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My Many Selves

Wayne C. Booth

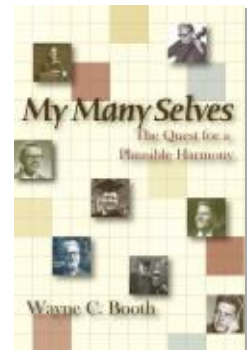
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Chapter Two

A Pious Moralism Confronts a Cheater

It is impossible for a man to be cheated by anyone but himself.

—Emerson

Nothing so much prevents our being natural as the desire to seem so.

—La Rochefoucauld

Know thyself? If I knew myself, I would run away.

—Goethe

One must not cheat anybody, not even the world of its triumph.

—Kafka

In early spring of 1946, the frustrated Staff Sergeant Booth is in the occupation army in Bremen, Germany, longing for shipment home. The morality-trained twenty-five-year-old—still the “devout” Mormon you have met—is now teaching a “lit-comp” course to other GIs waiting for shipment home. He has been put up with several buddies in a quite fancy house that the U.S. army has taken over.

Browsing through an impressive domestic library, he is tempted to steal a couple of books, but they’re almost all in German. Then he comes to a shelf of miniature musical scores, mostly of string quartets: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms! Would it not be right to steal them from the abominable Germans? Besides, he thinks, “If I don’t take ’em, somebody else will.” He picks just a dozen of them out—of course feeling guilty, apprehensive—and hides them under his bed. Finally, a month later, he hauls them home.

They still sit on my—not his—shelves, reproachfully but usefully.

I would now return them to anyone from that family, if I could ever find the name. MoralB finally, in one sense, wins—but to little effect. He often sneers at me, “How on earth could you have committed an offense like that?”

I wonder how many of the professedly honest men and women I’ve known have committed as much cheating as I have.¹ If this were a self-help book, I would censor all that follows here, laboring to invent a man who practices only life-enhancing, morally and intellectually defensible values. But as I

1. Influenced by the many revelations in 2002–03 of business cheating through recent decades, I asked a friend, experienced for most of his life in resolving traffic controversies, “What percentage of Americans do you believe will lie or cheat for personal advantage?” Without pausing even a second he said, “About 95 percent.” Only slightly shocked, I then asked, “What percentage will lie or cheat even if they know it will harm others?” “Oh, much smaller. Only about 50 percent.” If you are skeptical about such estimates, you should have a look at Erving Goffman’s many accounts, in book after book, of how universal are the arts of masking, posing, “performing.”

work at creating a harmonious Self who enjoys probing the conflicts, I must at least pretend to offer a wholehearted exhibit of honesty. And reporting the cheater's quarrels with the moralist is an essential part of the quest.

The better side of my Mormon Self—or should I call it my Platonic or my Augustinian or my John Deweyan Self—is not at all happy about most of the offenses you'll read about here. Stealing those music scores from Germans who, for all I knew, were admirable anti-Nazis or even Holocaust victims, is simply unforgivable. I was harming others. (Phyllis, penetrating editor, asks, "Do you mean to imply that if they had actually been known to be Nazis, your theft would be forgivable?" Well, ah, er, I'll think about it.)

Though I'm sure I've never lied as persistently as our political leaders or CEOs do, it still shocks me to rediscover a Cheater-Booth who was not just willing to cheat to win this or that bit of cash or praise, but sometimes even seemed to enjoy cheating for the sheer fun of it. A friend who read an early draft was also shocked and then advised me to report more moments when morality triumphed: "You're far more trustworthy than your chapter suggests." I hope it's true that if I totaled up all of my choices, I'd find far more in which "doing the right thing, whatever it costs" triumphed over cheating. What does it say about me, then, that I find stories about CheaterB more fascinating than stories about MoralB, even when they embarrass me?

Not long ago Phyllis discovered that we had underpaid a repair company by about a hundred bucks, and they didn't know it. What was my immediate silent impulse? "Forget about it; they've overcharged anyway." Her response was automatic: she just sat down and wrote a check, with MoralB's full support. I now still wonder, "Why on earth did I want to cheat them?"

Would I have been able, without her help, to talk CheaterB into making out that check? I hope so, but the initial impulse to forget about it was really there. That vile deceiver is still surprisingly alive in me, though by now MoralB usually trounces him.

Interlude

I have just now told her about that repressed impulse to say, "Just ignore it."

"How could you marry a man," I joke, "who is inclined to cheat—and stay married to him for fifty-nine years?"

"Well, I *thought* you were a man with total integrity."

"Well, one of my Selves was just that! I hope you've noticed."

"Oh, yes. I live with *him* all the time."

Another recent example, considerably less defensible: As we are preparing a dinner for twenty or more relatives in our rather chilly Utah "mountain cabin," I must go down from the mountains into "town" to shop for a few groceries and perhaps

some wood for the fireplace. We check to make sure that even on Sunday the Harmon's grocery store is open; phone book says, "Open twenty-four hours every day." Driving up to the store fifteen minutes later, I see that the car lot is entirely empty. I go to the door; it's locked. I feel a bit cross at the managers: why did they place deceptive information in the phonebook? Isn't that commercial cheating?

As I turn to leave, I notice a pile of firewood bundles lying outside the doorway. I scan the scene, see no one in any direction, and without a moment's hesitation I pick up a bundle of the firewood and carry it casually to my car, feeling something like "What fun!" I drive off, and suddenly a rival voice nags, "Why are you stealing that wood? Is it to get even with them for not being open?" I'm tempted to take it back, but CheaterB wins: What does it matter? After all, we've given them a lot more profit during our month here than that wood costs. And I've not actually hurt anyone!

After shopping at another store, I drive back into the mountains, feeling more and more self-reproach, not just for the stupidity of it—what if someone had caught me?—but for the sheer wrongness of stealing. I debate all the way about whether to tell Phyllis about it. Finally, entering our driveway, morality triumphs: I will tell her.

And I do. She is shocked—not fully surprised but rightly annoyed. "When you joke these days about fearing that you'll become a senile kleptomaniac, maybe you should take it seriously." It takes only a few seconds for me to agree with her: the theft is indefensible, and I will certainly pay them next time I'm in the shop—emphasizing, with a plausible smile tacked on my face, that we needed the wood and intended to pay all the while.²

Now there's a debate with the LIFER: Should I confess such behavior here? What will my grandkids think—in the unlikely event that any of them read this far? I hope they'll find it a bit instructive about whatever cheating they're tempted to do.³ Maybe my telling about it will lead them to see the superiority of Phyllis's response. Will they see that what they actually "are" now can possibly be transformed by aspiring to *be* someone better?

THE (COMICAL? SHAMEFUL?) HISTORY OF IT

I'm still puzzled about where CheaterB came from, raised in a culture that preached so strongly *thou shalt not lie or cheat or steal*. One part of me aimed

2. Oh, yes, skeptical reader; I have made the payment, anonymously.

3. A recent study, purporting to be "scientific," claims that something like 90 percent of children interviewed admitted that they had done some cheating or lying to their parents.

to become the most morally admirable creature in history. How could anyone who was as moved as I was by Jesus's attacks on hypocrisy start out, so early, not just deceiving others to further his own interests but actually enjoying the acts of deception?

Before addressing that question, consider a further selection from so many embarrassing memories:⁴

Age Four and a Half

A policeman comes to the front door of our two-room, no-toilet apartment. He shocks Mama by saying that it's not her he wants to talk with but me. Someone has broken the windshield of a police car as it sat on the street in front of a neighbor's house.

He looks at me suspiciously. I'm scared.

"Do you know anything about it?"

I know absolutely nothing about it, but I immediately tell him, in some detail, how it all happened.

"It was my friend, Sammy, next door. He didn't do it on purpose. We was just playing with throwing rocks up over the roof from behind there [pointing to the rear of the neighbor's house], and he threw a rock way up over the roof [gesturing with my arm] and it come crashin' down on the car."

He knows at once that I'm lying. "Look, kid, nobody your age could throw a rock that far." He sounds angry. After he leaves, Mama makes me miserable with her punishment—no physical blows but her standard chant:

"Oh, Clayson, how disappointed I am in you!"

I can't remember feeling guilty about how much harm my lie might have done to Sammy if the cop had taken it as true. I'm glad to say that I have no other memories in which my conniving threatened serious harm to others.

Age Seven

My uncle Joseph is a "champion" marble shooter, winning marbles by the bagful. Five years younger, I have never won a single marble. I long for those wonderfully colored objects, so I steal his bag and hide it at the back of a remote closet. It doesn't take long for Joe to catch me. Punishment? I'm locked by Mama in a dark closet, weeping for what feels like hours. Mama is *deeply* disappointed in me.

4. I don't have to tell you that LIFERS' memories are unreliable. We'll have a look at that problem a bit later.

From that time on I was quite careful about stealing only when I could be pretty sure I would not be caught.⁵ But:

Age Eight

Returning alone from a Church service, I see a looseleaf folder hanging on a fencepost. I look around, see no one, tear off the string attachment, and carry the folder home, excited about having some blank pages for my drawings.

Mama recognizes immediately that it's a voters' registration notebook; it is election time. She marches me back up to the violated house and orders me to take the notebook to the voting official and apologize.

A good lesson CheaterB took from that? Don't steal anything that your parents can identify.

He went on stealing paper and pens and pencils for decades, whether or not he had enough money to buy them. Even today when I see any desirable writing supplies lying unprotected, nobody watching, I sometimes have a hard time clamping down on the Cheater. I usually win these days, but will I always? In my pursuit of plausible harmony, "I" sincerely hope so.

Age Eight to Yesterday

I have always lied about how much I've read—though far less these days than as a kid. From about fourth grade on, having proudly skipped a year, I "had read everything." I would lie to teachers about classics I'd barely looked at. I would bore fellow students by trying to make them feel inferior for not having read the latest *Atlantic Monthly*, one that I'd only skimmed through. By late high school and through college, the way for VainB to prove his superior intellect was to show that he had read this or that impossibly difficult book. To see others embarrassed by their "ignorance" gave VainB some slight bit of pleasure: "I'm getting ahead—even if I have to lie to do it."⁶

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5. I'm sure that this memory explains why I also remember a family joke about a boy put by his mother in a closet as punishment. When she wonders why he's stayed there longer than required, she comes to take him out and says, "Why are you still in here?" "Well, I've spit on your dress, and I've spit on your shoes, and I've spit on your coat, and I'm just sitting in here waiting for more spit."
 6. Daughter Alison pleases me by scribbling here: "This does sound worse than you are. It's a necessary hypocrisy even to get by in academia, no?" "Of course, dear, but isn't mine a lot worse than yours?" We'll be meeting in chapter 6 some forms of hypocritical posing that I do think morally defensible. That will entail considerable labor at distinguishing defensible and indefensible deception: the subject of my currently back-burnered book on "hypocrisy-upward."

But now back to cheating that wasn't related to ambition or vanity.

Age Fourteen

As a "deacon" (Mormon boys are ordained into the priesthood at age twelve) I am assigned the task of going door to door and collecting from ward members their monthly "fast Sunday" contribution, the amount they have saved "for the poor and hungry" by skipping breakfast that morning. I collect what I can, then quickly pocket about a fourth of it before turning the rest over to the bishop.

Decades later when I confessed this sin to my aging Mama, she refused to believe it.

"Your memory must have made that up. The boy I knew could not have done such a thing."

"But, Mama, didn't I do a lot of lying to you? Didn't I often steal a bit of cash out of your purse?"

"Not that I can remember."

Age Fourteen–Fifteen

I am often assigned the paid job of distributing free newspapers or brochures house to house. I become quite skillful at burning a large fraction of the copies in our furnace; that saves a lot of time and labor. Then one summer I hide a bundle of them in a street irrigation culvert.

That one was stupid: as soon as irrigation water entered the pipe and flooded, the stack was discovered, easily traceable to me. Punishment? Can't remember, but the humiliation of it is still vivid. I had forgotten the lesson, "Make sure you're not easily caught. Whatever cheating you do must be done intelligently." Meanwhile I was constantly nagging myself to stop such awful stuff.

Perhaps the most shocking example occurred when I became a newspaper delivery boy and subscription seller. For quite a while I failed to sell any subscriptions at all, and I never became very good at it. Yet I claimed success from the beginning, reporting increasing sales totals—sales that I actually was faking.

Age Fifteen

The company gave every delivery boy a small cash gift for each subscription sold. Naturally the money-grubber Self wanted to earn a lot of money, while the honors seeker figured out that since the cash gift for each subscription was almost large enough to pay for a full month of deliveries,

he could chalk up a fake subscription at very small cost. So his divided selves faced a dilemma: if he entered fake subscriptions, his chance of winning the contest went up fast, while his income went down only a small amount for each subscription. Which was more important, fame or cash income? The egoist won, hands down, and his subscription rate went up and up, finally leading to his winning a contest.

Suddenly the whole episode, with its fame-winning façade, crashes. He contracts Bright's disease and hears a doctor speculate about possible death. He has to turn over his routes and records to the boss, and they reveal a total jumble of dishonest subscriptions and careless juggling of data: a huge cash debt (actually quite small, as I consider it now) and incontrovertible evidence of nonexistent subscriptions.

His boss turns out to be a generous man; he waits until the boy is back on his feet and attending school again, after two months at home, before he shocks the mother by revealing his discoveries. He does not turn the boy in to any authorities; all he insists on is some more work, without pay, until the losses have been paid off. (Does the diary reveal the truth of any of this? Not at all. It reads as if the boy were now simply working for his old boss again in a new job. Does it confess to any guilt? Not at all. It never acknowledges that the crazy desire to be number one had produced an atrocious hypocrite reveling in being a winner.)⁷

It's puzzling, given the guilt I feel about that now, to remember *not* feeling guilt through most of this cheating. One would think that with all of the sermonizing and punishment most of it produced, I'd have felt more than just anxiety about being caught. My journal entries do *imply* a lot of guilt about not achieving an ideal character: entry after entry about how I must try to be more honorable, a "better boy." But I never recorded, nor can I remember, anything like the remorse I feel now about stealing the music scores in Germany—or about most of the offenses we're coming to.

Age Seventeen

Four or five of us high school senior boys are discussing sex. One of them says how much he longs for some *real* sex, not just petting or masturbation. I intervene, with something like this:

“Don't you realize that all the girls are longing for it too? And that if you just push harder, you can get almost any one of 'em within fifteen

7. This recollection is quoted, with some alterations to the third paragraph, from an article in *The Michigan Quarterly Review*, written for an issue containing diverse memories of “Secret Spaces” (vol. 39:3 [Summer 2000]: 442).



Wayne C. in high school

minutes. I've had full sex with many of 'em just this year—they just cave in if they know you're serious.”⁸

They all look surprised, a bit shocked. Nobody seems to doubt me. Two years later, at BYU, my cousin Parker Chipman meets me in the hall.

“Are you still having as much sex as you told us about back then?”

“Oh my gosh. Did you believe my story?”

“Of course I did. And it *almost* changed my own behavior.”

Age Nineteen

I have been hired to tend a hamburger stand, a quarter of the way up the mountain where BYU conducts its annual Timpanogas Hike. Collecting payments for hamburgers and soft drinks, I pocket some of it—and never get caught!⁹

This one did produce immense guilt—so strong that I didn't mention it in my journal. Here I was cheating everybody, and it gave me no credit whatever for skill or manliness. Any six-year-old, even a girl, could have gotten away with that easy one.

Age Twenty

Another student and I are working as irrigators on the university farm at thirty cents an hour—a five-cent raise from last year. Since much of the work is just standing and waiting for the water to flow, we both get a lot of reading done; that's not cheating. But then my buddy gets an offer to work several hours a week on another job. He asks me if I'd be willing to cover him in a scam, continuing to report his sixteen to eighteen hours a day, with me actually doing some of his work. He'll pay me half of what he gains by the scam.

CheaterB agreed—though the journal reports only mild moral concern. After all, we were both being underpaid!

From Age Seven to Twenty-Five

I stole quite a few books. (This offense now really shocks me.) I can't remember how many—some from bookstores, a few from school libraries, a couple from a detested teacher's desk. Sometimes I would buy a book, read it quickly, and return it to the store as if unread. Books felt like my life-blood; could it really be a crime to add to the essential nourishment? I drew

8. I'm pretty sure my lie didn't include the word “fuck.”

9. It must have been a very small percentage, right?

the line with friends' books; when I would "steal" one of them, I would secretly return it later. (Though I often cheated family, I somehow always held back from cheating friends.)

The most outlandish book theft—one that HypocriteB is strongly tempted to censor—took place in Blackwell's bookstore in Oxford, when I was a GI waiting for shipment home after the war.

July 1945, Age Twenty-Four

In the riskiest theft I ever committed, I stole three books—all of them, of course, of high intellectual value—and did not get caught. (I think, but can't prove, that two of them were books Phyllis had written a request for.)¹⁰

If I had been caught I would have been court-martialed, kicked out, perhaps ruined for life. Maybe not that bad, but it would have been awful. And what is especially shameful is that I had enough money in my pocket to pay for those books! Understandably, the journal does not mention the theft, nor do my letters home to Phyllis. Does it seem to you that I am even more embarrassed about the stupidity of that one than about the dishonesty of it?

Some years later, MoralB did triumph: I mailed Blackwell's some money to repay the theft (without giving my name).

The cheating memory I regret most—even more than my stealing of the music scores in Germany—was committed in Paris in late December of 1945. Everything about it is sheer, undocumented memory; quite understandably, there's not a word about it in my journals or letters.

Climax

The Germans had launched a surprise counterattack, producing what is now called the Battle of the Bulge. Our army was short of infantrymen to charge back, and they began interviewing us clerks in Paris for return to combat. As I went for my interview, I felt both terrified and torn apart: honor commanded my "surrender to combat," but by now, after all I had seen of what combat meant for those who managed to come back, I could not face it. What could I do?

Well, the clerk did the best job he could do faking bad vision—he could not read the vision chart. The doctor looked suspicious.

"Any other excuse?"

10. Reading that, she writes in the margin, "Don't blame me; the books you sent me were secondhand!"

Suddenly he thought of one. “I do have fallen arches. They got me turned down for the Navy.” (That was an honest story. The Navy rejected me because of my arches; the infantry took me in spite of them—in itself a neat comic irony.)

The doctor looked at the mildly misshapen feet, decided that I was not fit for combat, and let me escape back to my clerkship.

If I had been a conscientious objector or complete pacifist, escaping combat at that point would not have been shameful. But I was a passionate anti-Nazi, a total supporter of our army effort. I was convinced that we were in a noble cause. (I still view it as inescapable, though hardly noble.) Yet I lied in order to avoid my own probable death at the front. The fact that it was my feet that really saved me doesn’t mitigate my vision lie at all. CheaterB had joined all those other guys, from presidents on down, who—as we learned later—used this or that dodge to avoid the draft. Full shame.¹¹

Isn’t that more than enough about my cheating Self? Should I go on and report my two—*only* two, I insist—moments of cheating as a student? Should I diminish readers’ contempt by boasting about never, from my late teens on, cheating a student or colleague and never (consciously) cheating my family or close friends? And how about never, never—in this book—lying about *anything*? VainB could fill this chapter with self-touting moments when morality won. Do I not deserve a lot of credit for clamping down on that VainB? Yet now I surrender to him.

Just One, 1975

I have been invited to speak at a conference on pluralism, along with Professor Boaster and others: fee, \$300 each. We all accept. A few months later, as the plans for the conference move ahead, I receive an invitation from President Johnson’s university in Texas: fee for the talk, \$1,000 (I think; certainly it was the highest I’d ever been offered). Without even a moment of doubt, I say, “Sorry, I’m already committed.”

A week or so after the conference, I learn that Professor Boaster had been invited to take my place in Texas and had accepted. He had written the director of the pluralism conference saying something like “Sorry, but

11. If what I’ve just said seems exaggerated to you, have a look at almost any biography of our presidents—for example, Robert A. Caro’s account of President Lyndon Johnson’s road to power (1981) and Michael Beschloss’s (2001) accounts of Johnson’s daily lying, or Mark Crispin Miller’s story of how all our modern presidents, especially the Bush family, have lied (in *The Bush Dyslexicon*, 2001).

my doctor has ordered me to take things easy, so I just can't come." Then he went to Texas to collect his much higher "honorarium." My reaction when I accidentally learned of that? Total contempt—and a bit of pride about having defeated at least my money-grabber Self.¹²

SOURCE OF IT ALL

Where did my unusually strong willingness to deceive come from, given my Mormon heritage of contempt for it, and why should I bother to report it here? Am I not poisoning my image? (*Writing* about it doesn't poison *my* own image of my Selves; after all, I've been living with these facts since that first episode at age four and a half.)

Well, perhaps some of it sprang from partially defensible motives. If you have no money and you need a pencil and paper for writing, is it really wrong to steal a bit—if you're not stealing from a beggar?¹³ My sister was equally short of cash, but I can't remember that she ever stole or cheated; her only compensation for grief was probably when, as a two-year-old who had lost her stable family with Daddy's death, she collected everything she could lay her hands on and constructed a little "secret" pile in this or that corner. Maybe we both were trying to get hold of something that was truly *ours* after the disastrous loss.

In any case something weird was going on in my picture of my Self; it was more than just hardwired selfishness. A strong part of me was taking real pleasure (or at least seeking some reward) from whatever my successful cheating demonstrated. Was it a search for cleverness—outsmarting the conventional victims? Was it rebellion? I did sometimes think of my actions as clever, and I did sometimes think of them as admirable rebellion against stupid codes.

I see a strong difference between my public posing as pious and the behavior of some other sinners who openly and courageously broadcast their sins as rebellion—or simply as hoaxes. My offenses were always "protected" by HypocriteB, the skillful performer of public piety.

So again: Where, oh, where did the impulses come from?

12. One beloved reader, whom I will not name for fear of hurting her feelings, writes in the margin: "I question using this anecdote. It only puts Professor Boaster down and reduces you to VainB." To which I answer: "Par for the course."

13. Nathalie Sarraute, in her memoir *Childhood*, reports getting caught stealing some candy in a store. When she is grilled by parents about just *why* she would do such a terrible thing, she simply shouts back, echoing Bill Clinton's explanation of why he misbehaved with Monica Lewinsky, "Because I wanted it."

One possibility is that I was thumbing my nose at the mysteriously cruel God who had betrayed Mama. If He could be a cheater, why shouldn't I become one? Had it not become clear to my unconscious soul that cheating was built into the very nature of things? What would a God who would kill my father care if I stole a few pennies or cheated my newspaper manager? I lived in a world run by a cheating God—or at least a God who was deliberately confusing.

It must have strengthened such convictions to be surrounded by relatives (including Mama) who played hypocritical roles in public. I can't remember examples of their doing it viciously or destructively. But they were clearly masking themselves as pious public personae, different from the people I met in private. That experience must be shared by almost every member of every church: "The mother and father I live with are not the ones whom members meet in church on Sunday morning." Just how much of my relatives' hypocrisy was I consciously aware of? I can't reconstruct it all, but it's not hard to think of many examples.

- One of my uncles faked, in dead winter, a total physical collapse, requiring him to be carried uphill to his high school where, after the doctor was called, he jumped to his feet, laughing at his victims. I can remember loving that story, as my uncles told it again and again. I wished that I had that kind of courage.
- I didn't learn until late in my teens that Gramma Booth was cheating daily by secretly drinking a cup or two of tea.
- When I was assisting my absolutely trustworthy aunt, Relva Booth Ross, in writing her autobiography, she told me the following:

As a teenager, the only argument I ever had with Father was over me wearing my corsets too tight. He and Manda [her sister] quarreled over high heels, but with me it was corsets. One night when I was going to a dance, he made me go and loosen them up. When I came out, he said, "Did you do it?" I said yes—but when I got to the dance I tightened them again.¹⁴

- I wonder how old I was when I learned that my Great-Gramma Hawkins fermented beer from fruit juice in her cellar.
- Uncle Joe would boast to me about how he got away with this or that infringement of the rules.

14. *The Autobiography of Relva Booth Ross: With Lives of My Parents and Grandparents*, ed. Wayne C. Booth (Provo, Utah: J. Grant Stevenson, 1971), 20.

- Grampa Clayson in his public sermons was visibly, passionately kinder, gentler, more tolerant than the man we lived with.¹⁵

The more I think about such examples, the more I'm convinced that most or all of these relatives were at least partially aware of their own hypocrisy. My Booth grandparents had, by the time of my father's death, lost all four sons, with four daughters remaining. What kind of God would allow that? God is up there, all right; He must be. And the only way we can hope for better treatment from Him is to claim both publicly and privately to be the most pious church members in town. But meanwhile, in our hearts we suffered a good deal of questioning.

MORALB FIGHTS BACK AND WRESTLES WITH HYPOCRITEB

Whatever the reasons for my frequent cheating, moral judgments (often joining VainB, who aspired to win the virtue prize) were constantly intruding. MoralB wanted not just to appear pious but to *be* virtuous. The commandments about visible behavior I obeyed scrupulously: I never smoked; I never drank (until the army); I paid my tithing regularly; I never missed church voluntarily; I accepted every assignment from every authority without ever talking back. When my school buddies went watermelon-stealing, I refused to go—I would not allow myself to be seen in public as a thief, even while practicing theft in private. I did raise occasional problems for my Sunday School teachers by asking tough questions, but there was no explicit code against asking questions. Indeed, one of the most prominent doctrines then—more prominent than now—was that God had granted us free agency, and to exercise it we had to do honest thinking about our choices.

Inevitably, the conflict between the would-be saint and the actual sinner took a different form as my faith in many of the literal Church doctrines diminished and my own commitment to “virtue”—to be honorable and do good in the world—expanded. My awareness of a virtuous tension—just how much doing good in the world depends on our willingness to put on honorable and cheerful masks—rose as I observed more and more posing in people I genuinely admired.

This was especially true as I saw how my beloved BYU professors survived steady pressure from authorities to be more orthodox. They were sometimes sent up to Salt Lake City to be grilled by the Church authorities. One time Professor Poulson was called up because a student had reported his revealing in class that he didn't believe in a personal devil.

15. Phyllis remembers that when her father was stake president, she thought quite explicitly, “Oh, if only the members out there who think he's so great could see the man I live with at home—two entirely different people!”

After he returned from Salt Lake City, I privately asked him how the interview had gone. “Oh, it was OK,” he said. “When they asked if I believed in a personal devil, I answered, ‘Of course I do: all of my devils are personal.’ They laughed, we shook hands, and that was it.”

That’s hypocrisy of the constructive kind, right? Though the word was never used among us, it was always implicitly there, as it was in my conversations with other professors. The silent voice was always saying, “We don’t take the Church literally, but we think it does good in the world, and we hope that by supporting it—*and concealing our doubts*—we do too.”

My full account of hypocrisy being saved for chapter 6, what about the rest of my life? Well, much of it has been plagued by a strong sense of my being a cheater—in danger of being caught. Long after I’d stopped actually stealing anything (except one package of firewood), my nighttime dreams still show me being caught. As late as July 1952, when my family was living for a few months back home in my mother’s basement, my journal reports my sleeping miserably, dreaming every night about guilt.

I wake each morning completely exhausted. It’s partly the hard bed, partly being in mother’s house, and partly a general uneasiness about being “found out”: obviously I could not have as good a deal as this Ford Foundation Fellowship unless I had somehow cheated to get it. [I really had not!] I have, in fact, cheated so many times in my life to get things, particularly money (always petty amounts, and always in completely safe situations; always safe) that now that I have a large bonus honestly, my unconscious won’t let me believe it.

“Did you yourself,” I hear some of you readers asking, “at some time develop greater honesty, before achieving it *totally* here in this book?”

Well, I’ve already given you some evidence of that. But the triumph was never total. As you’ve seen throughout, I can never resolve the conflict between total sincerity and the desire not to hurt others. But I do claim that my many moments of hypocrisy these days are never performed in order to cheat others. It’s always only to “do good in the world.” If I were to express sincerity in every moment, a lot of store clerks, and even some colleagues, would be more miserable by the end of the day.

Whether or not my self-defense is sound, I am convinced that defensible hypocrisy is the kind practiced when we are trying to live by some moral command superior to “thou shalt be openly sincere at all costs.”

Shall I cheat a bit now and delete the least defensible examples from this chapter? Too late.