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## Wickedness

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# Wickedness

Diana Fritz Cates

I awoke the other morning to the alarming news that a drive-by shooting had just taken place in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Later that morning, I read in the University of Iowa campus newspaper that a local custodial father had been accused of sexually abusing his daughter. That evening, I heard that police were seeking the arrest of a teenage boy accused of molesting his younger brother. Still later, I watched a television special on the epidemic of rape in America. A girl or woman is raped every five minutes in this country.

What is going on? What possesses people to murder, rape, beat, manipulate, humiliate, and punish each other? What is it about us that makes it possible for us to neglect, demean, and destroy each other repeatedly and with such ease? It is striking that the recent renaissance in virtue ethics has not inspired more scholarship on the problem of human wickedness. It is important, of course, to reflect upon what it is to do well at being human. As Aristotle put it, “if, like archers, we have a target to aim at, we are more likely to hit the right mark.”<sup>1</sup> It is also important, however, to reflect upon why it is that we fail, time and again, at doing humanly well. We are unlikely to hit the mark, morally speaking, if we remain ignorant of forces that conspire to throw our aims and our efforts off course.

As ethicists and as teachers, we are professionally and morally bound to take a good look at evil. In this essay, I call attention to several recent resources that probe the *internal causes* of wickedness. I then recall a much older resource that can be used to dig deeper into the roots of wickedness.

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<sup>1</sup>Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985), 1094a24-25.

Mary Midgley argues that wickedness is caused by an imbalance in our natural human motives.<sup>2</sup> Frequently, it is caused by the coming into prominence of certain motives that are relatively harmless when combined with other motives, but deadly in isolation. Midgley examines the motives of envy and pride. *Qua* motives, envy and pride are “structural factors in people’s lives, principles of assembly on which they organize experience, and principles of interpretation by which they understand it” (141). Envy and pride have a feeling component. “But feelings are not just formless floods of emotion that wash over us. They are lasting attitudes; they have a logic, a structure of their own” (141). Envy is the tendency to read everything that happens to the people around us as an answer to the question: Do I have enough goods relative to others? This tendency is rooted in a desire to be better off than others. Pride is the tendency to read everything that happens to us as an answer to the question: Am I valued enough relative to others? This tendency is rooted in a desire to be valued more highly than others. At the heart of both envy and pride is the desire to enhance the position of the self relative to others.<sup>3</sup>

Combined with sympathy, the motives of envy and pride tend to get defused. “We would all like to have other people bound and dependable, while remaining free ourselves. But as Darwin pointed out—following Hume—we have, because of our active imagination, an inconvenient faculty of sympathy, which tells us just what this policy looks like from the other point of view” (186). In the absence of sympathy and in the presence of natural human hostility, the desire to enhance the position of the self relative to others easily becomes the “violent hatred and rejection of all that seems to be superior to oneself” (138). At the root of wickedness for Midgley, then, is a desire to have and to secure “more” for the self relative to others—a desire that, when combined with natural hostility, turns into a demand for the submission and, indeed, the destruction of others (176).<sup>4</sup>

John Kekes argues that most wickedness is caused by unknowing participation in the essential conditions of life, namely, the conditions of contingency, indifference, and destructiveness.<sup>5</sup> As creatures of nature, we are vulnerable to forces beyond our control that repeatedly

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<sup>2</sup>Mary Midgley, *Wickedness: A Philosophical Essay* (London and New York: Ark Paperbacks, 1986). Page references to *Wickedness* will be included in the text.

<sup>3</sup>I rephrase Midgley’s questions somewhat. See 141-142.

<sup>4</sup>Midgley offers a fascinating sketch of the way in which natural hostility can give way to the vicious destruction of self and other. This sketch serves as an excellent teaching tool. See *Wickedness*, 176-177.

<sup>5</sup>John Kekes, *Facing Evil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 26. Page references to *Facing Evil* will be included in the text.

undermine our attempts to live good lives. We embody, express, and further promote this vulnerability to contingency through the exercise of the vice of insufficiency. "This vice is due to the inadequate development of some capacity required for acceptable moral conduct. The lack may be cognitive, emotive, or volitional" (71).<sup>6</sup> Each time we exhibit a cognitive lack (e.g., thoughtlessness), an emotive lack (e.g., insensitivity), or a volitional lack (e.g., weakness of will), we make ourselves and others more vulnerable to the injurious effects of this lack.

As creatures of nature, we are also vulnerable to the moral indifference of nature. We embody, express, and further promote this vulnerability to indifference through the exercise of the vice of expediency. "Expediency is the vice of pursuing . . . goods without regard for the evil that may result from the pursuit" (75). Expedient persons "see their situation under the description of working to achieve their goals." "Their energy, attention, and intellectual and emotional preoccupations are largely directed toward success" and away from the ways in which their preoccupations affect others (75).

As creatures of nature, we are also vulnerable to human destructiveness. We embody, express, and further promote this vulnerability to destructiveness through the exercise of the vice of malevolence. Malevolence "is a disposition to act contrary to what is good. Its emotional source is ill will, a desire for things not to go well" (79). "Malevolence, unlike insufficiency, is . . . active; unlike expediency, it carries with it no prospect of gain. If malevolence succeeds, it makes matters worse" (80). Probing the puzzling roots of malevolence, Kekes suggests that

malevolence is the natural reaction elicited by understandable grievances against a society that treats [agents] with contempt. The agents I have in mind are the lifelong losers in a competitive setting, the members of some racial, religious, regional, or ethnic group whose beliefs and practices are found offensive by those in power. Or the agents may be people who lack the physique, education, opportunity, or ability required for improving their lot. Such people may see their lives as hopeless. They may realistically view the past as an unrelieved stretch of humiliation and the future as the continuation of the same. Their lives are informed by futility, indignity, and meaninglessness (80).

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<sup>6</sup>A vice, for Kekes, is an enduring character trait that predictably manifests itself in evil (i.e., unjustifiably injurious) actions. Kekes makes the controversial claim that these character traits need not be *chosen* in order to count as vices (70).

Malevolent people wish ill to society, “not in order to transform it into something else, but just because by its values they are themselves judged to be inferior” (81).

Kekes seems to identify the same root cause of wickedness that Midgley identifies, namely, the desire to secure “more” for the self relative to others. For Kekes, this is a natural human desire. It becomes problematic, however, when it goes unchecked by critical self-reflection, unbalanced by the pull of sympathy, and unbound by self-control. It becomes problematic when we want this “more” so badly that we become willing and able unjustifiably to diminish the good of anyone who stands in our way. It becomes especially problematic when we lose sight of the original object of our desire such that we come to desire destruction for its own sake.

Patrick McCormick’s approach to the problem of wickedness is a Christian one.<sup>7</sup> He argues that wickedness or sin is an addiction. An addiction is

a pathological relationship with a (normally) mood altering substance or process. Over the short term this substance or process promises the “user” a consistent, dependable and repeatable solution to the anxieties and pains of life, a “fix” if you will. A belief system builds up around the user’s relationship to his/her addiction and its increasing importance. As the person becomes more and more immersed in and dependent upon this substance or process he/she experiences himself/herself as less free, more compulsive.

At the same time the addictive process begins to produce tangible and painful side-effects or consequences. More of the substance or process is required to kill the pain, a good deal of which is now being introduced by the very use of the addictive substance or process. A cycle is in place. The solution has become the problem, but continues to be employed as if it were a solution (150-151).

Sin is an addiction in that it is an attempt to “supplant God, aspiring, as the addict does, to an impossible perfection. . . . We want to be godlike, but in such an awful way” (161). Sin is an addiction also in that it is an attempt to use things or processes in the world in order to secure this godlikeness.

McCormick’s description of the addictive process seems sound, but he needs to be more precise about the way in which sin resembles addiction. McCormick’s description of addiction suggests that sin is an addiction in that it is an attempt to meet the self’s needs by grasping at

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<sup>7</sup>Patrick McCormick, *Sin as Addiction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989). Page references to *Sin as Addiction* will be included in the text.

objects that could not possibly meet these needs. What is the self's deepest (psychological) need? The need to secure a God-like perfection often masks a deeper need, namely, the need to be loved and to secure this love against loss. It could be argued that sin, like addiction, is at root the attempt to secure unconditional love from that which is conditioned. The need to be loved and to remain invulnerable to the loss of love is a natural human need. It becomes a problem, however, when we are unable to suffer the realization that freely given love cannot, in fact, be secured against loss. It becomes a problem when the pain of this realization leads us to pretend that the need does not exist or that it can be met successfully through some "fix."

Convinced that most moral philosophy has been written from the point of view of men and that this point of view is limited in significant respects, Nel Noddings approaches the problem of human wickedness from a woman's point of view.<sup>8</sup> That is to say, she approaches the problem from the standpoint of one who has a deep appreciation and sense of responsibility for sustaining and nurturing life in a directed and personal way (2, 108). In Noddings' view, the incessant desire to secure "more" for the self relative to others is a peculiarly male desire that most women find "inexplicable," "illogical," and in "contradiction to the maternal project" (122, 203). Striving entails "moving toward something, trying to excel, intending to win. A woman knows that she can never win the battle against dust, that she will have to feed family members again and again (and that no meals are likely to go down in history), that she must tend the garden every year, and that she cannot overcome most of its enemies but must treat them with the sort of moderation that encourages harmony" (182).

It is "the neglect of relation" that turns healthy hard work into adversarial striving (100, 181-182). According to Noddings, human beings have a natural capacity to care. We naturally become "engrossed" in others and undergo a "displacement of motivation" toward others, such that we are moved to promote their interests on their behalf (185). Human beings also have an ethical capacity to summon up care when it does not arise naturally (185). When we fail, however, to be "present" to others in such a way that our "motive energy flows in the direction of the other's needs and projects," we easily succumb to a kind of striving that promotes evil (185, 199-204).

If the cause of much evil in men is an uncaring desire to have and to secure "more" for the self in opposition to others, what does evil look like in women who think and feel as relational creatures? What

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<sup>8</sup>Nel Noddings, *Women and Evil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). Page references to *Women and Evil* will be included in the text.

is the root cause of evil in women? Noddings examines the arch evils of pain, separation, and helplessness as these are experienced by women *qua* victims of the evil of others. She has little to say, however, about the evils that women inflict through their own active agencies. She does say that women can succumb to the evil of men by agreeing, against the logic of their lifework, to sacrifice their sons to war: "women confined to domestic life might naturally welcome any opportunity to belong fully to a cooperative venture that promises glory and recognition" (107). She also says that women can commit evil by being too caring or by caring in the wrong way: "A child may be smothered, for example, by a woman who 'lives' for her children" (237). Curiously, Noddings' examples give little indication that women, like men, can and commonly do experience and act on deliberate desires to dominate and destroy. Considerable empirical evidence would have to be mustered to show that women characteristically experience their own evil impulses differently from men.<sup>9</sup>

I agree with Midgley, Kekes, and McCormick that a cause of much wickedness in both men and women is an unbridled and unqualified desire for some elusive "more" relative to others, whether it be the "more" of wealth, power, prestige, control, security, excellence, beauty, affection, a sense of belonging, or a sense of being needed. We must examine, however, what it is that underlies such desperation in human desire. Why are so many of us caught up in desires that compel us in such unsettling ways? I am persuaded by yet another author that a deeper cause of much wickedness lies in the self's inability to be at home with itself in whatever it desires. This suggestion comes from Thomas Aquinas. It comes, not from his reflections on sin, but rather from his reflections on love. In what follows, I show that unlikely portions of the *Summa Theologica* provide further insight into the problem of wickedness.<sup>10</sup> Extending Thomas's reflections on love, I suggest that the root cause of much wickedness is a lack of self-love, properly construed.

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<sup>9</sup>Such evidence is needed now more than ever, given that fewer and fewer women seem to understand themselves straightforwardly in accordance with the maternal model that Noddings has in mind (and given that more and more men seem to be taking shared or primary responsibility for homemaking and child-rearing). Recall two older attempts to describe women's experience of sin in distinction from men's: Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," in *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, eds. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979); and Judith Plaskow, *Sex, Sin and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1980).

<sup>10</sup>All references to Thomas Aquinas are to his *Summa Theologica*, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981). References will be included in the text.

Love, according to Thomas, is a three-fold effect that an appetible object has on a subject's appetite.

[An] appetible object gives the appetite, first, a certain adaptation to itself, which consists in complacency in that object; and from this follows movement towards the appetible object . . . so that the movement ends where it began. Accordingly, the first change wrought in the appetite by the appetible object is called [the passion of] *love*, and is nothing else than complacency in that object; and from this complacency results a movement towards that same object, and this movement is *desire*; and lastly, there is rest which is *joy* (I-II 26.2).

That love with which the self loves itself, in particular, includes what Thomas calls the passion of love or "complacency" in the self, a desire that the self attain certain goods, and an enjoyment of goods attained. In the following, I focus attention on self-love's "complacency" and desire. Although "complacency" is the first movement wrought in the lover's appetite, I begin with a look at the subsequent and more familiar movement of self-love's desire.

To love the self is, in part, to wish the self well (I-II 26.4). To wish the self well is to desire that the self be well and do well as a human being (II-II 25.7). To be well and do well as a human being is to enjoy a perfect union with God in the life to come and to enjoy in this life a preliminary participation in the life of God (I-II 4.5). To enjoy a preliminary participation in the life of God is to enjoy the exercise of intellectual and moral virtue (I-II 3.2 *ad* 4, 3.5). It is to exercise well a rational nature that has been elevated by grace in accordance with God's knowing and loving of Godself and God's creation (II-II 23.2 *passim* and *ad* 1). The elevated self is a friend of God who extends the hand of friendship to all of God's befriended (II-II 23.1 *ad* 2). It is an extended self whose good embraces generously the good of all who belong to the self (I-II 28.1, 2). To love the self is thus, in part, to desire the self's good in awareness of and commitment to the good of all the self's beloved.

The self's desire for the good of the self can, of course, easily run amuck. It can tend toward a wrong end as the self's highest end. It can tend toward mistaken means to right or wrong ends. It can pull the self this way and that in the pursuit of misguided pleasures. It can scatter the self's attention such that the self loses sight of and thus fails in the pursuit of its own best interests (I-II 77.1). It can disorient the self in such a way that the good of the self seems to the self not to include the good of others. It can disorient the self in such a way that the self feels driven to secure its own good through diminishing others.

What is more, self-love's desire gone astray can seek seemingly right means or ends in the wrong way.<sup>11</sup> It can tend toward the self's actualization in a state of controlling desperation. It can drive the self anxiously to tug at this, reach for that, grab something more, grasp something greater, so that the self's own regard for itself seems to itself to depend upon how much the self achieves, how well, and how quickly. Self-love's desire can become so frantic in its flailing for perfection that the self loses its capacity to rest in any ends achieved. Ends achieved simply point to further ends, which point to further ends, where none of these mediate ends bring significant satisfaction.

Self-love's desire can, accordingly, push the self to push an included other to do this thing, be this way, make this mark. It can drive the self to drive the other to prove her loveliness in the relentless pursuit of perfection. It can thrust the self into judging and condemning the other for failing to measure up. Self-love's desire can, in short, become controlling and manipulative. The self's desperate desire for perfection can infect the other like the dumping of toxic waste into a freshwater pond. Disguised as righteousness, the self's rigorousness can be absorbed by the other as a pervasive sense of the other's own inadequacy.

Midgley, Kekes, McCormick, and Noddings (at least with regard to men) all argue persuasively that this or some related sort of unreflected, unbalanced, and unrestrained desire for "more" is at the root of wickedness.<sup>12</sup> Thomas suggests, however, that there is something that is itself at the root of this self-loving desire gone bad. At the root of this perversion of desire is a lack of the self's "complacency" in itself.<sup>13</sup>

Complacency is the first change wrought in a lover's appetite upon reception of the beloved into the lover's awareness. It is a being "taken" by the beloved in such a way that the lover's appetite receives from the beloved an aptness, proportion, or adaptation toward the beloved (I-II 25.2, 26.2). It is a being captivated by and acclimated to the beloved so that the lover enjoys a "connaturalness" with the beloved, an initial sense of suitability, kinship, and belongingness (I-II 26.1 *ad* 3, 27.1, 27.4, 28.1). Complacency is a quiet reception of and a

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<sup>11</sup>What I develop here and in the next paragraph is in accord with Thomas's discussion, in II-II 29, of peace and concord and the evil of their absence.

<sup>12</sup>Drawing on the analytic psychology of C. G. Jung, Midgley explores in some detail the process of "shadow-forming," "shadow-shedding," and "projecting." See *Wickedness*, chap. 6. Noddings discusses the same aspects of Jung's thought here and there in *Women and Evil*.

<sup>13</sup>The best resource on the concept of Thomistic *complacentia* is Frederick E. Crowe, "Complacency and Concern in the Thought of St. Thomas," *Theological Studies* 20, nos. 1-3 (March, June, and September 1959): 1-39, 198-230, 343-395.

resting in a beloved whom the self experiences to be importantly like itself and already part of itself (26.2 *ad* 2).

In his discussion of love, Thomas moves quickly past this moment of restful reception and into the more familiar movement of desire. Complacency is the principle of movement toward the end desired (I-II 26.1). It is that in and out of which desire's movement arises (I-II 26.2). Here, however, I wish to isolate the moment of complacency in order to illuminate the role it plays in the exercise of self-love and in order to make manifest, subsequently, why a lack of complacency in the self is conducive to wickedness. This requires pressing beyond Thomas's explicit reflections.

To love the self well is partly to desire the self's good, but in order to do well at desiring the self's good, the self must first be complacent in itself. To be complacent in the self is to rest in the self's dynamism—to feel the self's deepest desires, to attend to the intentional content of these desires, to become aware of the self's patterns of perception, to encounter with interest the way in which the self evaluates and responds to what it sees. It is to rest, on the one hand, in the conditionedness of the self's moral agency and the way in which this conditionedness corrupts. It is to attend to the ways in which habits of reception and response have become rigid and distorting. It is to experience the way in which the self's dispositions toward pleasure and pain have become deformed and debilitating. It is to rest, on the other hand, in the self's experience of freedom. It is to feel the loosening and breaking of bonds to fear, victimization, arrogance, and ignorance. It is to undergo the reorientation and revivification of the self's desire for the good. It is to undergo the renewal of the self's moral vision and to suffer with attention subsequent changes in imagination, perception, desire, choice, and action.

To rest in the self is to rest in the self *qua* God-related. It is to turn with attention toward that which seems to the self to initiate and sustain the self. It is to ponder that which seems also to cripple and abandon the self in its pursuit of becoming a self. It is to rest, on the one hand, in the self's givenness and fallenness. It is to suffer the self's dependence on a power greater than itself, its ignorance of this power, and its lack of control over this power's plans for the self. It is to experience separation, alienation, and abandonment vis-à-vis this power and the inability willfully to restore right relation. It is to rest, on the other hand, in the self's befriendedness and the power to befriend in return. It is to experience that mending, enriching, and enlivening of the self that partly comprises its friendship with God.

To rest in the self is also to rest in the self *qua* other-related. It is to experience the extensibility of the self's boundaries. It is to sense the complex ways in which every choice and action of the self is affected by

and, in turn, affects the choices and actions of included and deliberately excluded others. It is to rest, on the one hand, in the self's subjection to and perpetuation of moral evil. It is to experience the self's vulnerability to the loss of love. It is to suffer neglect, rejection, derision, and violence from friends as well as foes. It is to suffer the way in which the crippled self knowingly and unknowingly cripples others in return. It is to rest, on the other hand, in the self's subjection to and perpetuation of moral goodness. It is to be "taken" by the promise of faithful friendship. It is to attend with interest to the moral education that the best of friendships provide.

To rest in the self is thus to rest in those relations with the self, with God, and with other selves that partly comprise the self. It is to rest in the self's givenness, its historical and social conditionedness, its aloneness and its power to alienate, its baseness and its propensity to debase. It is to rest, at the same time, in the power of that love in whose enjoyment the self attains to its extended good.

What does it mean to say that the self-loving self *rests* in these contrary things? We have considered the *what* in which the self-loving self rests. We need also to consider the *way* in which the self-loving self regards the *what*. Consider the way in which the self-loving self regards what it takes to be the goodness and the badness of the self. Before the self desires a given good for itself and before it chooses how best to secure this good, the self acquiesces with pleasure in the perception of this good. More fundamentally, however, it rests in what it perceives to be the goodness of the self. It assents with ease to the self's participation in a nexus of human tendings toward the good. It feels at home with this goodness, consents to it, and takes comfort in it. This is not, in the moment of complacency, a matter of reasoned judgment and deliberative choice, although complacency can be isolated only with difficulty from these other activities. It is, instead, a prior and spontaneous movement of the appetite in which the appetite is passively struck by and turned toward the perceived goodness of the extended self. It is in this posture of familiarity and accustomedness with the self that the self-lover's desires for the good of the self arise and swell.

What could it possibly mean, however, to say that the self-loving self rests, at the same time, in its *badness*?<sup>14</sup> To rest in the self's badness is to suffer the self's tending toward the destruction of its extended good. It is to suffer the self's leaning toward personal and corporate

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<sup>14</sup>For Thomas, the natural reaction to present evil is hatred: "love [*amor*] is a certain harmony [*consonantia*] of the appetite with that which is apprehended as suitable; while hatred [*odium*] is dissonance [*dissonantia*] of the appetite from that which is apprehended as repugnant and hurtful" (I-II 29.1).

corruption and ruin. It is to suffer this proclivity, however, in a particular way. It is to suffer it *as bad*, but with a familiarity and accustomedness toward it which recognizes that it is, after all, the proclivity of *this* self. It does, in fact, exert an influence on the self's exercise of virtue. It will, undoubtedly, continue to do so in the future, although it need not completely undermine the self's pursuit of the good. It is to suffer the self's tending toward the bad *as bad*, but with the understanding and appreciation that the self is, in the end, stuck with some measure of badness and can deal best with this badness by remaining clear-headed and reasonably relaxed in its regard. It may be imprecise, in the end, to say that the self-loving self *rests* in its *badness*. The self's badness clearly sets the self ill at ease. Yet the self-lover is gentle with itself in the suffering of its dis-ease. It finds itself strangely at home in the pain of this dis-ease.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps the self-loving self is able to rest in the pain of its badness because beneath this badness lies something that is basically good. Beneath this tending toward the bad lies a need for love and an understandable reluctance to suffer its absence or the ever-present threat of its loss. The self-lover senses that the desperate seeking of power, control, perfection, affection, and "more" is in truth a flight from anguish. It senses that it is better to rest with complacency in this anguish than to suffer its callous or malicious perversions. Complacent in its anguish, the self does not collapse. Instead, it is renewed in its unearthed and finally unquenchable desire for the good of love to disarm this desire's distortions, to transform them, or if need be to give them innocuous expression.

The self-loving self that rests in the whole of itself rests also in the whole of the included other. Prior to desiring and seeking the good of the other, the self-lover is touched by and turned with affection toward the other such that it experiences the other to be intimately part of itself. The self acquiesces with pleasure in the other's propensity to promote her own good. It seems to the self that the good of the other is included in the good of the self. The self is pained by the other's propensity to destroy herself and all of those upon whom she exercises

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<sup>15</sup>Drawing on Jung, Noddings says that an appropriate relationship of the self to its own worst impulses is one of "wary recognition and some playfulness: 'I know you are there,' we might say to our shadow selves, 'and you may as well come along. That way I can keep an eye on you'" (201). Also drawing on Jung, Erich Neumann argues that a root cause of human evil is the failure of the self to "accept" its "shadow" and to "integrate" the "shadow" into the rest of the self. See *Depth Psychology and a New Ethic*, trans. Eugene Rolfe (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1969), originally published in 1949. The apparent similarity between this characterization of the cause of evil and my own bears further investigation. The psychological literature remains largely untapped by ethicists.

influence. Yet the self is gentle with the other as it seeks to assist the other in suffering and surviving well the pain of this badness. The self-lover desires the mending of the other's badness, but the desire to seek change arises in and is conditioned by a posture of compassion. Just as self-love's complacency gives the self the demeanor necessary to desire and pursue its own good without succumbing to frustration, desperation, and self-laceration, so it gives the self the demeanor to desire and pursue the good of the other without succumbing to domination, manipulation, and violence.

Complacency is the very heart of self-love. A self that is unable or unwilling to be at home with itself is unable to be at home in the pursuit of the self's good or in the enjoyment of goods achieved. It is unable, accordingly, to be at home in the presence of the other who is part of the self. It is unable to pursue the good of the other as its own good or to share in the enjoyment of goods attained. It is also unable to suffer the pain of the other as its own and to desire with the other the relief of that pain.

Could it be that a root cause of much wickedness is a lack of complacency that yields to mistaken desires mistakenly pursued by the self? These reflections on self-love suggest that a self that is deprived of the pleasure of being at ease with itself cannot be at ease with others. It cannot be moved spontaneously or reflectively to promote the good of others as its own. It can only do what it knows how to do, which is to flee the pain of its own inadequacy in silent or noisy desperation—alone or in the company of its unwitting victims. Midgley, Kekes, McCormick, and Noddings offer compelling insights into the causes of wickedness. Working with Thomas's understanding of complacency, however, we can extend these insights to suggest that beneath the desperate seeking of that elusive "more"—more power, more control, more "stuff," and even more virtue—is an inability of the self to embrace as its own a flawed self whose deepest needs are always and inescapably vulnerable to frustration.



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