

Moral Addicts

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Father believes in his own righteousness, whereas you and I and other human beings are imbued with the feeling that we *consist* of errors and efforts of the lost souls. I commiserate with people like father—in *my heart of hearts I cannot be angry with him*—because I think they are more unhappy than I. Why do I think them unhappy?—because the good within them is wrongly applied, so that it acts like evil—because the *light* within them is black and spreads darkness, obscurity around them.

Letter from Vincent Van Gogh to his brother Theo¹

Any good ethical theory aspires to provide as comprehensive a guide to moral value and motivation as possible. Within modern moral philosophy, conceptions of moral value have been dominated largely by considerations of justice and concerns for the common good, and moral shortcomings have been accounted for primarily by appeal to ignorance, weakness, indifference or outright hostility to moral values. Yet the ways in which we fall short are far more complicated. By discussing one interesting example here, I hope to provide some support for the claim that our conceptions of moral value and motivation need enrichment. In making my case, I utilize a character who is more like a caricature than a figure from ordinary life. This touch of hyperbole is deliberate. Reflect for a moment on the function of a good cartoon caricature. By exaggerating physical features, it draws our attention to characteristics that go unnoticed in their normal context. Whereas cartoon caricatures aim at amusement, my goal is to distill some of our perceptions of moral excellence.

The Moral Addict

Imagine Ajax, a character with fairly normal roots. His parents did their best to inculcate a variety of attitudes and dispositions in their son, and

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for the most part they were successful. For instance, Ajax tells the truth, keeps his word, plays fair, stands up for his beliefs, loves his siblings, shares with others, sympathizes with the unfortunate and generally respects people. He is just the sort of decent person most of us can claim as a friend or neighbour. Or at least this is what he is like before he undergoes a moral metamorphosis. Ajax emerges as an unparalleled crusader against want and injustice, someone with an acute sensitivity to suffering and oppression. Indeed, Ajax comes to possess the moral equivalent of his martial counterpart's special "night-vision" goggles: where others see nothing suspicious on the moral landscape, Ajax spies moral squalor with uncanny perspicuity and then expertly exposes and eradicates it.

Some account of the genesis of Ajax's metamorphosis is necessary to fully appreciate the nature of his character and commitments. Philosophy, or at least philosophical reflection, plays a major role in his conversion. One point strikes him over and over again in his study of moral philosophy: the ethical leap from a personal point of view to a detached, impartial, "God's Eye" perspective. Eventually he takes this leap, and as he sees it, his life and character are forever altered. He comes to see the fundamental equality of all human beings in a completely different light and with a new appreciation. From this perspective, he sees the needs and rights of each and every person as literally indistinguishable. And given the overwhelming needs of the world's poor and its victims of injustice, he concludes that life's pre-eminent moral mission must be to bring comfort to these poor souls.

Unlike so many academic philosophers, Ajax's commitment to this mission goes beyond an intellectual one. Rather, he commits himself body and soul to this cause, sparing no effort in the struggle. Whether it be Oxfam or Amnesty International, he lives and breathes to make the world a better place. As one might expect, such a crusade effects dramatic changes in Ajax's life. For one thing, he no longer finds it easy to make time for family and old friends. For their part, they do their best to understand and "forgive" the dominating passion that comes between them, especially since they admire and respect his cause. But as you might expect, these ties become more and more attenuated and distant, until the time comes when Ajax's former life and connections are little more than a dim memory.

The tension that Ajax first experienced when abandoning old commitments and attachments gradually dissipates and ultimately disappears. The end result is an Ajax whose inclinations are as resolutely fixed upon his mission as is the intellect which led him to his vocation in the first place. Ajax's moral commitments suffuse every facet of his life and being. He views *everything* through the moral prism of his crusade. For example, when considering things like haute cuisine, elegant clothing, beautiful architecture or finely crafted objects, he immediately concludes that the

energy and resources devoted to such pursuits might be put to far better use. Neither can he hear people extol the talents, charms, grace, beauty or intelligence of the fortunate without wincing for the less fortunate. Ajax is also ever on the alert for subtle forms of racism, sexism and other types of discrimination. He assiduously polices his own words, demeanour and body language so as to ferret out the most minute vestiges of unfairness and prejudice. He even goes so far as to jetison elements of sarcasm and cynicism from his repertoire of humour because these elements could conceivably offend or depress people. Indeed, Ajax is perpetually "on call" where suffering is concerned. He eschews recreation, sports and the arts, nominally because they are a distraction from the serious business at hand, but the truth is that he feels no distracting temptations since he *lives* for his cause. And like Mahatma Gandhi, another famous fighter against want and injustice, Ajax carefully avoids all special, intimate attachments in favour of forging an egalitarian attachment to all human beings as such.

As Ajax wages his holy war, he laments the dearth of loyal soldiers in the struggle against evil. He knows only too well that even those who share his mission lack his focus and resolve. Unlike Ajax, they are pulled in many directions by conflicting commitments. While so much of his life is spent judging his own fidelity to moral mandates, Ajax is careful not to judge others openly or too harshly. He fully realizes that his path is a most difficult one, and he has absolutely no interest in driving off part-time crusaders or making them feel bad for their less than total devotion. From his point of view, all that matters is the eradication of evil, and he is grateful for any assistance, even if he gets less than he would get in a more ideal world.

From time to time, colleagues half-jokingly ask Ajax just *what* he would do with his life were he to ever succeed in his mission and put himself out of business, so to speak. Equal measures of respect and a sincere inability to imagine Ajax doing anything else motivate these queries. Ajax's response is always that this is something he will never have to "worry" about. Even if all unnecessary suffering were eradicated—say, if we universally respected each other and shared the earth's resources equitably—opportunities to comfort and heal would still abound, since as much human misery stems from the basic human condition as stems from theoretically eliminable vice. A utopia would still suffer from sickness, infirmity, old age, disappointment, loneliness and death. Thus, since Ajax knows that even a morally perfect world could always use someone willing and able to take charity to the maximum, he rests secure that his life could never be rendered meaningless.

Ajax is fully aware of his moral accomplishments, but he is modest in the sense that he does not dwell on them. Ajax is too busy to wallow in any self-absorbed contemplation of his own perceived goodness. While

his one true joy in life is doing and being good, he lives to really and truly eradicate evil, rather than to derive psychological satisfaction from basking in any conception of himself as a crimefighter par excellence.

Kantian and Utilitarian Reactions to Ajax

With this picture of Ajax in hand, let us consider how a Kantian might respond. At first glance, Ajax appears to be the epitome of the good Kantian moral agent who evinces an impartial respect for equally worthy rational beings. But we must be careful not to take actions at face value. For instance, respectful as Ajax's life may seem, he must be sure to carry out his crusade in a way that does not undermine his own dignity or the dignity of those he serves. If he lives a life of service because he sees his own life as worthless (or worth less), then his devotion is seriously tainted. The same is true if he "helps" others in a way that clearly undermines their autonomy or self-respect. Likewise, he must not use his unparalleled fidelity so as to bludgeon or browbeat others in a holier-than-thou fashion. In all of these cases, the well-being of precious rational beings is disregarded, and thus the spirit of the Kantian ideal of respect is dishonored.

Presumably, Ajax could fall short on Kantian grounds even if he brought or intended to bring no harm to anyone. If Ajax is a kind of secret "moral athlete" who delights in competing against and defeating others in the race for the crown of pre-eminent virtue, then this could display a lack of regard for others with respect to what Kant saw as most vital in life, namely, moral goodness. If Ajax really cares equally about his fellow human beings, he should welcome their equal achievements when it comes to goodness. In much the same way, if Ajax is a "moral virtuoso" who lives to indulge in his own image of moral grandeur, then it would seem that he is interested in others only insofar as they represent an opportunity for a "fix" of self-infatuation.

All of these cases raise interesting questions regarding supervening attitudes and motivations. In real life, our motives are seldom "pure" in the sense of having only one motive for anything we do. Barbara Herman has argued that Kant could allow for multiple motivations where moral worth is concerned so long as it were counterfactually true that an existing conception of duty would have been sufficient to move the agent to do the right action even in the absence of other motives.² Herman's motive here is to rescue those imbued with both a sense of duty and pathological love from any Kantian reprimand based upon a lack of moral purity. However, some of the above cases have to do with situations where a person could have an effective sense of duty and another motivation that runs along parallel lines, but that seems to offend against the very spirit of the Kantian moral ideal. I shall assume that a good Kantian could mount an argument to deal with such cases, though it is important to

note that this would have to involve allowing for the idea that unchosen feelings and attitudes *can* morally taint us. But I shall not depend much on this sort of argument here, since Ajax does not fit the above descriptions. Let us stipulate that Ajax is someone with complete purity of motives: he lives and breathes to evince impartial respect for equally worthy rational beings, and he is damn good at it.

If Ajax's life and character are permissible and even praiseworthy from a Kantian point of view, the next question is whether they are morally mandatory. On one reading of Kant, what we might call the "side-constraint" interpretation, the answer would be negative. This interpretation paints the perfect duty of justice with its injunction to do no harm as the primary ethical concern. The rights of others function as side-constraints which limit the pursuit of our own good. The imperfect duty to help others is depicted as a less stringent duty that confers moral worth, but that competes for attention with other concerns such as perfecting natural talents and capacities. Thus, this conception focusses first and foremost on respecting others by leaving them alone in various ways.

Yet the more seriously we take the Kantian ideal of equality, the less plausible this side-constraint conception seems. If other people really count, then alleviating their suffering must be terribly important. Personally avoiding the infliction of suffering cannot mean everything, morally speaking. And if other people count equally, then it is difficult to see how the perfection of non-moral talents and capacities could stack up for Kant when compared with eradicating injustice and want. After all, even though Kant never says that moral goodness counts for everything in life, he is clear that it counts most of all. Working against suffering and injustice would not only manifest Ajax's commitment to respecting all fellow rational beings, but presumably it would maximize the opportunities for others to freely express their rational nature. Those who are starving or horribly oppressed are hardly prime candidates for living true to the moral law.

In any case, the essential point so far as my analysis of Ajax is concerned is that he merits Kant's unequivocal stamp of approval. Even if Kant would hesitate to endorse his life as a mandatory ideal, and I think that there are some good grounds for believing otherwise, there are no reasons to think that Kant would find anything morally lamentable about Ajax's life and character as I have described them.

Now let us turn to utilitarianism. Even though Ajax seems like an ideal utilitarian, someone who maximizes happiness on a grand scale, we must be wary of employing simplistic conceptions of utilitarianism. To do justice to the theory, we might consider aspects of Mill's subtle version or a sophisticated consequentialist account like that of Peter Railton.³ These accounts avoid depicting pleasures as some type of unified "stuff" that is

easily quantified and mechanically compared. Moreover, they allow for the possibility that the world might be a better place in the long term if we were to mould ourselves into people with characters and dispositions which may sometimes preclude maximizing happiness in particular situations. For instance, perhaps it is true that the world is a better place because human beings form romantic attachments. And perhaps these attachments merit a place of highest honour in the pantheon of human pleasures. If it is also true that such attachments psychologically preclude being able to abandon loved ones *whenever* there is an opportunity to maximize happiness, then utilitarians can heartily endorse attachments and commitments that may sometimes work against maximizing happiness.

With these considerations in mind, it should be easy to see how a utilitarian might resist advocating Ajax's life as a universal ideal. For one thing, Ajax does miss out on all sorts of significant pleasures. And though it is true that a person like Ajax would provide many unfortunate souls with an opportunity to enjoy these pleasures, there is certainly something to the idea that the world would suffer important losses if *everyone* were to take up Ajax's cross. Moreover, despite the unlikelihood of everyone embracing the martyr's life (few exhibit this inclination) and the indisputable fact that a few moral zealots can often move moral mountains that need moving (people like Schweitzer, Gandhi and Mother Theresa *do* leave the world a better place), utilitarians can rightly alert us to the inherent risks in advocating and choosing the martyr's path. Who can tell in advance exactly who may be cut from the right cloth for this unusual, difficult life? Under conditions of uncertainty, surely it can make complete sense to advocate maximizing happiness via more indirect, but also safer, mainstream routes.

Yet these considerations can have little to do with Ajax, since he already has a proven track record as a moral crusader. There can be no doubts about his ability to perform at the vanguard in the struggle against evil on a grand scale. Whatever pleasures Ajax misses out on are more than compensated for in the lives of those he rescues. Furthermore, Ajax would insist that his life is complete and content, save for the suffering he cannot eliminate. As he sees it, all he needs are greater resources to pursue his precious mission. The last thing Ajax desires is a furlough of any kind from his moral battlefield.

Thus, forms of indirect rule-utilitarianism that insist it is actually better for us to be people whose day-to-day concerns are fairly parochial can find nothing morally amiss in Ajax, the exception to their rule. No matter how subtle or complex, any version of utilitarianism must ultimately come down to a matter of producing the best sum-total consequences for the world. And when the numbers are added up, no matter how difficult they may be to count, there seems to be little doubt that Ajax leaves the

world a better place than he would, were he to live more like the rest of us common folk.

Saints or Addicts?

Those familiar with Susan Wolf's provocative essay, "Moral Saints," may assume that I am driving toward similar conclusions.⁴ After all, my Ajax bears many similarities to her "rational" and "loving saints." In many respects, Ajax might even be thought of as someone who starts out as a rational saint and gradually evolves into a loving saint. And though I have refrained from arguing that perfect fidelity to a Kantian or utilitarian moral theory would necessarily force you to live like Ajax the crusader (as Wolf argues), we certainly agree that such a character misses something important, even if I have yet to say exactly what. However, we are driving toward very different conclusions.

Essentially, Susan Wolf's essay aims at weakening our conceptual defence to moral values. Of course, her worry is *not* that everyday people will be tempted to live the saint's life. She knows this is unlikely and she is plenty glad, since she believes that "a person can be *perfectly wonderful* without being *perfectly moral*."⁵ As she sees it, Kantian and utilitarian theories demand a limitless devotion which would either deform or squeeze out many of our most prized non-moral values. Interestingly enough, she does not see this as a criticism of these theories, or at least not so far as evaluating them as moral theories is concerned. According to Wolf, "The flaws of a perfect master of a moral theory need not reflect flaws in the intramoral content of the theory itself."⁶ Wolf concludes that to enjoy rich, complete lives—both individually and collectively—we must temper our fidelity to these theories, since they are only guides to moral goodness and not complete guides to life. Though she never discusses exactly how far from perfection we should allow ourselves to fall, presumably she has in mind something between sainthood and being a minimally decent Samaritan. The only other advice she can imagine would be to revise our conception of moral value in a more "Aristotelian" or "Nietzschean" way so as to include more non-moral values within the moral domain. But she rejects this alternative because "... no matter how rich we make the life in which perfect obedience to this [moral] guide would result, we will have reason to hope that a person does not wholly rule or direct his life by the abstract and impersonal consideration that such a life would be morally good."⁷ Thus, even though Wolf wishes to protect us from morality in a key sense, she is content to leave these moral theories intact.

An essential thing to notice about Wolf's conception of moral sainthood and Ajax is that they embrace excessively narrow conceptions of moral excellence. Wolf states that a "necessary condition of moral saint-

hood be that one's life be dominated by a commitment to improving the welfare of others or of society as a whole.⁷⁸ But notice that there is no such simple essence to moral excellence or dominant good at which morality aims. Unparalleled crusaders against want and injustice can still fail morally in other respects. Mahatma Gandhi surely suffered as a husband and father, though this took nothing away from his prodigious moral achievements in other areas of his life. Much the same might be said for Martin Luther King. Rather than casting moral excellence entirely in terms of maximal devotion to impartial justice and universal benevolence (with "more is better" as the major criterion), it is far better to see moral goodness as a subtle integration of diverse and often conflicting ethical concerns. Those who are sons, daughters, siblings, friends, lovers, parents and colleagues in common causes, and who take these roles and their attending obligations seriously appreciate the kind of fine awareness and keen perception required to do justice to them all. What makes this enterprise so difficult is the fact that the various ethical claims we must confront in a normal human life are not variants of some one fundamental value, and neither are they capable of being ordered in anything like a strict, mechanical hierarchy.

Ironically, the moral/non-moral distinction that modern moral theories have promoted and that Wolf embraces with an eye to mapping out distinct spheres of practical concern actually encourages the very phenomenon Wolf is combating. This sharp line between moral and non-moral values is usually conjoined with a conception of moral value fleshed out primarily in terms of what we owe "just anybody," and the entire package is wrapped in an aspiration to construct a decision procedure which yields determinate, overriding answers to any moral quandary. Even though Wolf rejects the idea that the mandates yielded by such a decision procedure must always trump other concerns, the conception of ethics she implicitly embraces is one that threatens the kind of commitments she thinks make life worth living for most of us.

It is crucial to recognize that this moral/non-moral distinction itself does not *create* the practical tensions and struggles in our lives. Our lives would be fraught with conflicts of value even if moral philosophers were to resist a strong moral/non-moral dichotomy. But a narrow conception of moral value conjoined with a penchant for a clear-cut decision procedure in ethics dramatically increases the likelihood of an unhealthy fixation on a small number of concerns. Of course, people are likely to concentrate and excel in certain areas even with respect to ethical concerns. For example, we know all too well that being a good spouse or parent does not ensure that we will be good neighbours or citizens. Neither does being the very best Samaritan ensure that we will be good friends or lovers. However, the important point here is that such deficiencies are genu-

ine ones that cannot be corrected simply by compensating with an extra mile in our area of expertise.

Some may object that we cannot risk blurring the moral/non-moral distinction without grave risks. So doing may leave us with no clear moral advice, or even worse, may encourage us to do things like ignore more "distant" people in favour of self and loved ones. These are reasonable fears. Nonetheless, we do ourselves a disservice by conceptually isolating a relatively small number of general rules designed to spell out impartial moral demands. We need to integrate these important concerns with a broad array of moral commitments that articulate a rich conception of what we regard as most beautiful, noble and worth wanting in life.

Thus, it is no wonder that Wolf is led to the conclusion that moral excellence competes with living a rich, complete life. Were she to adopt the Aristotelian route she rejects, a route that avoids the ethical reductionism she implicitly embraces, a large part of this conflict would be tempered at the very least. She dismisses this alternative because she assumes that moral assessments must be "abstract and impersonal," and that such a point of view would deform many of our most cherished commitments. She is absolutely right of course about the deforming effects of seeing our whole life through an abstract and impersonal lens. But many, if not most, everyday moral contexts involve very personal and concrete commitments. For instance, my conception of my responsibilities as a spouse, parent, sibling, friend, colleague or neighbour are anything but abstract and impersonal. Though these bonds can be quite demanding, they are not usually seen as an oppressive yoke imposed from an alien "abstract and impersonal" point of view. Moreover, it is worth pointing out here that even though a large part of ethics concerns what we owe others, there is no reason to restrict our conception of ethics to this alone. Perhaps there are good reasons to do so where the law is concerned, but the law should not exhaust what we are trying to get at when addressing fundamental ethical questions like "How should I live?" and "What sort of person should I be?"

In this light, notice that what is so peculiar about Ajax is *not* just the fact that he lacks some of the virtues. The same can be said for most of us, and while this is significant, it is hardly news. To better understand Ajax's peculiarities, contrast him with other martyrs and Good Samaritans from real life. For instance, consider conscientious exemplars like Albert Schweitzer who purposely, self-consciously devote so much of their life to the less fortunate. Or consider decent people like the villagers of Le Chambon during World War II who may not have actively sought such opportunities, but who found it impossible to refuse aid to persecuted Jewish refugees once confronted by their plight. Assisting these Jews entailed not only significant sacrifices but also grave risks to their

own safety. What is pertinent about these cases of heroism and sacrifice is that we do not usually find the extirpation of ethical concerns that we witness in Ajax's case. These people attempted to integrate many diverse ethical concerns within a single life, and, though some concerns inevitably had to lose in the competition for limited attention (as is always the case), these concerns did not simply fade away into oblivion. Indeed, we expect mature moral agents to retain a subtle appreciation for *what is lost* whenever life regrettably forces us to choose between ethical loves. This kind of sensitivity is just as essential an element in sound ethical deliberation as is the capacity to find the overall best choice.

Ajax suffers from an addiction, though admittedly a very unusual one. Ajax is a kind of moral addict. And just as other addictions induce forms of practical myopia, Ajax's monomaniacal fixation on suffering and injustice causes him to completely lose sight of everything else. He does not simply dismiss other ethical concerns as less important. As Ajax sees things, there are no other concerns to compete for his fidelity. While he is correct to believe that he will never find himself without work, the tragedy here is that Ajax's life would be empty were this ever to happen. Under what ought to be conditions ripe for human flourishing—i.e., the eradication of pervasive suffering and injustice, thereby freeing Ajax to partake of all the joys life has to offer—Ajax would be left with nothing. And though this is *not* to suggest that Ajax wants these ills to exist so that he can have them to fight against (if this is so, then Ajax is troubling in a different way), the fact remains that Ajax can experience joy only by waging his crusade. Even were Ajax unequivocally correct in devoting himself entirely to his cause, surely there is something lamentable about a person whose vision and imagination have been narrowed in such a way as to render him oblivious to innumerable sources of human value.

Hence, just what should we say about Ajax, whose addiction blinds him to genuine ethical concerns and numbs his capacity to appreciate competing ethical loves? Since his preoccupation with human suffering is not born from any objectionable motivations, and since he leaves the world a better place, can we say that Ajax is a *bad* person? In answering this question, we must be careful not to exhaust moral assessment in terms of adjudicating guilt and innocence. In Ajax's case, we can stop short of saying that his desire for goodness goes bad, but we can still insist that he suffers from a serious lack of moral vision, imagination and appreciation. Though Ajax is a thoroughly conscientious person, his conception of moral value lacks the richness we desire in flesh-and-blood moral agents. Even if Ajax never does the wrong thing by opting for his crusade (and notice that there are likely to be at least *some* parochial obligations he cannot avoid by choice—e.g., natural obligations to parents and siblings), the absence of any significant conflicts in Ajax's deliberations is itself a morally lamentable shortcoming in his character.

In assessing people like Ajax, we also need to pay attention to the circumstances that bred their moral addiction. Those who are forced to confront pervasive suffering on an everyday basis may eventually find it impossible to think of little else. The threat of moral desensitization looms as a constant danger to us all. Indeed, the unfortunate truth may be that under certain tragic circumstances, some measure of desensitization may prove necessary in order to further worthwhile moral causes in a resolute fashion. If so, then we have good reasons to temper our judgments about these unfortunate souls even while we unequivocally lament the loss that their metamorphosis involves. Ajax is not a bad person, and he is an exemplar in certain respects, but he is far from everything we desire in a moral agent. Notice that we can say this even if we scarcely blame him for his malady.

I began this essay by referring to Ajax as a kind of caricature. Therefore the question of relevance to real life naturally arises. After all, we do not come across people exactly like Ajax very often. Most of us are far more likely to ignore suffering and injustice in favour of more local concerns. Ordinary people do not seem to need any special warning in order to steer clear of Ajax's addiction. Thus, if Ajax's addiction is *so* unusual, perhaps he is just a straw man.

Yet, even if Ajax were a grossly exaggerated caricature, he would still serve a useful purpose if he alerts us to the dangers of a dichotomous view that places a rich, well-lived life on one side and moral goodness on the other. Ajax and Wolf's conception of moral value bites off too small a piece of life for designation as "morally" significant. An enriched understanding of moral value cannot ensure a good life for any of us, but at least it can allow us to see a much broader array of commitments as integral elements within a conception of human flourishing. This can help us to avoid casting morality as an alienating force bent on keeping us from living well.

Moreover, I would question whether Ajax's "disease" is really so uncommon, even if few people exhibit as bad a dose of the "sickness." I for one have met real-life characters who parallel this caricature to some degree. Consider a particular brand of philosopher, one who has assumed the dirty job of being the "conscience" of the world. This "person of principle" may eventually come to see *every* choice and action as suffused with profound moral gravity. Thoroughly embroiled in the effort to make students and colleagues alike realize that the world is rife with suffering and injustice, this person may be consumed by the vocation of showing people the moral light. Meeting with ignorance and indifference, this figure may interpret this as a mandate to press on that much harder. Indeed, this crusader may leave no stone unturned in the effort to enlighten people about the moral ramifications of seemingly innocent actions, words and ways of life. From afar, such people are likely to engender profound

respect and admiration, especially if their efforts transcend the classroom and written page, and if they venture out into the trenches. But in the flesh, such people are often disappointing, and may even strike us as inhuman in certain respects. We are likely to feel a twinge of guilt and even self-suspicion for reacting this way, as we hurry to remind ourselves that these are good people doing good things for the right reasons.

How is it then that a close-up look at these people can sometimes leave us cold? As Van Gogh suggests with respect to his father in the opening quotation of this essay, I suspect that we sense a very subtle warping of goodness in these upright people. Van Gogh expresses the idea that most of us are "imbued with the feeling that we consist of errors and efforts of the lost souls." One way of understanding this idea is to remember that the richness and diversity of our moral values condemns us to a life filled with ethical tradeoffs and compromises. Try as we might to pursue unequivocally good ends in an upright way, we are bound to forsake cherished things as we choose between conflicting loves. We can never be completely clean, and mature moral agency requires an acknowledgment of this fact on our parts.⁹ But by the same token, we must also remember that our lives and our conception of ethics are not only concerned with what is bad, base and unworthy. The capacity to appreciate and encourage what is most beautiful and noble about a human life and character is every bit as important as a subtle sensitivity to suffering and injustice. We must take great care lest we lose the former in our pursuit of the latter. The moral addict I have described unwittingly succumbs to this temptation.

Perhaps the greatest irony here is that the very desire for goodness can itself go bad in various ways and to various degrees. This is bound to be a disturbing thought to all of us, but particularly to Kantians who would like to believe that goodness is always to be had so long as our will is resolute. My suggestion is that Kantian respect and utilitarian concerns for collective well-being constitute important elements of moral goodness, but they are only pieces of a rich, complex moral mosaic. And as with any good mosaic, great care must be taken not only to collect all the necessary pieces, but also to place them in the proper relation to each other. Otherwise the mosaic will be incomplete at best and, in the extreme, virtually unrecognizable. Ultimately, we do best to think of ourselves as artists who must ply our trade—where this business is the business of living—with fine awareness, keen perception, rich imagination and loving attentiveness to all the values that make up this moral mosaic. Moral addicts suffer from a diminished capacity to appreciate the richness of this mosaic.¹⁰

Notes

1 Vincent Van Gogh, *The Complete Letters of Vincent Van Gogh* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1959), vol. 2, p. 228.

- 2 Barbara Herman, "On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty," *Philosophical Review*, 90 (1982).
- 3 Peter Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 13 (1984).
- 4 Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints," in *The Virtues: Contemporary Essays on Moral Character*, edited by Robert Kruschwitz and Robert Roberts (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1987). For direct and indirect responses to Wolf's line of argument (particularly with respect to ethical reductionism) see: Robert Adams, "Saints," *Journal of Philosophy*, 81 (1984); Lawrence Blum, *Friendship, Altruism and Morality* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), and "Moral Exemplars," in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* (Notre Dame, IL: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), vol. 13; Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Michael Stocker, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Moral Theories," *Journal of Philosophy*, 73 (1976), and *Plural and Conflicting Values* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); and Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).
- 5 Wolf, "Moral Saints," p. 149.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 148.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 138.
- 9 This issue and related ideas are discussed further in my "The Moral Importance of Dirty Hands," *Journal of Value Inquiry*, 26 (1992): 239-50.
- 10 I would like to thank the reviewing editors for their very helpful comments and criticisms of an earlier draft of this essay.