

## What is a temptation?

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*Abstract.* I present two definitions to cover when we talk about temptations external to persons.

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Temptations are strange things. On the one hand, temptations, or some of them, are within a person. For example, consider "I feel a strong temptation to kick you." In this case the temptation is a desire. On the other hand, temptations, or some of them, are exterior to persons. For example, "Those chocolates in the cupboard are a temptation for me."

I hope this division of temptations into within and exterior, inner and outer, does not sound overly Cartesian, though I myself am sympathetic to a Cartesian philosophy. Below is an attempt to define a temptation so that the word can be used for things exterior to a person for whom they are a temptation.

*(Awareness definition)* Something, S, is a temptation for a person P if and only if:

- (i) Person P is aware of S.
- (ii) Person P's awareness of S causes in them a certain desire in relation to S.
- (iii) It would be bad for this desire to be satisfied.

This definition leaves open whether being bad is to be understood in terms of defeating goals the person values more or whether there is badness independent of what the person values. Here is a related definition.

*(Awareness-risk definition)* Something, S, is a temptation for a person P if and only if:

- (i) Person P is aware of S.

(ii) Person P's awareness of S causes in them a certain desire in relation to S.

(iii) It would be bad for this desire to be satisfied.

(iv) There is a risk that it will be satisfied.

## **Reference**

Descartes, R. (translated and edited by J. Cottingham) 1996. *Meditations on First Philosophy, with Selections from the Objections and Replies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[The idea of treating this topic was stimulated by a sermon I heard, by the way.]