



Secondary guilt

I think it was Adrian Mole who noted a change in his social credibility as a teenager, like this:

“I used to be the type of boy whose face would have sand kicked into it by other boys. Now I am the type of boy who watches from the side, when other weaker boys have sand kicked in their faces.”

I have often thought that, for most of us, the majority of our moral dilemmas are less about stopping being a bully than in ceasing to stand by and watch while one person bullies someone else.

In this sense, my interest in the revelations about Harvey Weinstein is less in the movie mogul himself, than in the people around him who facilitated his behaviour.

Time and again, in the accounts from the actresses involved, things began with a social evening at a restaurant or bar or hotel room; everyone is socialising in a group until gradually people leave and it is just them, one assistant to Weinstein and Weinstein himself left in the room — and then the assistant leaves.

What did those assistants think they were doing? They were probably scared of Weinstein: by all accounts, he has a volcanic temper, and he was a powerful man in show business; equally, he didn't hold a gun to their heads. And yet time after time, they left vulnerable women in one to one situations with a man who would try to get sexual favours from them.

What would you or I have done if we were in the

same situation?

Because there are plenty of 'get out of jail free' cards if you want to play innocent about it: i. you might be aware that Weinstein would make a pass at them, but then that's hardly illegal: this would just be sex between two consenting adults; ii. you didn't actually know if anything happened; iii. it wasn't as if you personally were doing anything actively wrong; iv. no one complained about it the next day.

And yet, deep within themselves, those colleagues must have known both that what Weinstein was doing was wrong, and that they were complicit in it. On the surface, they could protest their innocence; certainly, they could not be convicted of a crime in a court of law. In reality, they helped a powerful man continue to prey on young women, and they must have known beyond reasonable doubt, if not with 100% certainty, that it was morally wrong.

Worse than their own guilt, arguably their behaviour legitimised Weinstein's own behaviour in his mind. If there were actually something wrong with what he was doing, then why didn't his friends and work colleagues challenge him about it? Right now, I suspect Weinstein is genuinely puzzled by the abuse being thrown at him. People had assisted his behaviour for years: why didn't they challenge him before?

For sure, he is guilty, but there are a host of others who are guilty to various degrees alongside him.

October 2017 Thought for the Train is a short column written by the Reverend Robert Stanier, the vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train, or elsewhere. You can also read "Thought for the Train" at www.surbitonchurch.org.uk.