What We Are

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We human beings have little comprehension of what we are. The difficulty is not that we are ignorant. It's that we are self-deceiving. We systematically keep ourselves from understanding ourselves. We don't do this deliberately. In order to do it deliberately we would, as Jean-Paul Sartre once wrote, have to "know the truth very exactly in order to conceal it [from ourselves] more carefully." Instead, we do it by means of sin—by going against our honest feelings of what's right and wrong for us to do.

I'll give an example. Marty was lying in bed, wrapped in the comfort of a deep sleep. He was and still is a young, ambitious businessman concerned about his career ladder and preoccupied most of the time with corporate assignments. As he slept, the four-month-old baby began to cry in the nursery just off the master bedroom. Marty roused, lifted his head, and looked at the clock. 2:30. His wife, Carolyn, lying next to him in her curlers and sleeping mask, wasn't stirring. Marty told this story:

> At that moment, I had a fleeting feeling, a feeling that if I got up quickly I might be able to see what was wrong before my wife would have to wake up. I don't think it was even a thought because it went too fast for me to say it out in my mind. It was a feeling that this was something I really ought to do. But I didn't do it. I didn't go right back to sleep either. It bugged me that my wife wasn't waking up. I kept thinking it was her job. She has her work and I have mine. Mine starts early. She can sleep in. Besides, I was exhausted. Besides that, I never really know how to handle the baby. Maybe she was lying there waiting for me to get up. Why did I have to feel guilty when I'm only trying to get some sleep so I can do well on the job? She was the one who wanted to have this kid in the first place.

When Marty failed to do what he felt he ought to do, he betrayed himself. He may also have violated whatever moral principles he learned at home, at school, or at church, but that's irrelevant. Whether or not others expected him to share caretaking responsibilities with his wife, he expected himself to do it, at least on this occasion; it was his own expectation of himself that he betrayed.

It's impossible to betray oneself without seeking to excuse or justify oneself. Marty rationalized. He became irritated with the situation and with his wife. Childishly he tried to place blame elsewhere. In the process of betraying himself, Marty began to live a lie, the net effect of which was to excuse himself in his own mind for what was happening. One of the ways we betray ourselves is to do just what Marty was doing—to insist by

our attitude and our actions that it's all right to be doing less than our best because of how we're being treated or what it will cost us to do better.

But that's not the only possibility. Another way Marty might have refused to yield to the promptings of his conscience is by getting up with the baby in a self-righteous spirit, saying to himself: "Here I'm the one who's got to get up early, and I'm stuck with the night shift too." Or: "It's all right. I'll do it. She hasn't got my sense of honor and duty. It would be glorious to be married to a person sensitive to my needs and willing to do her share."

Whether childishly rationalizing his moral failures or self-righteously claiming to be morally superior, the self-betrayer is blaming others and excusing or justifying himself. He can consider himself in the clear only if he can successfully find fault in others for whatever he is thinking or doing. There's no way around this. There's no possibility of betraying oneself without living a lie—no possibility of sinning in a straightforward, guileless, and open manner. This can be seen by considering the solution to a version of a puzzle well known to the ancient Greeks. The puzzle is this: Immorality—what I am calling "self-betrayal" and "sin" seems impossible. It seems impossible that anyone could know in his own mind what is morally right for him to do and yet not do it. When we experience a *genuine* prompting of conscience (there is such a thing as false or distorted conscience, and I'll get to that later), we are in that moment obligated: we are requiring of ourselves the course of action it prescribes. (I am not saying the prompting cannot originate from a source outside ourselves, but only that whatever its ultimate origin, we in experiencing it recognize and accept its validity for us.) There is no room for wondering whether we *ought* to follow this course. In the very reception of a moral summons, we feel we ought to follow it. But if this is so, what sense can it make to say that we require this course of action of ourselves in the very moment and by the very act of refusing to comply with the requirement? What sort of self-requirement is that? None at all, the tradition has said. Either (1) we don't really understand the requirement, or (2) we aren't really making it of ourselves, or (3) we lack the power or opportunity to comply with it. But the fourth alternative, that we are acting immorally—requiring moral action of ourselves in and by the very act of violating the requirement—seems to make no sense at all.

Yet we do make a moral requirement of ourselves in and by this kind of act. We do it by carrying out the refusal in such a way that it seems to us that we are doing the very best we can under the circumstances. We make the moral requirement of ourselves by denying that we are doing what we're doing. In short, we do it by hypocrisy. This hypocrisy acknowledges, in a backhanded way, the rightness of what we are not doing. Paul wrote that when we violate the law of God written in our hearts, we "consent

unto the law that it is good" (Rom. 7:16). Someone who is straightforwardly doing what seems to him right will have no cause to excuse or justify himself; and someone who *isn't* doing what seems to him right shows that he does have such a cause. In the words of La Rochefoucauld, "Hypocrisy is vice's tribute to virtue."

We are deceived by this hypocrisy of ours because it and the self-betrayal are the same event. We do not first betray ourselves and then, following a moment in which we recognize that we've got something to hide, act as if it's someone else's fault. If this were what happened, we could perhaps hang on to the momentary, accurate knowledge we had about ourselves and thereby keep ourselves from slipping into the lie. But that's not what happens. The self-betrayal and the lie we live do not come in sequence. They are two sides of the same act, for as we've seen the betrayal wouldn't be possible unless it were a lie from the first moment. Blaming others and making it seem that we're doing our best in spite of them is *the way* we betray ourselves. Marty failed to take care of the baby *by* entertaining a host of rationalizations and accusing feelings.

It's important to understand that emotions are always involved in the self-betrayer's lie. It would not be the same if we merely *told* ourselves a lie. We would not be able to get ourselves to believe it. Consider Marty's lie. Besides the words he said, he felt an unaccountable fatigue (which he wouldn't have felt had he been getting up at that very same hour to go fishing), irritation at his wife for insisting they have a child at this point in his career, and perhaps even resentment toward the baby for awakening him. (Irrational? Yes, but remember that blaming others is something the self-betrayer can't avoid, even if doing so doesn't make much sense.)

This point enables us to understand what's really going on when individuals profess, as they sometimes do, to know full well that they're doing wrong and yet continue to do it anyway. They are "intellectually" or verbally admitting to the truth, but emotionally they are still caught up in the lie. Everyone knows this who has experienced the sorrow of deep repentance; it is an emotion that's worlds apart from the self-betrayer's anxiety or guilt.

Collusion

Accusing others means making ourselves out to be their victim. We're not responsible for what's going on because we're helpless in the face of what they are doing. We feel unjustly used by them—wronged, threatened, or disadvantaged. Feelings of psychological or emotional victimhood are telltale signs of self-betrayal. A thirty-year-old bachelor named Larry wrote this:

> My former fiancée, Julene, loved to dance, but I felt unmasculine on the dance floor. One night she wanted to go dancing with some other couples. I didn't feel like going but said I would just to make her happy. Throughout the evening she kept insisting that we dance when no one else was out on the floor. I did it because I didn't want to make a scene, but it embarrassed me. It seemed to me that she was using me, that she wasn't being herself—you know, too bubbly and all that.
>
> On the drive home she said, "Something is bothering you." I had decided not to say anything, because I don't like to hurt people's feelings. But since she brought it up I decided I ought to be straightforward about what was on my mind. So I told her I thought she didn't care about others' feelings, but only about her own. She got very angry. Her eyes were wet and she looked at me hard. I was a cold, selfish person, she said, very loud. After her fit had kind of died down I put my arms around her to show I forgave her for her cruel words. I felt I was a better person than she was. I think that is when I started being less interested in her.

Each of these people felt victimized by the other. Notice the difference in styles. Hers was volatile and childish—temper and tantrums. He "self-sacrificingly" did his "duty," suffered in silence, and nursed his sense of superiority.

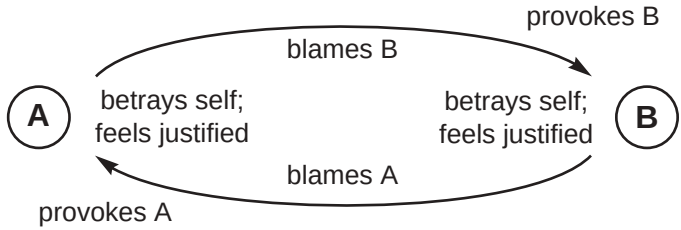
Victims are victimizers. When we make ourselves out to be victims of others, we are accusing them of victimizing us. We are making them appear the guilty ones. In reality, we are victimizing *them*. That's what Marty did to his wife and his child, when he felt he was their victim, and what Larry and Julene did to each other. What we need to learn from such stories as Larry's and Julene's (and I find that most people can readily think of many of them in their own experience) is that when others' behavior offends us we are finding in it justification or excuse for our own wrongdoing. To us it's proof that we are right because they are wrong. Even when it disadvantages us, we find it useful. There are people who make fools of themselves in public, chronically lose their jobs, even take their lives, just to have proof that someone, possibly everyone they know, perhaps even God, has treated them unfairly.

What's even more astounding is that by our blaming attitude we encourage and even provoke the behavior that we find offensive. Consider Larry's pouting, self-righteously critical attitude. *He* thought he was responding as best he could to the insensitivity with which Julene was insisting on kicking up her heels in spite of his reluctance to join her. But this attitude of his offended her. (Our accusing attitudes *always* come across, even if we try to mask them with airs of courtesy or with silence, because there's a perceptible difference between the person who cares and the person trying to make it appear that he cares.) The message in it was, "The trouble was all your fault." Thus accused, she felt justified in treating him even more coldly than before. He was trying, he supposed, to straighten her out, but she didn't

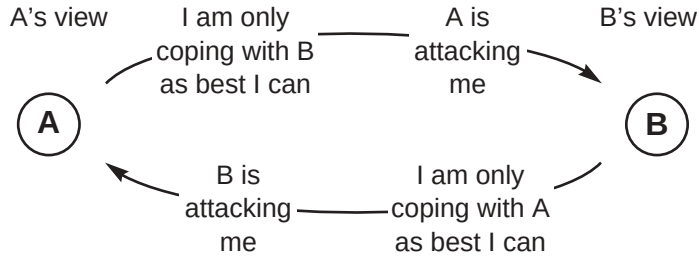
appreciate it. She didn't respond to his accusations by saying or feeling, "Oh thank you, darling, for pointing out this shortcoming to me. You know how I want to improve myself so that I can be a better companion to you." On the contrary, she felt he was unfair, pompous, and insensitive to *her.* From her point of view, she had to drag him through the evening; if it weren't for her enthusiasm, they would never have had any fun. His criticism only confirmed in her mind that he was so selfish he could only enjoy doing the few things *he* wanted to do. She told her roommate that from that evening on she lost a lot of her interest in him.

So blame begets blame. It is "self-fulfilling." Others react to our accusing attitudes with accusing attitudes of their own and feel they are being provoked to do so. Thus they do the very sort of thing we are blaming them for. They do the very sort of thing we feel is provoking us to blame them! As I said, this gives us confirmation that someone else besides ourselves is at fault. It validates the lie we are living. The more others engage in the accusing behavior we are provoking by our attitude toward them, the more they give us the excuse we need for having that attitude. Both our suffering and their wrongdoing give us proof that they are wrong and we are right.

When self-betrayers blame one another reciprocally, they are in *collusion* with one another, each provoking the other to give him or her validation of the lie he or she is living.



Generally, when people are colluding, each feels he is doing his best to cope with the other's unfair or hostile behavior. He doesn't consider *himself* unfair or hostile. He feels he's only trying to defend himself. Both Larry and Julene thought they were doing the best they could to deal with the problems thrown at them by the other's inconsiderateness.



These two views of the situation are worlds apart. The people involved are *alienated* from each other. They both see the situation falsely. Indeed, each believes the problem would go away, if only the other would change. Yet because the other's behavior proves to him the other is at fault, each of them finds it useful for the other *not* to change. Indeed, it may even strengthen his position if he does all he can to get the other to change because the more he tries to do this the worse the other's behavior tends to become and the more proof he has that he is right. Thus, colluders' solutions to their problems only make the problems worse.

> A new foreman got assigned to our drywall crew. He got paid by the job, and we got paid by the hour. The faster we worked, the more he got, and he pushed us without mercy. It bugged me. I'd be working somewhere in a house and would need instruction on a hard spot. I knew if I asked I'd get lectured in disgusted tones that my grandmother was smarter and faster. I'd get mad just thinking about it, so I'd keep on working without asking, covering up my mistakes as best I could. When I didn't cover them very well, I'd get chewed out for not asking and for wasting the time it took to redo the job. I vowed I'd never ask him anything if I could help it.

The more evasive the employee was (this was the employee's solution), the more suspicious and punitive the foreman felt he had to be (this was the foreman's solution), and this in turn only encouraged the employee to be more evasive.

What one colluder does justifies the other in doing what he does, and round and round. What each is blaming in the other, he himself is helping to create. The two of them (and there can be more) are quite literally producing the problem *together.* They are accomplices in the behavior they resent in one another. When we have a problem with another person, the chances are that our seeing that person as the problem *is* the problem.

False Morality

What I've said about emotions goes against the conventional and scientific wisdom of our age. One of our dominant, almost unexamined fictions is that we are not responsible for our emotions. They are caused in us, we believe, by events outside of our control. Recently this dogma has been undergoing reexamination, and it is becoming increasingly clear that it is false.[1] Accusing emotions are performances in which we engage. In the history of a particular people, patterns of emotion evolve as do patterns of rhetoric. They arise, flourish, and become extinct. Yet the metaphor dogmatically persists that such emotions are injuries because we invoke it anew whenever we compromise ourselves. (For example, if we're angry with someone we cannot fail to believe that that person is making us angry.)

This dogma is the core of every self-betrayer's self-deception. Given our conviction that we are not responsible for our accusing emotions, we

can imagine only two ways to manage them. We can try to control expressing and acting on the emotion—we can "keep our feelings in" or we can be forthright in expressing or acting on it—we can "let our feelings out." In our minds, our outward behavior is under our control but not our motivations. This places us in a moral dilemma characteristic of self-betrayers. If we express or act on our emotions openly, we will (we think) be honest but run the risk of hurting the feelings of those we accuse. If we control ourselves, we will (we think) be kinder but not candid. Our choice is to be either deceitful or inconsiderate. Whichever way we go, we'll do wrong. But since we believe it's the blameworthy behavior of the accused that has put us in this trap, we are convinced that whichever way we go is not our fault. We're exonerated in advance for whatever we do. Ultimately, no sinner will accept responsibility for the troubles he is party to; the moral traps in which he finds himself only support his conviction that he is not at fault.

Such traps are self-deceptions; they do not exist in reality but are projections onto reality of accusing, self-exonerating attitudes. From what I have said so far, it's not difficult to see just how false each of the supposed options is. Hiding our accusing feelings from others is not really considerate because the feelings are accusing and because those feelings always come across to others, no matter how we try to hide them. And openly expressing or acting on such feelings is not really forthright and honest because the feelings are false representations of the situation.

There is yet another trap the self-betrayer invariably finds himself in, another dimension of his falsification of reality. Accusing others always means regarding them as threatening something we want—some right, privilege, possession, opportunity, etc. We place an exaggerated value on such things in proportion to the threat we feel. We crave, lust for, or worry about things *just* to the extent that we accuse others of jeopardizing them. In other words, an anxious desire for something that *can* be jeopardized by someone else is the inseparable companion of an attitude that accuses that person of jeopardizing it, and is just as much a lie as the accusation is! It's not hard to see that when we have this kind of attitude we are not going to be overjoyed at the prospect of doing our "duty" towards this person—treating him fairly or kindly. As far as we're concerned, we're being called upon to treat someone fairly or kindly who is making trouble for us! For example, Marty felt he ought to help his wife, but in his accusing eyes she was the very person who was inconsiderately lying there asleep and who didn't appreciate the demands his job made upon him, as proven by the fact that she insisted upon having a child at the most crucial point of his career. For self-betrayers, then, duty and desire are usually in conflict, and both of them are distortions of genuine duty and desire. As far as Marty was concerned, doing his "duty" towards his wife and baby meant

not protecting himself against the threat to his career they presented; either he could succeed in that career or else sacrifice it for duty's sake. The summons of conscience self-betrayers refuse to follow inevitably strikes them as onerous and perhaps even ridiculous; that's why they so often roll their eyeballs, sigh disgustedly, scowl irritably, or pout when deciding to do what they themselves know they should do. It is they who have created the myth that moral goodness is absurdly self-sacrificing.

Duty is not burdensome emotionally for those of us who aren't betraying ourselves, even though it may be burdensome physically, mentally, or financially. We don't resent it. It must be done, but it doesn't seem unreasonable, unjust, or unfair. If Marty had simply and straightforwardly gotten up to check on the baby in the first place, he wouldn't have had any need to blame anyone; he'd have felt neither irritated nor resentful. The task would not have seemed a drudgery. Indeed he probably wouldn't have noticed any prompting of conscience; it would have seemed to him more like an invitation than a demand. Conscience usually isn't a major issue for people who don't betray themselves because they aren't fighting it.

We have seen that self-betrayal brings with it distortion of conscience. When embedded in self-betrayal, we do have feelings of right and wrong, but these are perverted by our self-concern, hardness toward others, and defensiveness. A prompting to be honest is felt as a demand to find a way to express victimized and accusing feelings in a way that won't appear too ruthless; a prompting to be kind is experienced as a demand to disguise our true feelings; a prompting to do our duty feels like a demand to sacrifice our own interests in favor of people who, we are convinced, don't deserve it.

Thus the person whose conscience is distorted concerns himself about justification and excuse rather than about doing what love and integrity dictate—though of course he would deny that statement. He's concerned with the "moral" rules that define what is reasonable and unreasonable to expect of ourselves in helping our neighbor. For example, he's interested in why it's okay for him not to help his neighbor paint his house—he's too busy; he needs time for himself; the neighbor never did anything like that for him—or else why he's morally superior to those he's accusing—his wife is a nag; she never notices all he does around the house and with the children; he never complains about her faults the way she complains about his. Being right means much more to him than doing right—that's the profound moral shift that takes place in self-betrayal. It's a shift from self-forgetfulness to self-concern.

One of the most harrowing aspects of the distortion of conscience that comes with sin is an almost unwitting ruthlessness. Good people can feel justified in doing cruel things. The following is an experience of Duane Boyce, a family therapist and corporate officer who has been part of our research team for many years:

For a few years after we were married, my wife, Merilee, and I lived in a trailer court filled with families who also had young children. When our Kelly and Kimberly were about three and two, we came home one day to discover that all their toys were missing. Finally a five-year-old girl told us she had taken the toys and showed us where she had hidden them.

Now Merilee and I weren't upset about the incident. It was nothing. When word reached the girl's mother, however, she denied that it could be true, and her daughter started denying it as well. She became so adamant that she began accusing us to others of starting a vicious rumor, and tried to poison our friends against us. Even when her daughter admitted the truth, she didn't come to us and apologize. She didn't try to make sure there were no hard feelings. We said we pitied her. She was obviously a sick woman. But I have to admit that I was angry.

Two months later the little girl had a birthday party. Every child in the trailer court was invited except Kelly and Kimberly. The children had long forgotten the incident and played together every day. And now not to invite two of them! A mature woman, supposedly, was taking out her guilt on two little kids!

I was outside when the morning of the party came, planting flowers and watching the children gather gleefully at the woman's trailer for the party. Soon they were playing games. Then Kelly and Kimberly came out of our trailer and saw the children having fun. They naturally went over to join them. To them it was just another day. I had a sinking feeling as I watched them go. I was afraid the worst might happen.

It did. About the time my girls got there, the other children were invited into the trailer and the door was closed, leaving Kelly and Kimberly standing outside alone. A bit later the children emerged again and my girls joined them. The girl's mother began passing out ice cream cones. I watched in stunned amazement as she carefully gave one to every child but mine. Kelly and Kimberly just stood there, puzzled. I was fuming. Then the woman passed out balloons, again to all the children but two. It was a touching sight. All those children dancing and jumping excitedly and just two standing alone in the middle, silent and still.

I was furious. These two little girls were innocent and helpless. What a monster this woman was! She was using these kids to hide her guilt and get at me and my wife! It was easily the most detestable thing I had ever seen.

Several years later I was telling this story in a seminar as an example of self-betrayal. "It shows," I said, "the lengths to which people will go to justify themselves."

Others present agreed. "She must have been insane," someone said. An otherwise jovial fellow blurted out, "Boy, I'd like to hit her right in the mouth!"

Then a woman asked, "Why were you so offended at that woman if you were as innocent as you say you were?"

"Obviously, she was misusing my little girls," I replied.

"You said she tried to ruin your reputation," another person added. "Weren't you doing the same to her?"

"What do you mean? I don't understand."

"Well, you said you were angry at this woman and that you would ignore her."

"Yes, but . . . "

"And you said she never came to you to be certain there were no hard feelings. But did you ever go to her?"

"Well, no, but . . . "

"Honestly, didn't you have just a little sweet taste of revenge when you said she must be sick?"

"Look," I said. "It's that woman who's got something to straighten out with me."

"And what about the children going to the parry?" another person interrupted.

"Well, what about it?"

"You knew they weren't invited."

"Yes."

"Then why did you let them go?" said another.

Another person piped up. "I know why. You were angry at this woman. You knew what would happen. You knew your neighbor would treat them that way. You *wanted* her to. Then you would have proof you were justified all this time in hating her."

"You were using your children just as much as she was," said another. "She mistreated them but so did you. *You let them go.* You set them up."

"I think *you* were the one who was insane."

The first responses to Duane sided with him. The rules most of us live by justified him. (If you want to see those rules written down, read the syndicated advice columns in the newspapers.) It took an extraordinarily sensitive group of people to see that Duane was not only not justified but was actually abusing his own children in *trying* to be justified. Not for several days, Duane told me, did the pain and sorrow he felt that evening start to subside.

Societies in general have substituted moral codes for the moral and spiritual sensitivity of uncorrupted conscience. These codes specify what honesty, considerateness, and duty will consist of, with the result that everyone is relieved, if they choose to be, of responsibility for their immoral feelings, as long as they outwardly conform to the rules. To grow up in such a society is to be nurtured in the ways of hypocrisy; few escape the influence. When the Pharisees conformed to the scriptural law outwardly while inwardly remaining corrupt, Jesus denounced them as hypocrites. We have to distinguish two kinds of morality. One is moral or spiritual sensitivity to the needs of others and the will of God (which is fixed always and unerringly on what others need), and the other is an obsession with rules that we can follow without yielding our hearts.

Emotional Bondage

Once one's outlook takes on the structure characteristic of self-deception, each new situation tends to be interpreted accusingly and defensively, self-righteously or childishly, and most experiences of conscience are distorted. Thus sin is habituating. When we see our world in an accusing, victimized, self-protective manner, our options are laid out for us in such limited patterns as I have described. Restricted to these options, we can find no way to deal with our unwanted emotions. Every course of action we can conceive of to bring about personal change leads further into self-deception. Generally speaking, if we have been childish we will think the only thing we can do about the problem is to control ourselves—but if we do this we'll only succeed in becoming self-righteous. And if we have been self-righteous, we'll think that we need to give vent to our feelings—but if we do this we'll only succeed in becoming childish. The only authentic emotional change we can undergo is abandonment of our accusing feelings, and we cannot consider this an option because we're convinced we aren't responsible for our feelings.

Isn't it possible for the self-betrayer simply to confess his dishonesty and pretense and thus be rid of them? Yes, it's possible. The trouble is that even when we confess our sins we are entrapped in one of the artificial dilemmas I've been talking about. From his self-deceiving point of view, what looks to the self-betrayer like confessing dishonesty is actually a counterfeit of the real thing, like his counterfeit conception of duty, desire, kindness, and honesty. I'll explain how this works.

Whether we are acting self-righteously or childishly, we are striving to qualify as justified, worthy persons. But because we have to work at this, we're bound to suspect that the person we're striving to be is a mere facade. When that happens, we can only wonder whether those who have been counteraccusing us may be right. We must fight off the suspicion that hidden within us is a self who is not at all the idealized person we've been striving to be. Such suspicions of unacceptability or unworthiness are the almost inevitable corollaries of the quest for a positive self-image. By our concern for a good self-image, we create the fear of a bad one! I believe this is the source of the anxiety and insecurity that are endemic in our culture.

We see, then, that a self-betrayer who is considering being "honest" with himself confronts the specter of this "unworthy self." But this "self" is just as much a fiction as the idealized, justified self-image he has heretofore been insisting on. It is merely another variation on the lie he has been living.

We all know people for whom this kind of self-disparagement is a lifestyle. It works just as well as self-justification to excuse us from responsibility for what we are doing. Whether we despair over what we are "confessing" or congratulate ourselves for finally being completely honest, we are sure

we have discovered what we are, and that we can't help being that way. A participant in one of my seminars, describing a repeated problem of collusion in his life, wrote the following story:

When I was eleven the following conversation took place frequently.

"What's wrong, Tad," my mother would ask. "Didn't you have a good day?" (I can see now I was pulling her strings. I could get her started just by the expression on my face when I walked in the door.)

"Whadda you care?"

"Son, if you need to talk about your problems, I'd be glad to listen."

"Keep yer nose outta my business." (Once I got this much started, it would start my father all by itself. It was like priming the pump. It worked even better than when my sister would hum a tune while he was trying to tell the family in no uncertain terms all the things they were doing wrong.)

"That's no way to talk to your mother. Even dogs treat their own better than that."

"There, there, Dear," Mother would counsel him. "Remember, it's hard to be growing up nowadays."

"It's no favor to him to be allowing disrespectfulness. We haven't done anything to deserve it."

"Nuthin', huh? Then why d'ya pick on me all the time?"

Then mother would put her arms around me. "It must be awful to feel nobody likes you." (That was the booster engine that sent Dad into his final orbit.)

"I swear you're absolutely ruining him, Blanche. We've sacrificed to give him more opportunities than we gave any of the other children."

"Yeah, just to keep me outta your hair."

"The trouble with you, fella, is you're spoiled. You can't even keep your room straight. Shows just how appreciative you are! The doghouse is cleaner."

"That's where you'd like me to live, isn't it?"

"I've had about all I'm going to take from you."

"Roger, he's only a boy."

"You better shut up, Blanche. You make it seem like I'm the one who's acting up."

"I'm just a spoiled and messy snot-nosed kid, just like you say."

"That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard."

"And now I'm stupid too." (Now I would start to cry, real broken-hearted tears. Vengeance was mine. Mom would be so upset she wouldn't say a word all evening. Dad would be shaking with rage. Some nights I would try to go to sleep so if they came up to my room to check on me they couldn't apologize. One night they came up and couldn't find me. They called out the neighbors to help them look. I had gone outside with a blanket and made my bed in the doghouse.)

Recall Duane's story. Everything he managed to accomplish in his self-righteous conviction of moral superiority, Tad achieved by being down on himself.

In contemporary counseling circles one of the fads is helping people gain a "positive self-image." Since a bad self-image is obviously unhealthy, a good one must be desirable—so it is assumed. But both are forms of self-preoccupation, as we have seen; they are the obverse and reverse sides of a single self-deceptive outlook. What is unnerving about the current fad is that, inevitably, preoccupation with a positive self-image creates the basis for doubting the validity of that image; it fosters insecurity; the client will require periodic "lutes" to maintain his anxiety-driven "conviction" that he comes off well by comparison to other people. What we need is to drop the self-preoccupied concern about image altogether. Spiritual wholeness consists in self-forgetfulness.

There is an answer to the question, "What's so bad about sin?" that rarely gets mentioned. It is that sin fundamentally alters our outlook on and feelings toward reality—towards both others and ourselves. We feel insecure and can be easily offended or rejected. We're anxious about what we have or might have and how we'll get on. For us, much is wrong with the world and with others. Thus obsessed with ourselves, we have little sensitivity for other people; we're far too insecure to love freely. So other people respond to us in ways that confirm our fears and anxieties. Most tragically, once mired in this kind of perversion of reality we can't see our way out; or, more accurately, the ways out we think we see are really further bypasses within the threatening world of our self-deceptions. There is a bondage in iniquity, a servitude.

Liberation

How is it possible for self-betrayers to come out of self-deception if every avenue of escape conceivable to them is a cul-de-sac? It's true that if we hang on to our accusing emotions and the falsified world that accompanies them, we will not escape self-deception, no matter how we try to change. So whatever we can think of to *do* is going to backfire. Nevertheless, we *can* give up these emotions altogether, and with them our false picture of the world. We can cease making accusations in our hearts. There's hope for us precisely because our emotional problems are what we are *doing.* Abandoning them is a matter of *ceasing to do.* It requires no special expertise. We are capable of ceasing to do anything. Emotional honesty is within everyone's reach.

Coming to this honesty is described in different ways by different people. I would like to mention two. The first consists in desisting from

self-betrayal. I've observed over and over that the person who makes a decision simply to do what he feels to be right, from moment to moment, without quibbling or stalling, undergoes a profound change of attitude. The following example is one of many sent to me by David Hamblin, a member of our research team and a practicing psychotherapist in upstate New York:

> Roberta was sixteen when she came with her eighteen-month-old boy, Andrew, to the clinic. She was shy, nervous, and very angry; her mother, at home with Roberta's three-month-old girl, made her come because she was abusing Andrew. She had become sexually active at fourteen, dropped out of school, and continued her switchblade, fight-with-anybody life-style. She said she was surprised at her angry outbursts—they seemed to come upon her unbidden and unwanted. Andrew, she said, would throw tantrums if he didn't get his way and would do just the opposite of what she told him to do. He'd hold his breath until he went blue to get what he wanted. She admitted striking him on the head when she lost control of herself. Her boyfriend wanted to marry her, but she felt she couldn't control her anger enough. She was sick of herself, worried about what she might do, and despairing about the future.
>
> Instead of using a standard psychotherapeutic approach, I taught Roberta very simply that sometimes we get angry at others when we don't do things we feel we should, to prove they are to blame and not us. I gave some everyday examples. She laughed and blushed; what I was teaching her matched her experiences. Her "homework" assignment was to stop whenever she got angry and think about what she was supposed to do that she was refusing to do. After she found what it was, she was to do it right away. She said she would. I told her that if she did it, her feelings would change. She wouldn't have any more need to prove she wasn't to blame.
>
> Two weeks later, when she returned, I asked her how things were going. "When I went home," she said, "I was determined not to get angry, but the next day I got angry at everything. I was tying Andrew's shoes, and as I would tie one and go to the next, he would untie it. When I would go to tie it again, he would untie the other one. When I got them both tied, he untied them with both hands at once. I was so mad I caught myself about to hit him. Then I remembered the homework and tried to think of what was right that I should do. I couldn't think of anything. As I sat there concentrating, I called Andrew over to me and I put him on my lap and just sat there rocking with my arms around him and my eyes closed, trying to think of what was right. After a long time I knew the right thing was just to love him and I started to cry and couldn't stop. I sat there hugging him. My mother came over to me and said, 'You were getting angry, weren't you?' I said, 'Yes.' She said, 'But you didn't, did you?' 'No, Mother, I didn't get angry.' And since I've stopped getting angry, everyone has started liking me."
>
> Roberta later told me that when her friends come to get her to play basketball she tells them she wants to stay with her kids, and told me it wasn't any sacrifice to do it. She said that what she had written in her diary about her cruelty to animals and her fistfighting even with teachers now "grosses me out." Her boyfriend called long-distance, and as they talked he stopped and asked, "Roberta, is that you? Yes, it's me." And a little later, "Are you sure this

is you? Sure, of course it's me." Andrew has turned out to be a very loving, happy, and obedient child.

A standard psychiatric diagnosis would have classified Roberta's problem as a "characterological disorder"—an "illness" very resistant to intervention. But for Roberta, changing was not the prolonged struggle many would have predicted. She did not learn to "cope" with people because they were problems for her. Instead she ceased to see them as problems. She gave up her blaming emotions because she no longer had anything to blame them for.

Another way to end self-deception is to be emotionally honest about ongoing self-betrayals and collusions, which is to say, to "yield our hearts" wholly to the truth. From inside of self-deception we cannot conceive the truth that needs to be admitted; nevertheless, it is possible to be truthful. For we do not find the truth by searching for it; instead, the truth is simply what is there—it is what we are—when we stop being false.

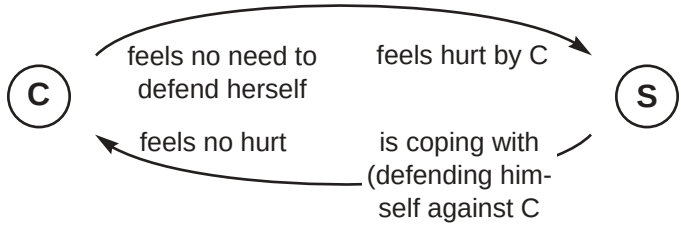
My husband and I are both writers. We have a baby. Shawn insists without sympathy that I keep the house clean, prepare the meals, stay well-dressed and appealing, and, most of all, keep the baby absolutely quiet during his writing hours. I write during the baby's afternoon nap if I can, but usually *late* at night and early in the morning.

If there is any noise from the baby, Shawn is not patient. He bitingly asks whether I understand the importance of what he is writing or its crucial place in his career or what it means for our future. Until recently tears would well up in my eyes in response to this harshness. Sometimes I would protest that he had no right to speak rudely to me. A quarrel would ensue. But more often I would suffer this sharpness silently and bitterly. I could not understand why I had to suffer when I had done nothing wrong.

One morning I was doing an assignment on collusion writing a case. I left the bedroom door ajar and the baby toddled out. She was scattering some of Shawn's pages when he saw her. He began to yell at me. Immediately I felt attacked; I began to burn with resentment and to search my mind for some way I could respond in kind. But all of a sudden I thought, "It's a lie. What I am doing right now is a lie." I was doing the very thing that I was imputing to him! My rage just melted. I was filled with compassion toward Shawn for the first time in a long time. In fact, all I could think of in that moment was how I could help my husband.

Love

Celia "before" and Celia "after" are represented respectively by the collusion diagram and the diagram below. Before she yielded to the truth, Celia, when she looked at Shawn, saw a person who was hurting her. That "perception" was not the truth; it was a false accusation. After, because she looked at him with no accusing feelings, she did not see him hurting her; she did not feel hurt. What did she see? A person who was hurting himself. This, at last, was the truth.



When our hearts change as Celia's did, we are able to perceive others as betraying themselves and even acting maliciously, if they are, but we will not take offense. This is what it means, in this context, to see the truth and not to live a lie.

What emotion do we have when we perceive another hurting himself and do not ourselves feel we are being hurt? Obviously, we no longer feel threatened and defensive. Some of the things we struggled for before might not even seem important to us now. Our false values have been left behind. And we aren't overcome with anxiety about protecting ourselves. Our insecurity and desperation are gone. We see another human being in trouble; our hearts go out to him. When compassion enters, fear departs. "Perfect love," John said, "casteth out fear" (1 John 4:18).

What are we that we can have the kinds of emotional troubles we have and yet be capable of being free of them, happy, and at peace? What are we that we are capable of feeling both animosity and compassion? A simple way to answer these questions is to say, We are loving. Or, more accurately, we *would be* loving if we weren't making something else of ourselves—if we weren't generating accusing emotions. I will discuss this point later.

Helping Others

When we are compassionate, we matter-of-factly expect others to do what they themselves know is right and to perform up to their ability. And we genuinely—not indulgently, desire to help them help themselves. Our compassion requires us to do all we can to help heal any damage we have contributed to: we may ask forgiveness for the offenses we have committed, and especially for taking offense, and we will do whatever we can to heal the damage. We will refuse to collude again, no matter how enticed or provoked. No longer feeling provoked and reinforced in their self-betrayal—no longer feeling the need to defend themselves—our former colluders are left undefended before their own consciences. And the most immediate issue of conscience for them is how to respond to the honest expectations and the love that are now being extended to them. Though there is no guarantee that they will respond in kind, it is amazing to me how often they do. I haven't space for a specimen of the many stories I've collected that illustrate this point, but

year-and-a-half-old Andrew is an example, and so is Celia's husband, Shawn, whose attitude softened for many months after the episode she related.

The most powerful human incentive, in families or organizations, is the opportunity to grow in an atmosphere free from accusing attitudes and evasion. Simply giving up our own negative attitudes is the best thing we can do to help others give up their negative attitudes and grow. If this is our primary desire, there is no limit to the power for good we can have. When others give up their negative attitudes in response to us, they become free to turn and affect other people in the same way, including ourselves. What they give back to us is love. In this way individuals liberated from self-concern create around themselves a society that cares for them and motivates them further to care in return.

II

There may be readers who find my position interesting, congenial, or perhaps even correct, but who are put off because it doesn't sound "scientific." Its terminology is that of everyday life, with a tone that seems more moral or religious. I'd like to indicate briefly the reasons why my position is a bona fide theory of human behavior, and more adequate than rival theories.[2]

One of the rivals might best be called "mechanistic." For a long time most psychologists and philosophers have thought that we human beings are nothing more or less than completely physical, very complicated objects. Since we have working parts, we are different from such simple objects as rocks and water puddles. We are machines, machines constructed of meat rather than of metal or plastic. Our component parts—the mechanisms that make up these machines—respond to stimulation from one another and from the external environment; that's how our behavior is produced. The currently popular idea that the human nervous system is a highly complex computer is a version of this mechanistic point of view. Though it's by no means dead, this conception of human beings is clearly losing its grip. A growing number of theoreticians from a variety of disciplines are finding it far more fruitful to regard human beings as role-players in large-scale social dramas. According to this "dramaturgical" conception of humanity, our personalities are the roles we play, and we develop these personalities by "internalizing" others' expectations of us, accepting the social status (with its rights and obligations) that they assign to us, and adopting the repertoires of speech, emotion, and gesture that brand us as having that status. Thus, insofar as an individual is a person, he is "socially constructed" to be a particular kind of person—an individual with a particular kind of status—in one or more class-striated systems, such as a group, family, institution, community, or society. "Social constructionism" is one of the most widely used names for this kind of theory.[3]

The mechanistically oriented study of behavior has generated methods that are intended to mimic the methods of the physical sciences and very technical vocabularies to accompany these methods. (Actually what is mimicked is a simplistic misunderstanding of the methods of the physical sciences, but that is a separate issue.) Part of the motivation for this attempted mimicry is a widespread (and false) belief that the terms in which we daily talk about one another are too vague to be "scientifically" useful. But from the social constructionist viewpoint these everyday language terms are the *only* ones acceptable for explaining behavior, because they are the very terms that guide behavior. No other theory or conception of ourselves can fit our conduct as well as the conception we have of ourselves as we act, for it is out of that conception that our conduct flows; the conduct perfectly expresses it. (One of the social constructionists' criticisms of mechanistic approaches is that their discoveries are made in contrived or artificially described situations and can be related to the behavior of ordinary life—which, after all, is what we want to understand better—only by guesswork.)

On the mechanistic view, we are what nature has made us, presumably through evolutionary processes, and we do what we are physically stimulated to do. We respond to stimuli in predictable patterns. One of the standard complaints brought against mechanism is that it cannot account for the sense we all have when we act—especially when the choice is between duty and self-interest—that we, and not just our bodily appetites and aversions, are responsible for what we do and that we can choose to do otherwise if we will. Moreover, conduct that can coordinate with the conduct of others—that can enter into "the conversation of mankind" must not merely seek the satisfaction of appetites and the avoidance of pain; it must conform to standards of intelligibility and propriety shared by others, standards that silently guide and coordinate conduct. These standards or mores are and can be maintained *nowhere else* than in the community functioning *as* a community. They cannot be sustained wholly within an individual psyche or even by a collection of individuals who do not form a community. (Even colluders deeply alienated from each other are bound together in an irreducibly corporate activity that depends upon their sharing an understanding of what it means to be offensive, obligated, excused, justified, etc.) The developing person adopts and assimilates these standards as his own as he learns by public responses to enter into the communal "conversation," and only subsequently and gradually does he "privatize" his communal skills and thereby establish his own "individuality." So *as a person* he is essentially one with others, essentially responsive and responded to, essentially constituted by his relation to others in his community. In the mechanistic picture we are far too radically individual for all this to be possible. Though that picture allows for us to stimulate one

another electrochemically, there is no room in it for individuals to be constituted essentially by their responsiveness to one another.

On the constructionist view, we are what others have made us by means of the processes of socialization. We do what we are silently guided to do by the expectations of intelligibility and propriety the assimilation of which has made us the persons that we are. We do it in order to acquire legitimacy in the estimation of others. This is true, the social constructionists claim, even though we may never realize that such expectations are the sources of our desires and choices—even though we misguidedly may feel we are acting from inner convictions without regard to what other people think. For we acquired the convictions as part of the process of social construction in the first place. So the social constructionists' problem is just the opposite of the mechanists'. On their view we're *wholly* responsive; our individuality tends to disappear. There is nothing in a strictly constructionist conception of the universe to moderate the unperceived control exerted by the community. If we are merely role-players, we may be agents, but not independent agents—not "agents unto ourselves."

Aware of this problem, some constructionists ascribe individualistic characteristics to human beings. For example, some say we are inherently honor- or approval-seeking. This helps explain why individuals are susceptible to the community's techniques of social construction. But the solution it provides loads the theory with some of the deficiencies of mechanism. It conceives of individuals as adopting the community mores not because of a fundamental sensitivity to the personal reality of others, but as beings who are manipulated, by their status-seeking caretakers, to seek a status of their own. I suspect that adding this dimension to constructionism represents persons so individualistic, so self-encased, that socialization becomes impossible. What are we, then, if we are neither essentially self-interested nor wholly other-directed? We are creatures capable of responding to others as others, which means we are capable of responding to their responsiveness to us. We are beings of empathy, caring, and love. We can regard ourselves as being like others and of them, and regard each of them in the same way. It is this, not an inherently approval-seeking disposition, that makes our socialization possible.

Nevertheless, the constructionists are right to this extent: we are beholden to the others in the community for our repertoires of speech, emotion, and gesture—the wherewithal of personality and agency. Our capacity for love acquires its form of expression only in a particular family, tribe, community, society, and culture. Though we are not wholly what we are made to be in the process of socialization—though we are something besides, something individual—it is nonetheless true that without this process our individuality could not be realized. We would mature biologically, but we

would not become persons. Our agency is inseparable from our capacity to love, and our capacity to love is dependent upon the people whom we are committed to love.

In the first part of this paper I tried to outline why creatures essentially loving and responsive could profoundly misunderstand their own natures. It is because of sin. In sin, we are convinced we are objects controlled by factors within and without, frustrated by others in our search for satisfactions that would not otherwise be very interesting to us. But this conviction is a consequence of self-deception. We are not objects; we are not inherently self-seeking. Instead, we make ourselves—indeed bind ourselves—to act self-seekingly. Our self-concern is an artifact, a creation for which we ourselves are responsible.

There's little wonder that close observers of human conduct have thought otherwise. They've supposed that the insecurity and brutality of most of humankind can only be explained on the premise that we are *in our natures* wholly self-interested—carnal, territorial, possessive, approval-seeking, power-hungry, etc. Now the theory I have been outlining does not deny or discount the insecurity and brutality. But instead of explaining them in terms of our natures, it explains them in terms of sin. It derives the characteristic behavior of fallen mankind from the idea of sin. Far from original, this is the most ancient explanation of such behavior.

This claim is not just an alternative to mechanism. It is empirically more powerful. The mechanist view cannot allow that individuals might be motivated by love and integrity rather than self-interest. It excludes the possibility out of hand. It cannot allow for St. Francis, Betsey ten Boom, Mother Teresa, Viktor Frankl, Joseph Smith—good people found here and there all over the world, including a number in my very neighborhood—and above all Jesus. But if, as I claim, what we really are (or would be, if we were not playing ourselves false) is loving, and if sin can be shown to generate all the patterns of self-interested behavior the mechanists can account for, then my view explains more than mechanism does. It explains altruism as well as egoism; love as well as enmity.

There are parallel points to be made about social constructionism. If all personality is role-playing, it is all self-conscious and insecure. This is true even if, as some constructionists say, we are essentially honor-seeking. As I noted earlier, when we strive to fulfill roles we cannot avoid suspecting that we are not what we are striving to be. Our behavior then becomes an anxious flight from the empty or unworthy selves we fear we are. Thus, unless we are more than our roles, the process of socialization can result only in individual inauthenticity.

So the constructionist theory cannot allow—as my theory can—for the possibility that there are human beings not ridden with anxiety, even subliminally, or for the possibility of a loving symbiosis in which the young

acquire the ways of the community without ever feeling the need to do so in order to make themselves legitimate in the eyes of the others, and therefore without ever having occasion to suspect that all they are is what they've managed to arrange in the minds of other people. Social constructionism excludes these possibilities in advance.

Nor is it just empirically that the kind of view I'm offering is stronger than its rivals. Ultimately, I believe, it's the only *theoretical* basis for refusing to despair over the prospects for humankind. (Of course there are religions and individuals who are not despairing, but I am speaking of theories here.) Part of the intellectual fashion of our era is to think it charitable to excuse people for their behavior on the grounds that it can be completely explained by reference to their biological make-up or their early life experiences. "To understand all is to forgive all." Clarence Darrow made himself a celebrity by arguing against the imprisonment of criminals on the grounds that anyone with their backgrounds would have turned out similarly. But contrary to what he supposed, there is no charity in this idea, only indulgence. People who believe it can extend no hope to those of us who are emotionally troubled; in their view we are stuck with our emotional deficiencies and will simply have to cope as best we can (perhaps with the aid of drugs that diminish our sensibilities generally, so that we can be rid of our destructive intensities only by giving up our enlivening ones into the bargain). Not only that, people who believe this doctrine will tend, like Tad's mother, to collude with disturbed individuals in their pity for themselves. A collusive indulgence is just as condemnatory and, if accepted, just as debilitating as a collusive accusation. On the other hand, treating people as responsible for their emotional lives is not condemnatory: it is a form of believing in them. It holds out hope. I tend to think that at bottom all our self-betrayals are withholdings of this hope from others and from ourselves. They are refusals to love. The perpetual decision most of us make to persist in self-betrayal is a decision against acting for the welfare of others and in favor of the (supposed) gratification of ourselves. It is a refusal to forget ourselves and to be at one with others. The pursuit of an idealized image of ourselves is such a refusal; we place our hope of fulfillment in achieving it. Self-disparagement is such a refusal; in it, we are preoccupied with the idea that we have unfulfilled needs that must be met before we can reach out to others, and with the idea that we have incapacities that prevent us from reaching out to others. In short, our emotional problems are refusals to love.

Children

The hope I have spoken of extends even to the primary historical sources of emotional problems, namely, the influence of collusive parents. The predominant pattern is for children to adopt the collusory style of one

or both parents, develop troubled personalities, and then perpetuate the family collusions in future relationships; they may even select marriage partners with whom they can carry them on. Nevertheless, though this pattern is commonplace it can be broken. Though children and other nonaccountable people can learn to collude—though they are capable of acting against conscience—it is not they who are responsible for any wrong that is done. The sins of such children are answered upon the heads of the fathers; the fathers are accountable. Little children cannot sin. Nevertheless, though they are not accountable for wrongdoing, the children are instruments by which the parents do it—the children are, as it were, the "proximate agents" and therefore they suffer the consequences of doing wrong as if they *were* responsible even though they are not! They suffer self-deception, guilt, anxiety, and enmity. The sins of the fathers are visited upon the heads of the children.

It's usually thought that psychological problems originating in childhood are like wounds that have not healed since being inflicted. But in my view we who are suffering from such problems are continuing to collude with our parents; our difficulty does not lie in what was done to us in the past but in what we are doing in the present. We may be subject to chronic failure; we may be driven to succeed even at the expense of relationships with loved ones; we may be hypochondriac or ill-tempered or macho or sexually deviant or depressive. There are countless kinds of attitudes with which we can continue to try to prove that we're worthwhile or admirable or exonerated or victimized or some other excused or justified kind of person. But precisely this is the hopeful point: Because the problems we developed from our early nurturance are our attitudes in the present, we can give them up and be rid of the burden we are carrying forward from the past.

> Margaret was a twenty-nine-year-old woman who asked to attend one of my seminars. She had been in counseling or therapy for fourteen years, chronically depressed and almost nonfunctional. She blamed her misfortunes on her mother. She never had more than a single friend at a time and would alienate that person within a few weeks. Her lips trembled when she talked and were tightly pinched when she didn't, and her eyes were always downcast. I found it hard to pity her because she was obviously expending a great deal of pity on herself. Privately I learned that her mother had molested and abused her frequently when she was a child and thus, as Margaret thought, ruined her life forever.
>
> The seminar extended over the Christmas and New Year's holidays. When it reconvened on 10 January, a woman entered the room about twenty minutes late whom I did not recognize. In a few minutes I realized with a shock who it was and whispered to my assistant, "It's Margaret." Simultaneously I saw others do the same. Her face was relaxed; there was a natural dignity in her bearing. And when she spoke, as she did presently, her lips did not tremble. The self-pity was gone. Her countenance seemed to be illuminated.

> She asked to speak and told us she had taken the train back to her hometown to see her mother. She had freely forgiven her. She desired her mother to have a taste of peace before she died and therefore asked her forgiveness for the hatred she had borne her since childhood. She said she now often has tender thoughts toward her mother and calls and writes to her, whereas before this episode she hadn't made contact with her for years. Her fear of being betrayed by friends, which was what tended to drive them away, has eased. During the course of the succeeding year, she became able to hold a job successfully. I have heard from her occasionally since, and she seems to be doing a little better each time.

Beyond Science and Philosophy

My brief account is and must be incomplete. For its completion, it is necessary to venture beyond the human sciences and philosophy into the domain of religion. I want to mention several reasons why.

First, I think self-honesty that is sufficient to end self-deception requires an independent witness to cut through our hardness and speak directly to our hearts. My strictly theoretical position is that the bondage of sin is so overwhelming that without such a witness we would be mired in it forever. My faith is that a Spirit of truth does strive with us, whether or not we understand or acknowledge it.

Second, even though we may muster a degree of emotional honesty in response to this Spirit, more is usually required. By our sinfulness we generally habituate our bodies to certain gratifications. These habituations are oppressive and return unwelcomed to the individual struggling to repent. Their eradication is the function of the redemptive power to be found in a living religion, a power no one caught in the bondage of sin can possibly generate on his own.

Third, we need an understanding that is impossible without revelation of what it means to be a moral agent. In nurturing us, our caretakers invest in us everything that they are. They make us one of them. In return, we tacitly make a covenant or commitment to treat them as love would dictate. And we become their fiduciaries, as it were, to personify their mores and tradition in whatever we do from childhood on. We accept a trust. Therefore, when we betray ourselves we betray that trust. We play our caretakers false. Moreover, though we will scarcely admit it at the time, being self-deceived, we dishonor our commitment of conscience to those of our caretakers and contemporaries whom we encourage or provoke to enter into collusion with us—to side in our enmity or to stand accusingly against us. We foster alienation rather than solidarity. Sin is an active crusade of world defilement, conducted in the pretense that we are only doing the best we can to cope with the troubles being dealt to us, but which in fact we ourselves are promoting.

By the same token, when we abandon sin, through the instrumentality of a living redeemer, we become what we are when we aren't trying to be anything special, that is, compassionate and self-forgetful. We have already seen what impact this can have upon others: it is the single most important thing we can do to help them extricate themselves from the bondage of sin. Knowing this, we are happy to suffer whatever we must for their sakes; we are unwilling to take offense or withhold forgiveness. In the words of Carlfred Broderick, we "metabolize the poison of the prior generations." Thus our actions may in a small way recapitulate the Savior's sacrifice and atonement, with effects upon others that follow his pattern. Or we may replicate the devil's acts of betrayal and alienation with effects not unlike the ones he achieves. We may accept the sacrifice of the Lamb or else reject it by insisting upon having other people be our scapegoats. Insofar as we are endowed with what I have been calling moral or spiritual sensitivity, we cannot stand on neutral ground. We may follow the way of the great accuser, who is Satan, seeking by means of sin to gain a bogus certification of worthiness—a salvation, of a fraudulent kind, in our sins—or the way of him who came not to condemn the world, but to save it from sin. I do not think there is anything in uninspired human experience to teach us how much is at stake in all that we choose to do from moment to moment.

I am aware that this kind of talk about religion is bad manners in academic society. That is understandable; religion is widely suspect. One reason is that what our rational and empirical methods have disclosed to us of religion confuses it with self-righteous counterfeits of religion. So much the worse for these methods. We need more, much more, than we are getting from them. By any standard of scientific inquiry, the human sciences are in disarray. There's no good reason to invest our trust in any of them—including my own version of what they ought to be saying.

When I set out to solve certain conceptual problems that recur in the human sciences and in philosophy, I discovered, gradually, that the important things I finally prepared myself to say had been said before—some in Eastern religious texts, some in Western authors such as certain Christian mystics and Shakespeare and Kierkegaard, some in the commonplace wisdom of guileless people in many communities, but all of it better said and shown in the Hebrew, Christian, and Latter-day Saint scriptures. Without having it as a prior aim, I have come to feel that my work is to convey something of the power of these scriptures to those who do not know them, an endeavor that admittedly loses important elements in the translation.

Though I am by no means the first to make these claims, it seems worthwhile to keep repeating them: Our ignoble desires are not ultimately derived from an ignoble nature, and our anxieties are not the result of being unable to make ourselves whatever we are striving to be. These desires and

anxieties stem from our betrayal of what we really are, from our refusal to love, from an exercise of our agency that ties that agency in knots—in short, from sin. If we're emotionally troubled, it is not because we were created to be that way but because we have betrayed, perverted, and denied what we were created to be. The condition of our liberation from our unwanted desires and anxieties is our responsiveness, in love, to what others need from us, and to the supreme loving act that makes our love possible.

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1. See, for example, Carol Tavris, *Anger, the Misunderstood Emotion* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), and C. Terry Warner, "Anger and Similar Delusions," in *The Social Construction of Emotion*, ed. Romans Harr (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

2. Further reading on the social science issues I discuss may be found in Romans Harr, David Clarke, and Nicola de Carlo, *Motives and Mechanisms* (London: Methuen, 1985); Romans Harr, *Social Being: A Theory for Social Psychology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979); John Shotter, *Social Accountability and Selfhood* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984); and in the many sources cited in these volumes.

3. Among the more important predecessors of social constructionism are such diverse figures as Thorstein Veblen, George Herbert Mead, and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Comment on C. Terry Warner's "What We Are"

Ivana Markova

Much present psychology is based on cognition rather than emotion, and even subjects such as morality and agency are usually associated with cognitive assumptions. For example, morality has been explored in psychology virtually exclusively in the context of cognitive development, with moral judgment and moral reasoning in a child unfolding alongside the changes in the child's structure of knowledge. Emotions, on the other hand, have been viewed as disruptive, interfering with the child's operational thinking and causing him to focus on irrelevant aspects of situations.[1] The dramaturgical approach to the study of human action, favored now by many of those concerned with agency and self, also disregards emotions, since, as Harr maintains, they are not admissible as causes of actions.[2] The role of emotions in psychology has been traditionally relegated to the realm of pathological or at least disruptive behavior to be treated by therapy or controlled by the individuals who suffer it. Indeed, psychotherapies often explain emotions cognitively—as attributional, cognitive, and Gestalt therapies do—or conceptualize and acknowledge them, as humanistic therapy does.

Professor Warner makes a very valuable contribution to psychology by bringing the subject of emotions to the close attention of psychologists. Using both persuasive arguments and pertinent illustrations, he demonstrates that emotions are essential to many of our daily inter-personal interactions and to the views we have of ourselves and thus that their study should become the subject matter of mainstream psychology.

Warner identifies the problem of contemporary psychology in pointing out that the dramaturgical model of man that is now replacing the traditional model of man as a natural being, although it appeals to human agency, does not, in fact, leave much space for agency. Support for Warner's claim can also be found in the theory of the agency-oriented social construction of self-knowledge, in which the information we get from others is a main source of our self-knowledge.[3] This view is based on an interpretation of Mead, according to whom "we are in possession of selves just insofar as we can and do take the attitudes of others towards ourselves and respond to those attitudes."[4] But both the dramaturgical approach and the social-construction-of-knowledge approach seem to have difficulty in

pinpointing exactly what the agent is, and it appears that the fact that human beings take on and play different roles and do various things is sufficient for the agency metaphor. Playing roles and taking the attitudes of other people, Warner argues, does not suffice to define agency, for we are more than this. We are, first of all, beings who are morally responsive and who have moral expectations of ourselves. The agency of human beings, according to Warner's view, is independent of the role-playing ability; it is a "quality of our own." The question arises, though, what part society does play with respect to human agency as it is defined by Warner. If moral responsiveness leads to internalization of the expectations of a morally ordered community, what, then, can be the individual's contribution to his agency? If, on the other hand, moral responsiveness is an independent quality of each individual on his own, then it is not clear whether moral responsiveness bears any relation to society except in the sense of being thwarted by it, as Warner makes clear in the latter part of his paper.

Warner points out that through socialization we learn to be self-betraying actors since we are raised in a culture of collusion. Is the effect of society only negative? Warner's position on this issue is not obvious. According to Hegel, humanity is not given to human beings naturally. Rather, potential human beings, in order to become really human, must fight for their humanness in the process of anthropogenesis. It is in the process of interpersonal interaction—that is, in the mutual encounter of one conscious being with another conscious being—that self-consciousness eventually emerges: "I that is We and We that is I"; thus they recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another.[5] These two characteristics, the recognition of other human beings for what they are and a desire to be so recognized by others, form the basis of humanity. Warner, on the other hand, seems to be saying that honest self-consciousness is given to human beings rather than being the result of their striving.

If self-betrayal is learned through the process of socialization, as Warner maintains, one would expect that it would be possible, through appropriate guidance, to delearn it. This is not so, however. Warner claims we cannot change our feelings by strength of will; neither can we change our emotions step-by-step. The only possibility of giving up self-betrayal is to start, from now on, "to be emotionally honest." It seems to me that there are at least two problems with this solution: the first is related to Warner's claim that self-betrayal is lived, and the second is related to what one can mean by emotional honesty.

On the first of these problems, the answer of philosophers to the question as to how self-deception is possible has usually been based on the assumption that since people try to protect their self-image and self-esteem they either avoid facing the facts, or reinterpret the information available

to them, or divert their attention from damaging information, and so on. In other words, at some level of preconsciousness or consciousness they "know" what is true and what is not true about themselves, and as a result they choose a suitable strategy to protect their threatened self-images. If I understand him correctly, Warner says, on the other hand, that it is not reinterpretation of information or denial or anything else that mediates between the damaging information and ourselves. Rather, we actually experience information as painful or damaging; we actually suffer accusing emotions; we feel others as being at fault. In other words, it is not that information is over there in the world and we respond to it emotionally. Instead, we experience it directly and so actually live a lie. This idea is thought provoking, and it appears that Warner's position is similar to Gibson's theory which holds that a precept is directly perceived rather than derived through reconstruction and internal representation. But if one senses the pain of self-betrayal directly, with no mediator intervening between the truth and the lie, how can one stop betraying oneself? How can I stop doing something if I do not know there is anything I should stop doing? What criterion does a self-betraying person have that he is betraying himself? We may, of course, still be responsible for our distorted view of reality just as we are responsible for our attempt to protect our self-image.

The second problem with Warner's solution is how to distinguish, conceptually and empirically, between immature childish retaliation and an honest emotion. Warner, as I understand him, calls for a return to what we were before we started betraying ourselves. But is this possible? Just as evolution cannot go back, one cannot become what one was before. Even spontaneity changes during one's life. Childish spontaneity is immature and to be rejected, but it seems to me that the other kind of spontaneity, an unspoilt, honest presocialization emotion, is impossible because it is impossible to go back. Experience, gained through our socialization, cannot be rubbed out. Warner's position would mean that, in some way, human beings are static and unchangeable, which would contradict his agency model.

The question of the relationship between self-knowledge and self-deception arises in this context. Self-knowledge is gained through a process of active engagement in the world with other people and physical objects. Self-knowledge gained in the process of interpersonal interaction is due both to the knower's interacting with the other person and to his reflecting upon such interaction. When does one stop gaining self-knowledge and start betraying oneself instead? Taking Warner's position, it would be when one attempts to justify one's actions rather than just understand and evaluate them. Self-justification is an accusing emotion, and it takes over either when one does not take deeply enough the role of the other person (one is not empathic enough) or when one does not reflect deeply enough upon

one's own action. We could say that an accusing emotion is a shortcut for not enough role-playing because one is too egocentric. Could we not say, therefore, that self-betrayal may arise both from cognition and emotion?—although talk about cognition and emotion separately is for convenience only, since there is no evidence of two separate compartments of cognition and emotion in the mind.

Warner's views as expressed in his paper have important consequences for social skills training. The general philosophy in social skills training in clinical, social, and educational psychology, and in mental handicap, is to raise the trainee's social competence to a normative level. It is assumed that competence in interpersonal interaction is closely related to the ability to follow rules of behavior, such as the amount of eye contact, physical distance, and other definable elements of behavior. A successful training program can improve a person's general social effectiveness and role-playing abilities. Such programs, however, do not offer much opportunity for a person to develop his agency. If Warner's agency position is to be taken seriously, any attempt to help people become socially efficient must be based on the individual's agency and not imposed from outside because this would reflect a mere role-playing model that is passive and static.

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1. Thomas Lickona, ed. *Moral Development and Behavior: Theory, Research, and Social lssues* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1976).

2. Rom Harré, *Social Being: A Theory for Social Psychology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979).

3. Kenneth J. Gergen, "The Social Construction of Self-knowledge," in *The Self: Psychological and Philosophical Issues*, ed. Theodore Mischel (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), 139–69.

4. George Herbert Mead, "The Genesis of the Self and Social Control," *International Journal of Ethics* 35 (April 1925): 251–77.

5. Georg W. F Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind [1807]*, trans. J. B. Baillie (New York: Macmillan, 1949), 226–29.

Response to Markova

C. Terry Warner

Being brief and written for a broad audience, my paper could not deal with every important issue. By her sensitive, incisive, and clear statement of some of the issues I did not treat, Ivana Markova has given me an excellent opportunity to suggest some of the more subtle implications of my position. I am grateful to her for this.

She raises four main issues:

1. I wrote that in order to be socialized, we must in our natures be something more than a capacity to take up social roles. For there are some social role-networks that are alien to our humanity, in that however vigorously we may pursue them we will be tormented in doing so, while being assimilated into certain other role-networks fosters serenity of spirit. In other words, socialization is more than the acquisition of roles. It is a matter of internalizing expectations that are, in a broad sense, moral expectations. Therefore, as a condition for being assimilated into the moral order of a community, we must, in ourselves, be moral sensibilities—beings with agency to appreciate, internalize, and even violate such expectations.

Markova asks, if it be true that our agency stands prior to and independent of society's influence, then what effect can that influence have upon the exercise of our agency, except a negative, oppositional one? On the other hand, if our actual moral commitments at any one time are *only* internalizations of preexisting social expectations, and there is no moral nature apart from the socialized person, we cannot be said to contribute *anything* to the exercise of our agency, except for the trivial fact that it is we rather than some others who are exercising it. Apparently we are left to choose between a picture of the individual as an autonomous being potentially pitted against an intrinsically alien society and a picture of the individual as wholly a product of society. Markova intimates that I have given reasons for accepting both of these irreconcilable pictures as well as reasons for rejecting both of them.

One way to clarify the issue is to say that although the moral commitments we form in the process of socialization are ways of acting out roles that are dictated to us by our tradition, we become individuals only by actively taking up that tradition for ourselves. The influence of society is possible only by means of this active exercise of agency, just as the exercise of agency is possible only by way of desires, emotions, and fears that are mediated through others. Hence, the character of the individual being

socialized is neither autonomous nor dictated. It is mediated. The *We* that is society is the *I* in which it is incarnated: Hegel is right, and so is Markova for endorsing him on this issue. Equally, the *I* is the *We:* there can be no possibility that the emerging individual is autonomous and possibly thwarted by an independent society. If thwarted at all (and this does not necessarily happen), it is because the attitude by which the individual regards society as opposing him is a collusory one: he is accomplice to his own stultification. Even what threatens agency manifests agency.

2. I wrote that self-betrayal is a lie that is lived, in that the agent retains no residual or "unconscious" sense of the truth. Lacking this, he cannot evaluate himself and thereby overturn the lie; he has no leverage against his capacity to transform his world totally by the lies he lives.

If then we have no way of knowing we are self-deceived, Markova asks, how can we put an end to self-deception? My answer, which I develop at length in a forthcoming book, is that there is an emotional bondage in self-deception. We pursue our own misery systematically, *as if we* cannot help it. One way to try to explain this compulsivity, which is by no means limited to clinical cases, is Freud's way, in terms of the absolute unacceptability both of facing up to the dark side of our natures and of hiding them from ourselves by self-deception. In this view, we are forever conflicted in our personalities as a condition of our humanity; psychological peace is impossible. I think I have a more adequate way to explain the self-deceiver's compulsivity: since the lie that is lived is global, every conceivable way out of it is a cul-de-sac in the labyrinth: it leads only into other regions of the self-deception. This does not mean that we cannot extricate ourselves from our self-deceptions, but only that we cannot do so by analysis, or with the help of a plan, or through reflection. The path we must take is not one we can see in advance.

What then is the path? For one thing (though there is no room to discuss this in the present paper), even though we retain no access to the truth when we are self-deceiving, there are telltale signs that something is wrong. In particular, we are anxious to prove that the emotions we are suffering are genuine and not mere pretenses, for we feel assailed from every side by challenges to our claims that we are victims. So the possibility that we are not being truthful is a constant preoccupation for us. It may seem, therefore, that we have a secret access to the truth and are vigorously covering it up. But I maintain it isn't the truth that we are thus defensive about, for if we were to "admit" it we would not arrive at serenity of spirit but would beat our breasts self-condemningly and remain as agitated about justifying ourselves ("At least I am not a hypocrite anymore!") as we ever were. Even for one who pays attention to the telltale signs, the conceivable ways out are cul-de-sacs.

How then may we stop deceiving ourselves? Just because something cannot be done in steps, it does not follow that it cannot be done at all. From observation of many cases, I have come to believe that escaping self-deception is an absolutely simple act that is ever within our power (given the spiritual resources I mention in the last section of my paper). We are able simply to be honest, to "get off it," to stop the self-insistence. A self-deception must be renewed in every moment by attentive pursuit of our self-justification; equally, it is within our power at every moment to abandon the effort. After all, deceiving oneself in the first place cannot be accomplished by taking thought either. (If anyone doubts this, let him try it.)

3. Markova writes that I seem in my paper to suggest that by means of emotional honesty we may return to our childhood condition of pristine spontaneity, whereas this is clearly impossible since it would require undoing the socialization that has made us what we are and what we must be in order to be capable of that kind of honesty. For me there is a difference between a child's kind of innocence and the innocence possible for people who have become accountable for their acts. By repenting of the lies we have been living, we become like little children in openness and straightforwardness but without the child's kind of innocence. We come to our adult kind of innocence after complicity in the world's sorrows, and when we do, the oppositions between ourselves and others that we may have nurtured in our lifetimes are at last reconciled. For little children, those oppositions do not yet exist. To mark the difference between the two kinds of innocence, we might call the child's kind *innocence* and the adult's *virtue*. Virtue consists of overcoming evil by love, and so the path of virtue is a way through the world's troubles, not a way back. Little children are naive, not virtuous in this sense.

4. Markova raises also the issue of self-knowledge. I think she and I would agree that there is no self independent of knowledge of the self. The self is not an entity but is *only* the object of self-knowledge. Therefore, what we think we are when we are engaged in living a lie is a very different sort of thing from what we would think we are if we were free from self-deception. The self we conceive self-deceivingly is a creature replete with emotional needs, hungers, anxieties, and vulnerabilities that simply do not exist in the self we conceive when we are more self-forgetful, less self-involved, more concerned about others.