

## Constancy and purity

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### 1. *Integrity and constancy*

Integrity is a complex notion. In one of its senses, it is principled action; in another, it is wholeness. I shall call the first authenticity, and the second constancy. A man shows authenticity if he has made a commitment and acts according to it. But there is more to it, because one is called upon to act authentically only if it is difficult to act in accordance with his commitments. Authenticity is shown only in the face of challenge. If a man acts authentically over a long time, we can say that he has integrity, in one sense of the word.

But he may not have it in the other sense, because the commitments he habitually honours may frequently change. A principled man may not be a whole man, he may not be all of a piece, for his commitments may be incompatible, or he may punctiliously adhere to one commitment after another. Constancy is to act authentically in accordance with coherent commitments. The second sense of integrity, wholeness, can be ascribed to a man only if his life has a deliberate pattern.

Patterns may be deliberate or fortuitous. The latter is a property every life has, the former is an achievement resulting from self-direction. A man's conduct cannot fail to reflect his fortuitous pattern for that pattern is simply the aggregate of his actions. To act in accordance with one's fortuitous pattern, therefore, is not to do something praiseworthy or difficult, it is just to be in a certain way.

A man possesses constancy only if he regularly acts in accordance with a deliberate pattern. That is, a pattern he first recognizes as an ideal and then gradually transforms himself so as to have his life reflect it. To have constancy is to be steadfast in adhering to one's deliberate pattern as it is transformed from a distant ideal to one's second nature and true self.

One consequence of this is that it is a mistake to think of authenticity simply as episodes forming constancy. The two senses of integrity are not related as simply as this. For constancy frequently involves violating some of the commitments of one's present self, and thus acting inauthentically. The reason for this is

that by being steadfast to one's present self a man manufactures obstacles to becoming better. Acts of authenticity, therefore, may actually stand in the way of constancy. Sartre, that prophet of integrity, has seen this clearly: 'What then is sincerity,' he asks rhetorically, 'except precisely a phenomenon of bad faith'.<sup>1</sup>

If we think about creating one's better self in terms of integrity, the process appears paradoxical, for it involves both adhering to and weakening one's present commitments. This paradox comes from the failure to distinguish between the two senses of integrity. Integrity is being true to oneself. But the self may be the present self that one has undertaken to improve or the future self that he aspires to having. Constancy is to be true to the self one's deliberate pattern projects; authenticity is to be true to the self one happens to have. The two selves may coincide, but actually they are unlikely to do so, since few men have achieved the better self they want to have.

Of course, authenticity and constancy remain connected, for both involve habitually honouring one's commitments when doing so is difficult. Thus it is frequently a matter of indifference whether an action is said to exemplify authenticity or constancy. This overlap is reflected by the ambiguity of integrity. For my purposes, however, the distinction is important, because worthwhile life is connected with honouring commitments structured into a deliberate pattern. Constancy can be ascribed to a man only if he does this, while authenticity may or may not involve doing it.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. *An act of constancy: Callisthenes*

In his life of Alexander, Plutarch tells us about Callisthenes, nephew of Aristotle, a philosopher himself, who had accompanied Alexander on the campaign to Persia: '[I]n the matter of obeisance he behaved like a true philosopher, not only in his sturdy refusal to perform it, but also in being the only man to express in public the resentment which all the oldest and best Macedonians felt in private. By persuading the king not to insist on this tribute, he

1 J-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, tr. H. E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), p. 53.

2 For an illuminating discussion of these issues, see L. Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1971); S. Hampshire, 'Sincerity and Single-Mindedness', *Freedom of Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972); A. D. M. Walker, 'The Ideal of Sincerity', *Mind*, 87 (1978), pp. 481-497; and N. J. H. Dent's 'The Ideal of Sincerity', *Mind*, 89 (1980), pp. 418-419.

delivered the Greeks from a great disgrace and Alexander from even a greater one.<sup>1</sup>

Obeisance was a serious matter. It involved prostrating oneself on the ground. For the Greeks, this was a religious gesture which they owed only to some gods, and Alexander was a man. For the Persians, on the other hand, obeisance was a social act routinely performed to kings. Alexander's demand that the Greeks should pay obeisance to him, as the conquered Persians did, was thus doubly offensive. It was both sacrilegious and it reduced the Greeks to the status of barbarians. This was behind Callisthenes's protest.

Yet kings were not to be trifled with. Not only was obedience to them a duty, it was also a matter of self-interest, because the king guaranteed the cohesion of the group. In a foreign country, in the midst of conquered enemies, the authority of the king was essential to the unity and security of the Greeks. Furthermore, obedience, prompted by both duty and self-interest, was also backed by the king's absolute power over the life, wealth, and citizenship of his subjects. Callisthenes risked losing all by his public refusal of obeisance.

Callisthenes's behaviour exemplifies constancy: for he was being true to the pattern of his commitments. This pattern was the Macedonian gloss upon the Greek way of life. It was the pattern in terms of which Callisthenes, and his fellow Greeks in Persia, saw the good life, judged good and evil, and ordered their commitments. Alexander, who ought to have been defending it, was undermining the pattern. Callisthenes's constancy was a reminder to Alexander, and to the other Greeks, what they were about. As a true philosopher should, Callisthenes reaffirmed the ideal of good life that was the foundation of all that made their lives worth living.

Essential to understanding constancy, and of Callisthenes's exemplification of it, is understanding that it is an attitude in the face of a conflict. Constancy is called for, because the pattern a person has accepted conflicts with something else. It may be the command of some external authority, one's pleasure or security, the temptations of wealth, power, or status, or the inherent difficulties involved in adhering to the pattern. Constancy is the refusal to be swayed from the pattern in the face of this conflict, the disposition to remain true to oneself.

But the pattern to which one remains constant differs from

<sup>1</sup> Plutarch, *The Age of Alexander*, tr. I. Scott-Kilvert (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 312.

person to person, and so, therefore, does the form of constancy. I do not mean merely that different people are obliged to remain true to different patterns, it is also that remaining true to them involves quite different attitudes. For Callisthenes, constancy was to disobey his king; for Clarendon, constancy was to obey the frivolous Charles II, and eventually acquiesce in his own ignominious dismissal after a lifetime of loyal service. Montaigne showed great constancy in retiring from public service for private life. Charles de Gaulle, however, was led by constancy first to seek public office, then to leave it, and then to accept it again when France was ready for his principles, only to resign it forever when anarchy got the better of his people. So the attitude involved in constancy is not to prefer the private to the public, nor to refuse to alter one's behaviour, nor is it to obey or to disobey external authority. What is it then? I shall answer by considering first a mistaken and then a correct analysis: Kierkegaard's and an Aristotelian account.

### 3. *Constancy and purity: Kierkegaard's mistake*

Kierkegaard identifies the attitude towards the conflict involved in constancy as purity of heart, or, briefly, purity. His book, *Purity of Heart*,<sup>1</sup> is an extended meditation on a Biblical passage: 'Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts ye double-minded.'<sup>2</sup> Drawing near to God is to draw near to the good; to stop being double-minded by purifying one's heart. And 'purity of heart is to will one thing' (p. 53).

Kierkegaard would interpret Callisthenes's behaviour as an indication of purity. Callisthenes had a conception of the good, he did not allow himself to be deterred from it, he willed only it, thus he was not double-minded, and therein consists his constancy.

What would it have been for Callisthenes to be deterred? If he had willed the good because of hope of reward or fear of punishment, he would have been double-minded. He would, then, have willed the good not for its own sake, as purity dictates, but for the sake of something else. 'To will the Good for the sake of reward is double-mindedness. To will one thing, therefore, is to will the Good without considering the reward' (p. 72). And 'willing the

1 S. Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart*, tr. D. V. Steere (New York: Harper, 1948); page references are given in parentheses.

2 *The Epistle of James*, chapter 4, verse 8.

good only out of fear of punishment . . . is the same as to will the Good for the sake of reward, to the extent that avoiding an evil is an advantage of the same sort as that of attaining a benefit' (p. 79). Callisthenes did not behave as he did for reward; in fact, he risked great injury to himself. So he was not double-minded. But why should we think that if one is not double-minded, if he really wills only one thing, then he will will the good?

Because '[g]enuinely to will one thing, a man must in truth will the good' (pp. 121–122). And why should this be so? Because if one is pure, without double-mindedness, then his soul will be allowed to speak clearly, and it will speak for the good. For '[t]he person who wills one thing that is not the Good, he does not truly will one thing. . . . For in his innermost being he is, he is bound to be, double-minded' (p. 55). And conversely, 'If . . . a man should in truth will only one thing, then this thing must, in the truth of his innermost being, be one thing' (p. 66). One more step will bring us to the core of Kierkegaard's thinking.

Purity is bound to lead to the good, because one's innermost being, the soul, is attuned to the objective good, God, which exists outside of oneself. The pure uncorrupted soul, freed from double-mindedness, will necessarily aim for the good, because evil is simply interference with the natural processes of the soul; an interference which shows itself in the various forms of double-mindedness. Purity, therefore, leads to the good and double-mindedness to evil, because purity is to be in harmony with the cosmic order that is good, while double-mindedness is to be separated from it. On this view, constancy is to listen attentively to one's soul and to resolve conflicts between its promptings and worldly rewards or punishments in favour of the soul. This, supposedly, is what Callisthenes had done.

It is natural to object to Kierkegaard's view by pointing out that there is no reason for accepting the metaphysical theory implicit in it. This has been argued many times, and I shall not rehearse the old steps again. An additional reason for not doing so is that the moral portion of Kierkegaard's view can be held without the metaphysics; Rousseau, for instance, had done so. I shall, therefore, argue against the moral view independently of the supposed metaphysical underpinnings.

Did Callisthenes will only one thing? Superficially, it seems so. For what he meant to do by his public refusal of obeisance was to defend the pattern of his life. And since the pattern was the Greek

way of life, he was defending also the pattern of life of his fellow Macedonians, including Alexander, against whom the defence was needed. But this is superficial, because the Greek pattern was a complicated structure of commitments, wants, and ideals. *It* was thought to be good; the *it*, however, was not one thing, but many. Callisthenes's defence was like protecting one's house from deterioration: a matter of having to do many things. His constancy was pure, in the sense of not being motivated by hope of personal gain; but it was not pure in the sense Kierkegaard needs of wanting only one thing.

Kierkegaard's reason for thinking that one wills the good if he wills only one thing was his metaphysical belief in a benign and love-impregnated cosmic order. But what reason is there for thinking that there is such a thing as *the good*, if we question the metaphysics? In the absence of supernatural grounding, we must observe human nature and history. And what we can conclude from them is that while there are some universal and necessary conditions without which human lives cannot be good, such as some security and opportunity, when these conditions are met, lives reflect many different conceptions of good. There is an ideal of good in the Homeric tradition, in Aristotle, in monasticism, in the Protestant Ethic, in the lives of Victorian gentlemen, and in the long tradition running from Plato, through Jesus and Kant, to Kierkegaard. There is no reason to think that all good lives will take one of these forms in civilized conditions when a person is willing the good without thinking of reward or punishment. And there are excellent reasons, provided by personal experience, history, and literature, for thinking that good lives take many different forms. So Kierkegaard is mistaken in thinking both that purity will lead a man to will one thing, because the pattern he wills is complicated, and that it will lead different men to will the same thing, since there are many good patterns.

But he is also mistaken in thinking that having the kind of purity he values is good without qualification, and being, what he calls, double-minded is an obstacle to moral excellence. I think that purity may lead to vicious fanaticism and double-mindedness is part of being a reflective moral agent.

Kierkegaard supposes that moral progress is from double-mindedness to purity. In this progression, a man engages in deeper and deeper self-examination, and, in the course of it, he gradually frees himself from the corrupting desire for such goods as the

human world can offer; thus he gets rid of double-mindedness. The very serious difficulty with this view is the supposition that what awaits a man at the end of self-examination is goodness. Why should one believe that when the desire for worldly goods is removed, then only benign and loving sentiments will be left? What happens to such equally basic impulses as aggression, hostility to novelty, suspicion of strangers, jealousy, pride, envy, and so on? On this point, Kierkegaard is not only opposed by those who reject his metaphysics, but also by many defenders of the Christian tradition. Salvation, according to them, is not in human hands, precisely because human nature is unavoidably tainted by evil; good and evil exist in us side by side. Only with the help of divine grace can we overcome evil. The secular equivalent of this realistic appraisal of human nature, if not of its improvement, is the apt observation that 'To say that altruism and morality are possible in virtue of something basic to human nature is not to say that men are basically good. Men are basically complicated; how good they are depends on whether certain conceptions and ways of thinking have achieved dominance.'<sup>1</sup> Kierkegaard fails to see that the result of vigorous and honest self-examination may be the discovery Kurtz makes at the end of his journey in *The Heart of Darkness* that in his innermost self he finds 'The horror! The horror!' Great purity is compatible with great evil. To will one thing is to be single-minded in pursuit of an ideal. But whether it is good to be single-minded in this way depends on the goodness of the ideal.

What counts against single-mindedness counts for double-mindedness. Now the enterprise of defending double-mindedness must seem perverse, for the word suggests duplicity, and nobody can be seriously defending that. And, of course, it is not duplicity, but a healthy dose of moral care that I think a person should have. To be double-minded, in my sense, is to interpose reflection between what one wants and what he does. It is to refrain from acting spontaneously, because one knows that such action may be evil. Thus, double-mindedness is a necessary condition of self-direction. If one were not double-minded in this way, he could not decide to commit himself to the satisfaction of some and the frustration of other of his wants. Nor could he decide about the relative importance of his commitments, and, therefore, could not form a deliberate pattern to guide his moral progress.

1 T. Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), p. 146.

Kierkegaard's praise for single-mindedness or purity and his condemnation of double-mindedness both stem from his belief in the intrinsic goodness of man. My suspicion of single-mindedness and advocacy of double-mindedness also have a common source: the belief that men are intrinsically complicated. This is cause for optimism, because there is good in man; and it is cause for pessimism, because there is evil in man. I shall now turn to a view that takes these plain facts into account.

#### 4. *Constancy and satisfaction: an Aristotelian view*

Callisthenes was admirable in his constancy. But what was admirable in it was his willingness to risk everything for the pattern of his commitment, for his ideal of a good life. It is not for his purity that we should honour Callisthenes. He wanted many things, including no doubt rewards, and it would be amazing if he did not want to avoid punishment. In the reflections of a reasonable man, reward and punishment have an important role. They are, after all, connected with his well-being. This may or may not be corrupting, and in Callisthenes's case, it was not. He was constant to his ideal of a good life, because it was the life he supposed will lead to the good things he wanted. He was willing to risk it, because he saw the whole pattern jeopardized by Alexander. The risk was reasonable, because he believed that whatever good there is in life is obtainable only through the endangered pattern. Constancy and well-being are thus connected for Callisthenes, and they should be connected for all reasonable men. To understand their connection, we have to understand better the goods a pattern may yield.

Here the Aristotelian distinction between external and internal goods will help.<sup>1</sup> The goods are benefits obtainable through a pattern. And they are external or internal depending on their origin. Take the pattern of an exemplary contemporary philosopher when all goes well for him. The external goods the pattern affords him are the salary he receives, the status he has at his university, the respect of his students and colleagues, the prestige he enjoys in his

1 The distinction is in Book I of *Nicomachean Ethics*. I say that the distinction is Aristotelian, not Aristotle's, because it is obscure in Aristotle's writings and I have not hesitated to adapt it for my purposes. I found J. M. Cooper's *Reason and the Human Good in Aristotle*, Part III (Cambridge: Harvard, 1975) and W. F. R. Hardie's *Aristotle's Ethical Theory*, chapter II (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), 2nd ed., very helpful. But my account owes most to A. MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, chapter 14, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).



profession. The internal goods are the satisfaction of having understood another philosopher's outlook, of knowing that he got a difficult argument just exactly right, of having succeeded in presenting persuasively his own thoughts about a problem, of observing himself gradually growing in understanding how philosophy illuminates the human condition, finding that it informs his life and makes him a more thoughtful and, perhaps, wiser person, of feeling at home in a long and noble tradition.

There are similarities and differences between external and internal goods. To begin with similarities, both external and internal goods are good. They are benefits a reasonable person may wish to have. Financial security, prestige, respect, and status make one's life better. They are good in themselves, because they are indications that one's contributions to society are valued. A person who contributes to the well-being of others ought to receive recognition. External goods are these recognitions. But external goods are also good as means, for they are part of having a satisfactory life. So external goods are what Aristotle called mixed: they are both intrinsically and instrumentally good. And so are internal goods. They are intrinsically good, because they are the satisfactions a person hopes to derive from living according to his commitments. Growth in wisdom and understanding, mastery of the skills required by one's chosen pattern, appreciation of one's tradition, the acquisition and exercise of good judgment are good in themselves and good also as means to a satisfactory overall pattern.

There are considerable differences between external and internal goods as well. One is that the former come to one from the outside, while the latter are self-developed. External goods are external, because they are possessions or rewards a person receives from social institutions. They are external in their origin. They are given and received, and the process can be seen by all who care to look. Internal goods are internal, because they come to a person, if at all, only as a result of his inner life. They are not given or received, but developed. When a person finds satisfaction in his understanding, skill, appreciation, belongingness to a tradition, and good judgment, he does not receive a reward in recognition of having done well. The satisfaction is part of having done well. Internal goods are constitutive of an ideal pattern; external goods are supervenient to it. A person can enjoy internal goods without, or even in opposition to, existing social institutions; external goods are impossible without granting institutions. Thinkers, mothers, inventors, fire-

men, and politicians may be unrecognized and unappreciated and yet find great satisfaction in life according to their chosen pattern. But these satisfactions must be derived from internal goods; for the lack of recognition and appreciation deprives them of external ones.

We must guard against a misinterpretation of the distinction between external and internal goods. The distinction does not coincide with the distinction between private and public goods. In one sense, both external and internal goods are private, for what makes them good is the private satisfaction they give to the person who has them. From the point of view of their origin, however, external goods are public and internal goods are private. But even this can be misunderstood. By origin I mean where the goods come from: external ones from social institutions, internal ones from the inner life. By origin I do not mean the kind of activity that produces them; internal goods may be produced by activities that concern only the agent or by activities that concern other people and society. Growth in self-knowledge is an internal good that concerns primarily oneself; but growth in love and understanding of another person, or in statesmanship, are also internal goods and they concern others as well as oneself. I shall speak of internal goods being either public or private in one sense only: they are private, if the satisfaction they give concerns the person himself primarily and others, if at all, only derivatively; they are public, if their primary concern is both with others and oneself. The satisfaction is in both cases enjoyed by the person, but the object of the satisfaction may or may not involve others.

External goods are competitive; internal goods are not. Financial security, status, respect, and prestige depend on a person's standing in a hierarchy. It is possible to have more or less of them, because there are social institutions in the background part of whose business it is to maintain the hierarchy by comparing and ranking people's achievements and distributing the external goods. This can be done justly and unjustly. When there is clarity about the standards for the evaluation of achievements, the institution is just; otherwise, not. Of course, there will always be borderline cases, anomalies, difficulties about distinguishing between originality and inappropriateness, but if these cases are in a minority, the institution is functioning well. Universities and professional organizations, like the Modern Language Association or the International Olympic Association, are clear examples of the kind of institutions I have in mind. Museums, editorial boards of publishers or learned

journals, personnel officers in large corporations, the consensus of literary or art critics are less well defined institutions. The salient fact is, however, that regardless of whether the distribution of external goods is just or unjust, the more a person has, the less is left for others. If external goods were not scarce and competitive, they would not be goods.

Internal goods are not like this. They are satisfactions obtained from doing well at the activities involved in one's pattern. The satisfactions may be greater or less, but their extent does not depend on a system of distribution. Internal goods come from the satisfactions a person has in transforming himself in accordance with his ideals of a good life. Its source is the belief that one is becoming proficient at the skills and beginning to possess the dispositions required by his ideals, and, as a result, he is making himself into a better person.

The internal goods a person enjoys cannot but be deserved. For the only way of obtaining them is to work hard at realizing one's adopted pattern. Of course, this pattern may be ill-chosen, either because it is defective and it cannot lead to a good life for anyone, or because it is unsuited to the person who has adopted it. But if the pattern does yield internal goods for a person, then he is receiving no less than he deserves.

On the other hand, a person may receive external goods both justly and unjustly. If the social institution distributing the external goods is unjust, people may not get what they deserve on the basis of their achievements. Internal goods and achievements are directly connected, because, given only a non-defective pattern, achievement partly consists in obtaining the satisfaction through the enjoyment of internal goods. The connection between external goods and achievement, however, is indirect, because there is the social institution mediating between them. So, in pursuing internal goods through a pattern, a person inevitably gets what he deserves: satisfaction if he tries hard and the pattern is suitable; frustration, if he backslides or adopts the wrong pattern. Getting or failing to get the internal goods cannot be accidental. Discrimination, favouritism, fashions, prejudice, unfair advantage may interfere with distribution of external goods, but they have no foothold in the process of seeking internal goods.

There is a relentless objectivity about internal goods. The Christian who aspires to imitate Jesus, the philosopher who aims at the benign wisdom of the old Montaigne and the mature Hume, the

artist whose model is Michelangelo, the politician who wants to be to his people what Pericles was to Athens all have a clear standard of achievement set by these magisterial figures. '[T]he old masters are something like culture heroes, but heroes whose achievements are not only remembered in legend, but preserved by society as a continuous challenge to those who come after them.'<sup>1</sup> A person patterning his life on these old masters will know better than anyone how well he is doing. And if he is given to self-deception, he will not be able to sustain it, for the test of success is not what he says to himself, but the enjoyment of the internal goods that only approximation of the ideal can provide. The significance of having internal goods is that one is better; and the significance of not having them is that one has, excusably or not, failed: the life he had thought good is eluding him. There is no comparable clarity about external goods. Since social institutions tend to be corrupt, and even just ones frequently err, having or not having external goods indicates more about fortune than about merit.

The distinction between external and internal goods leads to a better understanding of constancy. Constancy is to adhere to the deliberate pattern one has adopted in the face of challenges. A person adopts a pattern, because it represents his ideal of a good life. The life is made good by the external and internal goods it provides. As we have seen, however, there is a crucial difference between external and internal goods. If a person realizes his pattern, transforms himself according to it, and the pattern is neither defective nor unsuited to him, he will have such internal goods as his pattern can yield; but whether he will get the external goods is, to a large extent, a matter of luck. Constancy, therefore, takes two forms, depending on the kind of challenge one encounters in working to realize his pattern.

One kind of challenge is the difficulty one encounters in becoming the sort of person his pattern prescribes. Constancy here consists in continuing to work hard at developing the necessary skills and dispositions. I shall call this positive constancy. The other kind of challenge is the misfortune of not getting the external goods one deserves. Constancy in these cases comes to not allowing the misfortune to interfere with the pattern. Rage, envy, jealousy, and resentment do not remove the misfortune, and they tend to prevent a person from continuing with the task of self-direction. Negative

1 E. H. Gombrich, *Ideals and Idols* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1979), p. 253.

constancy is not to allow this to occur. In the course of a lifetime, a person will need both positive and negative constancy, if he is to cope with adversity.

The alternative to constancy is to weaken one's allegiance to one's pattern. But since the goods a person wants can be realized, if at all, only through the pattern, lack of constancy will lead to lack of satisfaction, and so to unsatisfactory lives. If a person lacks negative constancy in the face of being deprived of external goods he deserves, the result is that the chances of getting the internal goods will also diminish. And if someone does not have positive constancy, he is unlikely to achieve the self-transformation that makes the enjoyment of internal goods possible, and thus removes himself from the ranks of candidates who deserve external goods.

Callisthenes showed considerable negative constancy in the face of Alexander's injustice. Alexander was the social institution responsible for the distribution of external goods. These goods, in the Greek pattern, were honour, respect, and public recognition. Alexander was unjust, because he did not give the Greeks the respect they deserved and he demanded from them respect he himself did not deserve. Callisthenes's constancy consisted in protecting the Greek pattern against Alexander's attempt to demean it.

The distinction between external and internal goods also makes it possible to understand better Kierkegaard's mistake. Underlying his identification of constancy and purity is a deep suspicion of external goods. This suspicion has long historical roots. Traces of it can be found in Plato, it is a cornerstone of stoicism, Christian moralists place external goods firmly among the glittering objects in the City of Man that turn out to be other than gold, and various champions of authenticity suspect those who want them of bad faith. The source of this suspicion is the accurate observation that the possession of external goods is largely a matter of luck, and that if a person seeks them, he should be prepared for frustration. But it does not follow that external goods are not good. The mistake of Kierkegaard and of the anti-worldly tradition to which he belongs is to try to make the contingency of external goods easier to bear by denying that they are good. This denial seems untenable to me.

The deep truth in this anti-worldly tradition is that each person is responsible for self-direction and the primary satisfactions of that process come from one's inner life. But inner satisfactions and their lack are not the only ones. A person's judgment of himself is

connected in countless ways with how others judge him. A person shares with others his ideals, his moral idioms, he learns from some and teaches others, he cooperates and competes with friends and colleagues, he joins with them in exercising judgment; in brief, the opinion of others unavoidably reflect on oneself. External goods are the currency, the symbolic forms, of these opinions. The opinion of others is fallible, but so is one's own. To trust only one is to make judgments about the crucial matter of how one should live even less reliable than it needs to be. Of course, personal judgment should take precedence over public opinion; but if they coincide, they are more likely to be correct, and if they diverge, there should be good reasons for coming down on the side of personal judgment. Kierkegaard's anti-worldliness leads him to rule public opinion out of court.

The anti-worldly mistake is either *hubris* or hypocrisy. It is *hubris* if it is thought that if one thinks deeply, then one will have thought well. Everybody benefits from the discipline of subjecting his judgment to public scrutiny. Or, the mistake may be hypocrisy: to pretend that one does not live in the world and care about its opinion. There may be a few people who genuinely do not care about external goods and whose personal judgment needs no improvement, but I see no reason why they should serve as models for most of humanity who do care and are fallible.

It is best, I think, to take Kierkegaard's position as a warning against a certain kind of corruption. A person can care too much for external goods. Indeed, his engagement in a pattern may have very little to do with his hope of achieving internal goods, for he uses the pattern merely as an instrument for getting external goods. The musician who measures his success by the length of applause, the athlete who is in it for the money, the philosopher whose satisfactions come from delivering crushing rejoinders, the politician for whom accomplishment means popularity are all corrupt in this way. If by purity we mean resistance to this kind of corruption, then we should all be in favour of it. What purity, in this sense, requires is not the rejection of external goods, but maintaining a proper balance between external and internal goods. Montaigne can teach us something about that.

##### 5. *Constancy and commitments: Montaigne's example*

Montaigne saw himself as living in 'a sick age', in the sixteenth-century France of whose 'worm-eaten and maggoty body' even the

'justest party is still a member' (p. 759).<sup>1</sup> He was a minor aristocrat and this conferred on him moderate wealth, prestige, and status. These were connected with public service, and Montaigne was engaged in it for thirteen years as counselor attached to the Parliament of Bordeaux. He found the laws he was administering unjust and he retired into private life. As he notes: 'In the year of Christ 1571, at the age of thirty-eight, on the last day of February, his birthday, Michel de Montaigne, long weary of the servitude of the court and of public employment, while still entire, retired to the bosom of the learned virgins [his library], where in calm and freedom from cares he will spend what little remains of his life, now more than half run out. If the fates permit, he will complete this abode' (p. ix). Montaigne intended to reflect and to write, and it is for this that he needed 'freedom, tranquility, and leisure' (p. x). But the fates did not permit it. He was obliged to be Mayor of Bordeaux for two terms and to mediate between the warring Protestants and Catholics. Why did he do it? Because 'in such a [worm-eaten and maggoty] body the least diseased member is called healthy; and quite rightly, since our qualities have no titles except by comparison. Civic innocence is measured according to the places and the times' (p. 760).

Montaigne faced the fundamental conflict between public and private life. The internal goods of his pattern were connected with both. But there was a tension between them, because public life was soiling; it conflicted with Montaigne trying to become what he regarded as a good man. He sees this, as well as the necessity of being soiled: 'In every government there are necessary offices which are . . . vicious. Vices find their place in it and are employed for sewing society together, as are poisons for the preservation of our health. . . . The public welfare requires that a man betray and lie and massacre' (p. 600). Montaigne's conflict is known to us as the problem of dirty hands.

Kierkegaard would say that to see this as a conflict is already to be corrupt: Montaigne is double-minded. When public life is seen as a source of internal goods, there lurks behind this perception a corrupt want for the wrong things: power, prestige, respect are false goods. The error is to think of external goods as if they were internal. Purity calls for retreat into oneself, because no genuine internal good can come from involvement with the world.

1 The page references in parentheses refer to the pages of *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, tr. D. M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958).

Montaigne was right to retire at thirty-eight, and he was wrong to come out of retirement and expose himself to inevitable soil by being a mayor and a go-between. But it is Kierkegaard who is wrong about this: seeking internal goods through public life can be corrupting, but it need not be. Montaigne's life and the *Essays*, 'a book consubstantial with its author' (p. 504) are great partly because we can learn from them how to see corruption for what it is and yet to avoid it. Montaigne's pattern of a good life requires both living in the world and withstanding its corruption. How can he do both?

'The mayor and Montaigne,' says Montaigne, 'have always been two, with a very clear separation' (p. 774). What is this separation? On the one hand: '[A]n honest man is not accountable for the vice and stupidity of his trade, and should not therefore refuse to practice it: it is the custom of his country, and there is profit in it. We must live in the world and make the most of it such as we find it' (p. 774). On the other hand: 'I have been able to take part in public office without departing one nail's breadth from myself, and to give myself to others without taking myself from myself' (p. 770). But how is this possible? How can he remain himself, have what I am calling constancy, and, at the same time, engage in vicious and stupid practices? And Montaigne answers: by offering only 'limited and conditional services. There is no remedy. I frankly tell them my limits' (p. 603). He will soil himself up to a point, but not beyond it. What is this point?

Montaigne has no clear answer, because he thinks mainly of his own case. We know what his limits were in some cases, but we do not know why. However, we can give a clearer answer by distinguishing between unconditional and defeasible commitments. Unconditional commitments are the core of a person's pattern, the fundamental components of his identity, his most basic allegiances. Defeasible commitments reflect the requirements of the particular historical and social setting in which a person lives. Both kinds of commitments are to goods, formulated as ideals, in accordance with which a person aims to satisfy his wants. And he accepts the ideals, because he believes that they represent good ways of being, that is, a way of life in which a person directs himself to satisfy beneficial wants and frustrate harmful ones.

Montaigne and Kierkegaard agree on one point: the most fundamental of one's unconditional commitments must be to internal and private goods. The reason for this has been cogently



expressed by W. D. Falk: '[T]here is one commitment whose ground is intimately personal and which comes before any other personal or social commitment whatsoever: the commitment to the principled mode of life as such. One is tempted to call this the supreme moral commitment.'<sup>1</sup> Beyond this point their disagreement begins.

Kierkegaard thinks that the principled mode of life cannot include commitments to public internal goods or to external goods. If a man's unconditional commitment is to a private internal good and his defeasible commitments are to public internal goods or to external goods, he is double-minded. He, then does not will the internal goods for their own sake, but for the sake of external goods public life may hold out. Montaigne thinks that the principled mode of life includes external goods and both public and private internal goods. There is, in his view, nothing wrong with defeasible commitments to external and public goods. 'We must live in the world and make the most of it as we find it' (p. 774). Montaigne agrees with Kierkegaard that living in the world can be corrupting. But it has not corrupted Montaigne and it need not corrupt others. What must be done is to make only 'limited and conditional' (p. 603) commitments to public internal and external goods; the right attitude is: 'I frankly tell them my limits' (p. 603). The limits are the unconditional commitments to private internal goods; these commitments must not be compromised by defeasible commitments to external or public internal goods.

So Montaigne's answer to the question of what the proper balance is between external and internal goods is that private internal goods are primary and that one may do what his pattern calls for in seeking external and public internal goods, just so long as doing so does not violate unconditional commitments to private internal goods. In this way, Montaigne can live in the world 'without departing one nail's breadth from myself, and to give myself to others without taking myself from myself' (p. 770).

Constancy is to adhere to the pattern of hierarchically organized commitments that compose one's life. In the overwhelming majority of cases, people's ideal patterns include satisfactions derived from what they do and from being publicly recognized for what they do. If there is no genuine satisfaction involved in doing what

1 W. D. Falk, 'Morality, Self, and Others', *Ethics*, eds. J. Thomson and G. Dworkin (New York: Harper, 1968), pp. 374-375.

one's pattern calls for, there can be no satisfaction in one's life derived only from public recognition. The latter is given for the former. If a person receives undeserved external goods, undeserved because the internal goods assumed to be there are not, his life will be bad, because he derives no satisfaction from what he is doing. External goods cannot compensate for the lack of internal ones. Those who think otherwise are corrupt. The way to avoid corruption is not by denying that external goods are satisfying, but by not allowing the desire for external goods to interfere with unconditional commitments to private internal goods. Constancy is to maintain their proper balance by remaining true to the pattern composed of the hierarchy of one's commitments.

#### 6. *Constancy and reflection: purity regained*

A man in whose life there is a proper balance between seeking external and internal goods is uncorrupted. And, it is natural to suppose, that an uncorrupted man is pure. So it seems that constancy and purity are related after all. Yet I have rejected Kierkegaard's attempt to establish the connection between the two. What, then, is their connection?

Let us try to answer by reflecting on something Wittgenstein wrote in a letter: 'Now as to Moore—I don't really understand Moore, & therefore, what I'll say may be quite wrong. But this is what I am inclined to say:—That Moore is in some sense extraordinarily childlike is obvious, & the remark you quoted (about vanity) is certainly an example of that childlikeness. There is also a *certain* innocence about Moore; he is e.g. completely unvain. As to it's being to his "*credit*" to be childlike—I can't understand that; unless it's also to a *child's* credit. For you aren't talking of the innocence a man has fought for, but of an innocence which comes from a natural absence of temptation.'<sup>1</sup> I think that the quality Wittgenstein ascribes to Moore is purity. But we can learn from this passage to distinguish between purity that is 'a natural absence of temptation' and purity 'a man has fought for'. I am not competent to say which did Moore have. My interest is in the distinction and in proposing a way of drawing it.

Corruption is to engage in a pattern only or mainly for the external goods one hopes to gain. Lack of corruption is to maintain a

1 From a letter of Wittgenstein, quoted by N. Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein, A Memoir* (London: Oxford, 1958), p. 80.

proper balance between seeking external and internal goods. A man who succeeds in this may do so either because he is so innocently childlike that he fails to connect his pattern to external goods, or because he has understood the nature of the corrupting influence of external goods and learned to resist it. The first kind of purity is prereflective, the second is gained through reflection. The first may be accompanied by spontaneity, naturalness, innocence, the second is hard-earned, the result of successful self-direction. I shall call the first natural, and the second reflective purity.

To have natural purity in civilized circumstances is virtually impossible. If someone does have it, it requires much explanation. How could a man be unaware of the social setting in which he lives? For this is what purity requires; it is to live in the world and not to be aware of the considerations that influence others in their response to oneself and of their expectations that one's own behaviour towards them will be guided by similar considerations. A person of natural purity must live constantly at cross purposes with others. If he understands that external goods matter to others, if not to himself, then the natural purity has begun to fade, because he must see himself as a source of external goods, for he is one distributor of status, prestige, rank, and power. If he does not understand that external goods matter to others, he is a fool. 'Stupidity pushed to a certain point is . . . immorality.'<sup>1</sup> Admittedly, such fools can be the holy fools of Dostoyevsky: Prince Myshkin or Alyosha Karamazov. I wonder, however, what they would have said, not to some ineffectual weakling, like Ivan Karamazov, but to John Stuart Mill, for instance, in a long conversation about the facts of social life. And it should not be supposed that the response of Jesus to the Grand Inquisitor counts, since Jesus did not live in the world, at any rate, not in that story. For the rest of mankind, natural purity is lost forever. Its loss is one price we pay for self-direction.

I think that those who regret its loss do so not because they fail to see the need for reflection and self-direction, but because they miss the spontaneity that usually accompanies natural purity. The constant monitoring of oneself is burdensome. One yearns for doing as he pleases without having to look over his shoulders for the nod of the censor he himself appointed, but who is censor nevertheless. However, reflective purity is compatible with the satisfaction of this yearning.

<sup>1</sup> H. James, *The Golden Bowl* (London: Methuen, 1956), p. 62.

The purpose of self-direction is to impose a deliberate pattern on one's life. The pattern makes possible the balanced achievement of internal and external goods. Constancy is to continue to adhere to the pattern in the face of adversity. Now suppose that a person has succeeded in transforming himself according to the pattern, he is enjoying a just share of external goods, and his pattern is yielding the internal goods he has hoped for. In a word, his life is good. Part of what makes it good is that self-direction is no longer an effort. The pattern is in place and one has to reflect on what it calls for only in unusual and difficult situations. There is no longer any doubt about one's commitments or about their respective importance. The pattern they form is wholly one's own, there is no gap between it and oneself, the pattern *is* one's self. If a person achieves this, he has also reflective purity. And since he needs to reflect in this way only rarely, there is no reason why he could not act spontaneously most of the time. One context in which this spontaneity may show itself is taking delight in such external goods as justly come his way.

I once observed an honorary degree being conferred on a very eminent scholar. There he was in the ill-fitting medieval costume, trudging along in a procession with similarly garbed, similarly eminent elderly men. The spectacle was quaint, droll, and heart-warming. The last, because he obviously liked being there. He enjoyed the whole thing and he was pleased as punch with the honour. He was a spontaneous, pure, good man. He liked being honoured for what he has achieved. And it was fitting to honour him. To suppose, as Kierkegaard must, that there is corruption in this worldliness is to have fallen victim to an exaggerated and, I suspect, carefully nourished sense of sin.

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