Deconstruct Your Temptations [1]

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Why do you want what you want?

Everyone operates within a moral framework. It is largely rooted in the values with which we were raised. It likely includes “universal” values, such as that stealing and murder are wrong. But moral values can also vary wildly, and be in conflict with others. For example, many people (not only Christians) view homosexuality as wrong, or they believe women have a moral duty to dress modestly, or think it is wrong to eat and drink certain things.

Few people question the moral framework they are in as they grow up, because it forms a familiar and stable foundation for perceiving the world. Later in life, some people deconstruct when they start questioning the roots of their moral assumptions (as well as their core beliefs, on which their moral assumptions may touch). There are many reasons why people begin a journey of deconstruction. Two examples are because they engage with people who hold different views, or they begin to investigate the historical or philosophical bases of their own beliefs. Deconstruction most often has real and sincere roots. At the extreme, deconstruction can lead to nihilism—“everything is meaningless.”

Temptation is different. It is instinctive. As anyone who has raised small children can attest, you don’t need to teach a child to be deceitful and manipulative. They are so, because often they are driven by their desires.

Our moral senses temper temptation. We can (sometimes) resist temptation by reminding ourselves that there are *good reasons* for doing so. But, met with opposition of moral reasoning, our base instincts in turn become more sophisticated. We try to justify going against our moral values. Soon, we can find ourselves in a moral arms race.

Sometimes a belief is worth interrogating. If it is a true belief (and it was honestly interrogated), then people come away stronger from it. While many people who deconstruct their faith end up leaving their faith, that by no means happens to everyone. Some find their faith *strengthened* through the process. It happens that people find their faith shored up by good history, philosophy, etc. For this reason, I do not think deconstruction should be a taboo. But if someone is going to deconstruct, then they should do it honestly and fairly.

The point that I really want to make, however, is this: as each of us are locked in our own, internal moral arms race, beware your temptations. I do not mean merely the temptation to deconstruct, but temptation in general. Do not give too much weight to the lies which often underlie a temptation. I have found myself tempted with things which seemed very attractive. Self-justifications were plenty! But when I interrogated why having this or doing that would—really—be a good thing, often I found that there was no basis for a good or wholesome or constructive outcome. It’s all wishful thinking. It’s a sophisticated ruse to satisfy a primeval desire. (This isn’t mere risk aversion; it’s making

careful and informed decisions instead of acting on wrong beliefs.)

A temptation to do something bad usually is appealing because it masquerades as something good. Food, money, relationships, sex, etc. are good gifts from God. But it becomes a problem when these things become the end unto themselves, not merely means. They become our idols. Our desire for good is good, but desire can work against us. Effective propaganda is never purely fiction: it is always rooted in some truth. And just as it takes training to recognise propaganda for what it is, and to be able to separate out the lies from the truth, we must train ourselves to deconstruct our temptations, so that we can find where the lies and the true truths are.

Satan is the great deceiver. He does not "make us do [2]" anything. But, just as with Adam and Eve in the garden, he sows seeds of doubt (which grow in the rich soil of our pride [3]), and tempts us with lies. Be prepared to do some work to dig through the soil and find what the lies behind your temptations are.

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