapon of a ferocious cleverness. If we value truthfulness as a virtue, so our nature as truth tellers, then, from the point of view of practical wisdom, and however we end up balancing the demands of explicitness and renunciation, it and we deserve respect, not irresponsible and unlimited exploitation.

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On Knowing Thyself

Should we desire to know ourselves? And to what degree? The first question is answered by virtue of our enquiry. Unlike Nietzsche's Homeric Heroes we are more than surfaces of 'noble' spontaneity. We have depths and are often a mystery to ourselves. It is just our desire to obviate that mystery which sets the problem. There remains then the question of *degree*. Our nature as self-reflective beings, able always to surprise and subvert settled expectations, means we cannot hope to know everything there is to know about ourselves, if (but not) only because we would not put up with any so-called 'final account'. But we can know—we can set ourselves to know—more or less about ourselves. The question becomes whether or not the injunction to know oneself is good advice? I mean *good moral* and, for the philosopher concerned to understand the moral life, *good philosophical* advice? May it not be the case morally, and for a philosophy that concerns itself with morality, that on occasions the thing to do is to *refuse* knowledge of oneself? May it even be that failure to refuse such knowledge; the insistence that everything come up into the light; sometimes blinds us to the real nature of our moral predicament? Perhaps some things are such—are, as it were, so *bright*—that to attend to them means other things which should be taken into account are drowned out in the glare. On the other side, perhaps the capacity to appreciate what, morally, there is to be appreciated, is inhibited or damaged to the degree one is the sort of person who thinks (or is willing and able to think) certain thoughts. The thought is that evil is risky in that it may fatally obscure the good, and that it may lead one into corruption.

There are those whose moral sensibility makes little or no room for evil or for corruption, and it would be wrong to think this always mistaken. Even so, recognizing that for many people there is this room, opens our eyes to the complexity of moral experience and helps us to better understand what it means both to celebrate and to oppose the demands of radical truthfulness. The point is that those people who find room for evil and corruption aim at a special virtue—*temperance*—and aim at it not through an assertion of the will, but through the way of deliberative silence. From this vantage-point it is a common-place that to contemplate evil freely is to bare oneself to the dangerously fascinating. To recognize this possibility is not only to appreciate the need to pause before accepting the rationalistic demand that we unearth absolutely everything for inspection (it is possible to think that there is more

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to life than the endless introspection this promises to involve us in); it is to suspect we have been too hard, morally and epistemically, on the sorts of false imagination we may engage in in moral life concerning who we are and what we want. Some will find the suggestion peculiar. It is an axiom of moral and philosophical health as they see it that all falsity is to be unearthed in the interest of the individual and of others. I cannot see the sense in this, not anyway if by 'interest' is meant to the moral and cognitive benefit of the individual, or of others, or of the decent and wise community.

For instance: imagine a person suspects, perhaps has even come to know, that they bear aberrant or perverse desires, and let us suppose they are not at all happy with this discovery. What are they to do? One strategy they might pursue in dealing with this is to go to a Priest or Psycho-Analyst or Close Friend, or simply to 'Go In There Alone', and set about 'unearthing' things so that these desires might be 'confronted', seen for what they are, and—hopefully—'overcome'. I am willing to allow this might be the right choice. But however that is, there is another path. In religious language this path is called *The Way of Negation*.[3] Here our person denies the duties of transparency and sets about living a different life without initiating, or thinking it right to initiate, any sort of confrontation. They may feel that to think the problematic thoughts, let alone expose them to another, is to take the first step to corruption, for it is to allow oneself to contemplate that which is evil; or they may simply refuse to accord evil the respect implicit in recognition, involving as it does, the reality-conferring gift of acknowledgment. Instead they may aim at witnessing the life, in their life, of the *temperate* person.

[3] Under rationalism this method of attaining virtue is inevitably misunderstood as an active denial, but its religious meaning is quite different. It is not a matter of denial, but a disposition of being. What is important is our way of being in the world, not that we have a way of being for the world. The negation lies in our abhorrence of being (of being in the world with) evil, not in denying that evil is evil, or in denying, case by case, that we are subject to evil desires. Thus Simone Weil, in *Waiting on God*, (London: Fontana, 1959), p. 21, writes:

> 'I think that it is useless to fight directly against natural weaknesses. One has to force oneself to act as though one did not have them in circumstances where a duty makes it imperative; and in the ordinary course of life one has to know these weaknesses, and strive to turn them to good purpose.'

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On Temperance

'Temperance' *(sophrosyne)* is a term that is out of philosophical fashion, though not as a virtue entirely out of practice. It is the former because it presupposes a conception of the virtuous self as an *achievement,* the result of a process through time, a narrative effort, which is out of key with the momentarist preoccupations of modern philosophical conceptions of the self. Those preoccupations begin with the Cartesian view of the self as existing in and through its acts of self-awareness. While Descartes viewed the self as an unchanging and simple substance in which mental content transparently inheres, it is a substance and a transparency which validates its existence on a basis of momentary awareness. It is a matter of *being* self-conscious. This momentarist focus is refined in the Humean and Kantian conceptions of the self. In Hume's 'bundle' view the self-as-simple-substance is repudiated. The self turns out to be nothing more than a spatio-temporally located set of occurent psychological states. In moral theory the consequence of this is to commit us to a strong internalism for reasons for action, and so, in ethics, to encourage doctrines like utilitarianism and emotivism which emphasize the role of occurrent states, and particularly the place of pleasure (this because pleasure may be understood as a motivating force independently of further ends). Kant, on the other hand, while he accepted the empiricist conception of the empirical and heteronomous self, argued that the internalism it sustains opens the door to amoralism. Morality requires that beneath this Humean surface there is a changeless and continuously present *Noumenal* or Rational Self. In this partial return to Cartesianism the momentarist presupposition surfaces as the felt necessity that the rational self be able to make good on its directives *whatever* the present psychological state of the agent. For the Kantian moral theory is no good unless it can be brought home to a potentially recalcitrant self that, empirically considered, is a sequence of heteronomous spatio-temporal slices. Empiricism and Kantianism alike, in viewing the self through the categories of momentary man, have insuperable difficulties in making sense of essentially temporal failures and successes, thus in making the right sense of the virtues and vices. These, of course, are dispositions of character, and while some dispositions have a categorical basis (e.g., fragility), not so here. It is no accident that traditionally much moral reflection concerned itself with the *cultivation* of the virtues. We are not born virtuous or otherwise so much as moral innocents on whom time and actions inscribe moral concerns. For Aristotle, and

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for those who champion the Way of Negation, our *behaviour* is crucial to this development.

> Some men are made temperate and gentle, others profligate and passionate, the former by conducting themselves in one way, the latter by conducting themselves in another, in situations in which their feelings are involved.[4]

Mere behaviour, of course, is not all there is to it. To possess a virtue is not merely to act in a certain way, though acting that way may be the first step; it is to act on a certain sort of reason—the ethically relevant reasons in these circumstances—and our perception of these presupposes the development of a certain *sensibility*. All this is clear when we think about our own lives. To think deliberatively, to think about our life and our actions, forces the achievement conception of the self on us as the plainest, and most difficult, common-sense.

As Aristotle describes the temperate person they are someone for whom considerations to which otherwise they are vulnerable are now 'silent' to their will. *Comprehensible*, yes—the temperate person is not the moral prig or vapid innocent who finds the grounds of temptation unintelligible—but not as something which might figure *as they are* in *their* deliberations.[5] Temperance on this account involves the attainment of a certain motivational peace, the creation of an island of deliberative silence where before one found temptation and evil. So the Gautama Buddha:

> By strenuous effort, by self-control, by temperance, let the wise man make himself an island which the flood cannot overwhelm.[6]

And so Thomas A Kempis:

> The man whose inner life is well-ordered and disposed is not troubled by the strange and perverse ways of others; for a man is

[4] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 2, Ch. 1.

[5] I am suggesting that in temperance we see a division in practical reasoning between that which is a deliberative possibility (i.e., a possibility for me); and that which is a possibility of human action. Of course the temperate person is a human being, but in this matter, not this sort of human being.

[6] Quoted in C. E. M. Joad (ed.), *Philosophy and Ethics,* (London: International University Society, 1951), p. 253. Cf. John McDowell, 'Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume 52* (1978); and 'Virtue and Reason', *The Monist* **62** (1979).

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> hindered and distracted by such things only so far as he allows himself to be concerned by them.[7]

In developing the account of temperance these passages suggest I shall have to extend the notions of dishonesty and truthfulness beyond the discursive paradigm intrinsic to rationalism; in particular I shall speak of 'being true to oneself' and of one's 'true self'. In temperance what was once a deliberative possibility for one is so no longer, and the question is how, deliberatively, this reduction of deliberative possibilities, is achieved. Here I take a hint from Aristotle. The trick, he says, is to conduct oneself a certain way, and by that to *become* the sort of person who, from their second, developed, nature, 'naturally' goes on in that fashion. This way of describing matters makes it apparent that if we are lucky enough to end up as one of the temperate it will only be after (re)shaping our lives through a determined practice of false imagination.

If we 'become ... temperate by performing temperate actions', and we are prone to intemperance, then the strategy of resistance I am discussing involves a certain *renunciation*, where this means a purposeful withdrawal from the full content (though not the full complexity) of our psychological lives. It is a matter of getting our inner life in good order, and the method is to withdraw *all* concern, including that expressed in explicit denial, for our troubling desires so that we shall not be hindered and distracted even by their idea. The method of negation is not to be associated with the naked deception rightly berated as 'double-mindedness', wherein, for the sake of moral or psychological comfort at the same time as the pleasure to be had from indulging the evil in us, we simply succeed in splitting our attention as the occasion suits. True, in pursuing temperance one must, and to oneself, be *silent* about desires one indeed has—it is that one has the desires which makes the task so urgent and which makes room for the notion of false imagination—but rather than the self-deception of indulgent weakness and for the purpose of easy satisfactions, this is a form of imagination, so I want to say, of strength in the service of, and driven by, (a desire to preserve) one's 'true self'. It is not so much an attempt to selectively hide one's nature from oneself as a matter of preserving that in one which makes the desires abhorrent and inspires one to self-revulsion and determined opposition. To give it what only appears as a paradoxical formulation: *We must 'deceive' ourselves in order to remain true to ourselves*. The inverted commas are there because there is no

[7] Thomas A Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ,* tr. Leo Sherley-Price, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p. 69.

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question here, as there is in ordinary cases of self-deception, of *insincerity*. The Cartesian conception of the self as inherently self-transparent means that any withdrawal from the full content of psychological experience is a form of insincerity, but there is another meaning of sincerity associated especially with aesthetic judgment. Croce speaks of sincerity here as a matter of 'fullness of truth and expression',[8] and understood this way it characterizes the aim and end of the virtue of temperance.

The idea of one's 'true self' and, in the active sense, of 'being true to oneself', may seem mysterious, but it is nothing more and nothing less than a determined holding to that virtue and that good in life which one understands the desires to threaten. Its reality is attested in and through our capacity to recognize those desires as aberrant. Indeed it may be precisely in and through that recognitional act—an act which, being what it is, already constitutes a certain withdrawal—that a person comes to know, and knowingly foster, their true self. I think this A Kempis' meaning when he writes:

> We often do not know what we can bear, but temptation reveals our true nature.[9]

We all distinguish between that style of feeling and acting which we experience as a matter of our 'being true to ourselves', and our compliance with those desires, actions and thoughts, which we experience as a matter of self-betrayal.[10] There may be difficulty in making sense of these experiences in the language of a philosophical thought which has begun by severing its roots in our real concerns with who we are and what we are doing and how we are to live with ourselves, but this is a problem for that approach. There is nothing unintelligible in speaking of a person desperately holding to their true self, not even, but especially if the result of failure promises to be that total corruption in which it is lost for good.

The idea of utter corruption and the sense in fearing it causes difficulties for subjectivist accounts of value,[11] but it is a fear that haunts many a life, and it helps us to a better understanding of the

[8] Benedetto Croce, *Aesthetics,* (:), p. 53.

[9] A Kempis, op. cit., p. 41. Cf. Browning in *Bishop Blougram's Apology:*

'When the fight begins within himself,
A man's worth something.'

[10] So, for instance, we speak of 'forgiving oneself'; an idiom that only makes sense to the extent that we (see we) have *harmed* ourself.

[11] But not all. Cf. David Wiggins, 'A Sensible Subjectivism', in his *Needs, Values, Truth* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

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notion of the true self. For part at least of the horror of utter corruption and central to the fear of falling into it (outside horror at the sheer evil that one will bring into the world), is that what one will be responsible for (the evil) is something one will no longer be in a position to recognize *as* evil. One will not merely suffer to do evil, one will be afflicted with it; will be nothing more than an instrument in its hands.[12] Just so, the attempt to keep faith with one's true self is in part the attempt to preserve that in us which is capable of recognizing the real character of our actions and desires. The corruption involved in such a loss is that one is cast adrift in a world now denuded of the sense and meaning we once knew it to bear. This sense, this meaning, is not a matter of failing to comprehend this or that empirical fact; it is not a piece of information that has gone missing as when one forgets where one has left the front-door key. When Jesus is reported to have said of those who condemned him to death, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do'[13], he is not to be taken as asking that his killers be excused on the grounds that are ignorant as to his identity as the Son of God (as if the point were that, knowing that, they would not crucify *him*), though to be sure they were ignorant of that; rather he is calling on his Father to see and with pity understand that these men have so far fallen from the moral understanding they claim for themselves that they do not know even what it is to put a *man* to death. The horror of their corruption lies in the blindness that has descended on them, leaving them unable to comprehend who they are and just what they are doing.

I spoke of renunciation and withdrawal in characterizing the path to the deliberative silence of temperance, and sought to distinguish this from double-mindedness. I did this to make clear that the deception involved in being true to oneself is not and cannot be a matter, as it were, of keeping a *secret* from oneself, as I take it is implied in the psycho-analytic notion of suppression.[14] A person

[12] Cf. Simone Weil, 'Human Personality', in *Simone Weil: an anthology,* Siam Miles (ed.), (London: Virago, 1986), p. 92:

> Affliction is a different thing from suffering. Affliction is a device for pulverizing the soul; the man who falls into it is like a workman who gets caught up in a machine. He is no longer a man but a torn and bloody rag on the teeth of a cog-wheel.

[13] Luke 23:34.

[14] Nor that of repression. In the cases I am discussing, repression is merely supression that has suceeded in converting itself into the pathological symptoms of the personally unreachable. In such cases publicity may have a prolusory role in showing us (again) where the real difficulty lies.

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cannot make headway by simply hiding the dangerous desires and thoughts. What is hidden cries out to be discovered, and the only thing to do to avoid the empty ritual of rediscovery is actively to will one's eyes to look elsewhere. It is true it takes *will-power* (determination, courage, steadfastness, and so forth) to become as the temperate, but this is not intelligible as a momentarist achievement, the product alone of a sequence of assertions, of *acts* of will. It is true that there are things to be done and things not to be done, and that this is something we must will; but we do it in the course of sticking to a way (our *true* way) of living and seeing, rather than fighting momentarist battles against this or that aberrant desire. To begin with there may be plenty of that, but virtue is not a victory borne of momentary struggle, it is a determined setting oneself to the course.

Suppression is the tool of momentary man, and it involves an endless practice of re-assertion, for there is a continuing need to *distract* oneself. In its brittlest form this involves that practice of ferocious denouncement which aims in its vigour to foreclose forever on the suspicion that one, *of all people,* harbours such secret desires. We are all familiar with instances in which persons insist on the outrageous evil of a person or activity, and sometimes vigorous condemnation may be just what is called for; but there are all too many cases which insinuate the thought, '*Methinks he doth protest too much*'. To have a secret from oneself is to possess a permanent source of fascination; a fascination that only grows stronger the more often and forcefully it finds—'needs' to find—expression in overt acts of denial. To have any hope we cannot deal with the evil in us this way. We must think and act as one for whom the possibility of such desires *does not even arise*. In this sense—and in this sense alone—we are right to speak, as does John McDowell, of 'renunciation, without struggle'.[15] What is called for is an exercise of imaginative self-discipline that extends over and informs our deliberative understanding. It is the moral mimicry of a natural turning aside. We must become persons for whom certain fundamental exis-

[15] McDowell, 'Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?', op. cit., p. 27.

(But what of sublimation? It is my suggestion—if one must talk this way—that sublimation is simply the strategy of overcoming evil temperance exemplifies. The evil desires energy is controverted to the purposes of preserving and strengthening the true self. (Just as the Indian myth has it that by ingesting one's enemies, one thereby assumes their valour, their strength and bravery.))

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tential modalities have vanished from our deliberative view, leaving no residue, but, simply, *silence*. This remaking of ourselves as our true self has a quality of deliberative transcendence which leads some to speak of the pursuit of virtue in the radically oppositional terms of traditional religious imagery. I have mentioned A Kempis, but consider too F. H. Bradley on the self-realizational strategy temperance implies:

> How can the human-divine ideal ever be my will? The answer is, Your will it never can be as the will of your private self, so that your private self should become wholly good. To that self you must die, and by faith be made one with that ideal. You must resolve to give up your will, as the mere will of this or that man, and you must put your whole self, your entire will, into the will of the divine. That must be your one self, as it is your true self; that you must hold to both with thought and will, and all other you must renounce.[16]

Just how natural, even essential, is religious imagery or the idea of transcendence to (the philosophy of) virtue, I leave untouched for the moment, except to remark on its seeming indispensability if we are to keep any sort of faith with the complexities of moral experience.[17] I am aware too that the use I have made of writers like Buddha, A Kempis and Bradley will have done little in the eyes of those of a convinced rationalist bent to establish my case for this method for attaining virtue.[18] For them, I know, it will seem the grossest fantasy. In response I offer these words from Lewis Carroll, 'Why', said the Dodo, 'the best way to explain it is to do it.'

[16] F. H. Bradley, 'Concluding Remarks', *Ethical Studies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), p. 325.

[17] Cf. Roy Holland, *Against Empiricism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980). And Lloyd Reinhardt, 'On Some Gaps in Moral Space: Reflections on Forests and Feelings', in D. Mannison, M. McRobbie and R. Routley (eds), *Environmental Philosophy,* Monograph Series No. 2, Department of Philosophy, Research School of the social sciences, Australian National University, (1980).

[18] I want to make it clear that I am far from embracing all of A Kempis. I reject out of hand his everyday anti-intellectualism as expressed in such words as:

> '...for what concern to us are such things as *genera* and *species*?' (op. cit., p. 30).

My claim is only that, more than our contemporary moral theorists, he offers us a way into an important but neglected aspect of moral psychology. He helps us comprehend what goes into temperance, and into the movement from intemperance to temperance.

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On Moral Imagination

Thus far I have been speaking of imagination concerning *who one is* as a moral technique in the service of virtue; but before this, and the source of the need for this style of imagining, there is the imagination which acquaints us with particular possibilities of choice and decision. This is the style of imagination which can be termed in a broad (and non-reductive) sense 'strategic', and it sets out before us possible courses of action we might take, where who we might be to face these possibilities is not—or not yet—an issue.

It was this style of imagination the philosophical moralists of the Enlightenment focused on, and they were right to insist that on this level there are regrettable closures of moral imagination. Least seriously agents, actions and motives, may be 'pedestrian' or 'conventional', 'dull' or 'plodding' and so forth, in which case we rank them morally deficient and may moderate our impulses to blame. More seriously the closure may be a matter of vicious prejudice. As a possible example of the first style of closure consider the local alderman who cannot see how someone like him ('trustee of the public good', 'upstanding citizen', 'pillar of society') can provide any sort of support for a daughter who has left home, has now a desperate need for the calmness heroin brings, and who can only finance that peace through prostitution. He might see everything and be simply vicious, but he might simply lack, even lack the resources for, the imaginative understanding of his and his daughter's position; of how mutually they have got where they have, and how now that mutuality might serve to get them out. The second and more obviously reprehensible style of closure is exhibited by our myriad and various dogmatists; blinded either by an obsession with their own and others moral rectitude, or by an indolent and sensuous indulgence of prejudiced hatreds.

These closures of moral imagination are both regrettable and reprehensible. What the Enlightenment tended to overlook however, thus overlooking the strategy for resisting evil I sketched above, is that there is also the vice of reprehensible prolixity; of the imaginatively *unleashed*. On the more physical plane there is the example of the sensualist, whose restless imagination drives them further into perversity and the grotesque.[19] Here perhaps one may locate De Sade. On a more complex level I mention out of myriad possibilities just two styles of temptation. The first finds expression in the multifarious varieties of moral masochism and moral sadism. It is

[19] Cf. Buddha, op. cit., p. 233:

'As the rain pours into the illthatched house, so lust pours into the undisciplined mind.'

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the way of those obsessed with the endless possibilities of humiliation and degradation life offers. On the most brutal level the sadist is the torturer, with his all too frequently realized fantasies of relating to others through rituals of pain and intrusion, degradation and destruction. On a more refined level there is the 'mordant wit', who takes exquisite delight in the moral squirming others may be induced to perform. Its more pathetic masochistic expression has found fine literary representation in the imaginative moral victim found in some of the writings of (among others) Kafka and Roth; a person able to find, almost out of nothing, new possibilities for shameful behaviour and for novel humiliations.[20] The second style of temptation lies in the susceptibility to 'Fourierism'; to grandiose utopian dreams of moral purity and political redemption innocent of the complexities and limitations context and history import. The utopian's feverish imagination invariably reflects a contemptuous attitude towards thinking sensitive to the details and limits of the given and the at hand, so a contempt for real lives and real despair.

To appreciate the connection there exists between an overly prolix imagination and vulnerability to various forms of temptation is to see that publicity in the sense either of self-revelation or public exposure is not always on the side of the angels. It may and often does serve virtue, but it may also give that part of the self which finds expression in the aberrant desires the advantage it needs to discipline us to compliance. Here again A Kempis is revealing:

> First there comes into the mind an evil thought: next, a vivid picture: then delight, and an urge to evil, and finally consent. In this way the Enemy gradually gains complete mastery ...[21]

To order these thoughts on imagination and temptation consider the case Bernard Williams briefly alludes to.[22] His concern is with the moral implications of publicity between persons, but the lesson holds equally for the intra-personal. So, imagine we are attending a company board meeting. We have a problem with an effective competitor who is slowly squeezing us from the market. The deliberative possibilities within which we conduct ourselves are different between the case in which the chairman opens things by saying, 'Well, I suppose we could have X killed! But lets put that aside from the

[20] Moral masochism often has, it seems, a connection with certain religious conceptions. For instance, ideas of personal unworthiness grounded in 'Original Sin', and of a God who misses out on absolutely nothing one does.

[21] A Kempis, op. cit., p. 41.

[22] Williams, op. cit., p. 185.

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start', and the case in which the chairman says nothing along these lines whatsoever. There is an obvious possibility present in the first case which thankfully is absent from the second. Even if the speaker ostensibly raised the idea as a piece of jocular whimsy and to condemn it utterly, still it has altered the space in which our deliberations take place simply in virtue of being allowed voice, whatever its putative inflection, in these circumstances. As we might put it: there are some things, in some circumstances, which *cannot* be said with a certain inflection, however hard the speaker tries to make it seem so.[23] Manifestly relevant to the purpose which controls our deliberations—getting the better of our competitor—it cannot help acquiring a certain motivational potency. In A Kempis' terms, first comes the thought whose evilness shines through any artful packaging, and which, given our predicament, we cannot help picturing as an effective solution to our difficulties. This solution as we picture it brings us a certain pleasure. It does so because we picture our difficulties *resolved,* and so it leads naturally into *anticipation*. Now we are practically orientated towards evil. Our anticipation founds the urge to evil and initiates the battle for consent. It is *tempting*. It is something we might succumb to. It is not simply a 'blackboard proposition', such as we often claim to make in classes of moral philosophy.

In Williams' example there is a prior and independent interest which the idea fits, but this will not be so clear cut in many cases. Allowing something to become public may itself suggest new purposes to an agent. These purposes will not arise *ex nihilo*; they will have some connection with our prior desires and interests; but they may add something quite new so that their intelligibility will be a matter mainly of rationalization.[24] It is for this reason that we need

[23] This incapacity of inflexional dissociation to distance oneself from one's words constitues, I suggest, one of the more infallible marks of evil. It is this too which makes the very thinking of some thoughts dangerous. Of course often the danger only becomes apparent after the thought, and by then it might well be too late. Sometimes it will be too late, but it may not be where the initial (and momentarist) defence of rejection is sutained by a continuing effort of directed attention and inattention. Will-power comes in here, and the challenge is that this presupposes already a certain ethic of achievement on the part of the individual, though the effort itself helps sustain and strengthen this ethic.

[24] This is part and parcel of our lives as narratives constrained by the search for meaning. The Humean view of reasons for action as necessarily *internal* reasons is not false so much as constrained by the unnecessarily restricted notions of rationality available under the momentarist framework. Reject that framework and to a large extent the internal/external division looks rather irrelevant, for there is so much to internal reasons not covered by Humeanism.

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to be very careful not only what we think about for ourselves, but also what we say to others. For example, someone—you, let us say—may be furious with another and be roundly denouncing them, but have no apparent intention of inflicting retribution. Then I point out to you that many people in your position would be inclined to do exactly that. You are struck, 'Yes, you're right!' you exclaim, 'I simply *have* to get back at him!' And now instead of resting content with bad mouthing your unfortunate fellow, you set about plotting his downfall. *Would that I had kept my mouth shut and you your ears closed*.

We may apply these ideas in locating the source of that moral outrage many experienced in the face of John Howard's actions in 1988 as Opposition Leader of the Liberal-National Party Coalition in Australia facing a tight Federal Election, in raising the question of a racialist immigration policy from political and community silence on grounds of the possibility of 'future community disharmony'. Howard defended himself from attack (much of it fired by the predictable spat of 'community disharmony' that ensued) by insisting he only brought the issue 'out into the open'; had no part or responsibility in the consequent disturbances; and insisted that his real motive in publicizing the 'problem' was to 'solve' it pre-emptively by allowing everyone to come to explicit agreement on its unacceptability. He insisted against moral 'slurs' that he personally was no racist, merely a brave and fearless thinker.

Well, perhaps. But he was also a major political figure charged with a certain responsibility for the forum of political debate in the community, and on this score he was, at best, careless and intemperate, at worst, corrupt. Corrupt if he raised the issue with the hope that it would flame a public expression of prejudice driven support for the Coalition; careless and intemperate in insisting on extending the forum of political and community debate beyond its tacitly acknowledged limits and into an area where overt prejudice found itself granted the rights of public expression. It is regrettable that moral philosophy has so exalted the brave and fearless 'Socratic' sceptic that it has lost all sight of, as it were, the duties and responsibilities of *moral ecology*. These are the duties and responsibilities Howard showed himself blind to. He was, as he showed himself to the community, no moral environmentalist. It is, I think, these ideas which account for Bob Hawke's reactions as Prime Minister.[25] To the apparent bewilderment of many he did not take

[25] I would like to thank William Grey for reminding me of Hawke's reaction.

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the opportunity to accuse Howard of racism, but instead contended that the real moral outrage of Howard's remarks lay in the fact that he was by no means of racist persuasion.

In the case of the person with aberrant desires the strategy of solitary and disciplined imaginative refashioning is powered by a concern not to become evil by thinking evil, or not to bring evil into the world by means of the gift of acknowledgement. But there is another case, interesting in itself. Lord Olivier said in an interview published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* a few years ago, that the reason why he, unlike most of his peers, resisted the energetic advances of Noel Coward, was not due to an abhorrence of homosexuality, but from the conviction that *for him* such an expression of sexuality would be 'damaging for my soul'. Now I don't know what Olivier meant by this, and I do not mean what follows to be a speculation to his meaning, I mean only that Olivier's words could find their place here.

We can imagine this case.[26] A person refuses such activity, while not being opposed to it as such—so not thinking it evil—on the grounds that for them it would be a choice (say) for the pleasures of narcissism, a withdrawal from the complexities of the human world with its experience of otherness and its perennial challenge to understand, into a now impoverished self, navel-gazing and lower, beset with the concomitant temptation for further all too easy 'exploration'. This would be a journey of self-discovery over before even it had begun. It would be a temptation to be resisted by withdrawal and renunciation, as, in a connected case, did St. Augustine to such effect.

In this case the necessity for a violation of transparency arises primarily from a concern to protect and preserve the *quality* of one's concern for the good, whereas in the other case it is an aversion to evil. But in both cases the call to transparency is the moral enemy, a point dramatized, I think, in the clear sightedness of the Devil in his temptation of Christ. It is worth pausing to reflect on this. Both Luke and Matthew report three temptations.[27] All are immensely attractive: to turn stones into bread after forty days without food (to establish economic justice); to assume total temporal power (to establish political justice); and to call up one's infallible aid (to relax, and to invoke external signs of one's Godhead to convince all of the

[26] One of the problems with Roger Scruton's *Sexual Desire* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986) is that he allows his obsession with this case to generalize across all who pursue homosexual activities.

[27] Luke, 4:1–13. Mattehew 4:1–10.

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truth). In themselves it seems all three invite no evil. Economic and political justice are good things! And what evil is there in leading persons to the truth? Why then did Jesus refuse? Why are these choices *temptations?* With the second there is an obvious reason. The grant of temporal power is conditional on ultimate subservience to the Devil, so the choice would be for evil. But for the two remaining the subtlety of the temptation lies in the point that evil will *not* result. As the *Interpreter's Bible* says, what the invitations threaten is to divert Jesus not from what is good, but from what for him is the highest good. He would have followers indeed, but for the wrong reasons. 'He could not take the short road to popularity.'[28] When Jesus dismisses the Devil with the words 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God', he is reminding us that while it may be true that we are committed to knowing ourselves, it is the beginning of moral wisdom to appreciate that sometimes that may include knowing what we are not, and are not meant to, cast our eyes upon. Even it seems, a being who knows all may not welcome their attention being directed to this or that piece of knowledge.

On Deliberation and Cohabitation

At this point I gesture at some thoughts of Donald Winnicott. Winnicott was a Psycho-Analyst, not a philosopher, but that does not mean he has nothing to say that is philosophical. Winnicott is one of the few psycho-analysts I know to defend 'the right not to communicate'.[29] He explains his rejection of psychiatric rationalism as a matter of defending and protecting that 'communication which is for ever silent'.[30] 'This was a protest from the core of me', he writes, 'to the frightening fantasy of being infinitely exploited ... it is *the fantasy of being found*'.[31] There is much here worth discussing,[32] but for the present I want only to ask why Winnicott

[28] *The Interpreter's Bible Vol. VIII,* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1952), p. 83.

[29] Donald Winnicott, 'Playing: a Theoretical Statement', in *Playing and Reality,* (London: Tavistock, 1971), p. 59

[30] Winnicott, 'Communicating and Not Communicating Leading to a Study of Certain Opposites', in *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development,* (London: Hogarth, 1965), p. 188.

[31] Winnicott, Playing, op. cit.

[32] Including the idea of that communication with oneself which is for ever silent, and which I think Winnicott means to characterize the dialogue founded in withdrawal we may engage in with our 'true self'.

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makes that striking connection between being exposed to the light of publicity, being 'found', and laying oneself open to 'infinite exploitation'? Let me quote from Hannah Arendt's essay, *Civil Disobedience*.

> In the *Gorgias,* Socrates does not address the citizens, as he does in the *Apology* and, in support of the *Apology,* in the *Crito*. Here Plato lets Socrates speak as the philosopher who has discovered that men have intercourse not only with their fellow men but also with themselves, and that the latter form of intercourse—my being with and by myself—prescribes certain rules for the former. These are the rules of conscience, and they are ... entirely negative. They do not say what to do; they say what not to do. They do not spell out certain principles for taking action; they lay down boundaries no act should transgress. They say: Don't do wrong, for then you will have to live together with a wrongdoer ... *existentially speaking, this dialogue, like all dialogues, requires that the partners be friends*.[33]

For our purpose the crucial point in this is the existential, so *practical* and *deliberative* condition of self-understanding; of, as Arendt says, 'inner discourse'. Arendt says it is *friendship,* which makes the idea of dialogue with perversity and aberrant desires rather alarming. As we might put it: *what sort of person has friends like that?!* For there are two voices here, as there must be if there is to be any sort of dialogue, and as there must be if we are to be tempted (and as there must be if double-mindedness is to attract). In that case our morally troubled person must get along with someone—no one else indeed but themselves—who has aberrant desires. I mean they must get along with themselves in the sense of being able to contemplate and enter into discussion with the sorts of things someone driven by those desires contemplates. Here is the idea of friendship: for what could induce someone to enter into discussion over matters they find abhorrent, unless they are being raised by a friend? Friendship in such a case implies some acceptance of the views of the other, at least of their legitimate expression, and so a partial compliance with their way of seeing things. The negative rule of conscience invoked here is surely that I have been defending: So: *do not set or force oneself to cohabit with evil such as this*. To ignore this injunction is to open oneself, one's true self, to the infinite exploitation of utter degradation the aberrant desires promise.

[33] Hannah Arendt, *Crises of the Republic,* (Harmondsworth: Pelican books, 1972). My italics.

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Conclusion

The argument mounted here has been intended to protect a crucial component of our moral lives from destruction at the hands of an unseeing, and interrogative, truthfulness. Such radical truthfulness may see us being, or becoming, untrue to ourselves; it may open us to evil and utter corruption. It is a truthfulness that takes a momentarist focus (insisting that whatever is there now, within us, come into the light) and ignores the foundations of virtue—at least, the foundations of virtue for many of us—in a concern that we be, and be truly, a certain kind of person. It is this concern—what I have called a concern with the protection, and being, of our 'true self'—which opens the strategy for dealing with temptation through the practise of renunciation. Such a practise aims at temperance, a temperance realized in the attainment of deliberative silence before the otherwise, the previously, attractive.

Deliberative silence on such matters is not to be understood as a matter of willed denial or, consequently, of self-deception or doublemindedness. It is rather a disposition of being. What is important is our way of being *in* the world, not that we have a way of being for the world. Thus the element of negation is not a matter of willful conflict with reality—'I reject you! Be gone from me!'—but of a non-confrontational silence before it—'There you are. But not with me.' The possibility of such deliberative silence lets us see that we must distinguish between those things which are deliberative possibilities *for me*, and those things which are deliberatively possible *for agents of the kind I most undoubtedly am*. The temperate person is not self-blinded to the complexities of our psychological lives, and nor do we have to assume that they are *naïf* like creatures, all shallow goodness and little else. They may be—they are—very deep, in the way it seems the Buddha was deep, and in the way St. Augustine so movingly tried to be, even perhaps became, deep. Nothing that is human need be a mystery to them, but much that is human is not for them. They have passed it by, not denied its existence. And they have passed it by because not to have done so would have meant living with someone—no one else indeed, than themselves—they cannot honestly honour or respect. This is something moral philosophy ought to help us to illuminate, not hide from us through a preoccupation with self-revelation and self-denial. So, as God is reputed to have written (*Ecclus. XXXIX,* 1–3.) 'Commune with your own heart, and in your chamber, and be still.'

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