

-Wolf, "Moral Saints"

Preface: Via Aristotle and others, we've seen accounts of a 'good life' that seem to focus on *moral* virtues. But what about non-moral virtues?

Key theses: "moral ideals do not, and need not, make the best personal ideals" (94)

- she systematically examines the notion of moral sainthood, which is to say ideal moral status, from the respective points of view of common sense morality, utilitarianism, and Kantianism\
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common sense morality, which presumably amounts to the moral view most people act on independently of theoretical considerations, advocates a moral ideal according to which an individual's life is committed to improving the welfare of others. This commitment, as it occurs in the moral saint, is peculiar in that it *dominates* all of her other commitments, including personal non-moral interests such as athletic prowess, intellectual pursuits, and the like

there might be more than one *kind* of moral saint compatible with common sense morality. Two distinct kinds of moral saint are described in the paper, called the "Loving Saint" and the "Rational Saint" respectively

-Loving Saint: to be happy *just is* to make others happy, so by acting in accordance with his other-directed commitments he simultaneously fulfills his own personal interests

-The happier of the two

-Rational Saint: she has personal, non-moral interests that do not consist in the happiness of others, and as such are not fulfilled simply by her acting in accordance with her moral commitments

-She is willing to consistently *disregard* her own interests in order to attend to the welfare of others

It's easy to see why the loving saint acts the way she does: she has no interests of her own

The rational saint, though, is trickier:

-interests in athletic and intellectual prowess, for example, do not conflict with other-regarding commitments at a theoretical level, because they do not *logically* entail the diminished welfare of the people who serve as the objects of those commitments

-The resultant behavior of the rational saint is thus a *practical* consequence of her motivational structure and the world around her

- there will always be something more that she can do to help others, leaving the Rational Saint without any real time of her own

Where the Loving Saint has no non-moral interests of her own, the Rational Saint simply fails to grant her non-moral interests sufficient importance to pursue at any given time. Neither, according to Wolf, has an acceptable relationship with his own personal interests.

each type of saint personifies an ideal culminating in “either the lack or the denial of the existence of an identifiable, personal self.”(84) Now, it has been shown that one may have good reason to conclude that common sense moral sainthood requires either the lack of or the denial of *personal interests*, but one wonders whether it is proper to equate this with a rejection of *selfhood*

-is this right? Has she shown that these saints lack or deny a self?

Two possible views: On the one hand, one might hold that an individual’s personal interests are *identical with* her personal self, so that to promote or suppress one *just is to* promote or suppress the other. On the other hand, one might think that an individual’s personal interests are an *essential constituent of* her personal self, so that the suppression of the interests would *entail* the suppression of the self. Importantly, however, this second view involves a different approach to the *promotion* of personal interests. For the promotion of one of the self’s essential constituents might not be sufficient to amount to a promotion of the self

Back to her central arg about commonsense morality:

She takes it to be a fact that most people *do* encourage the development of non-moral pursuits. While it would likely be foolhardy to contest this claim, it should be noted that it is only a contingent empirical observation about what sorts of pursuits people actually encourage.

But: It is one thing to assert that people do value and desire character traits associated with the development of non-moral interests, but quite another to assert that “they are qualities we *ought* to like”

What could we say to a moral saint who insists that he *is* living a good life? Has Wolf given us any reason to think that he has an inconsistent view?

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Crit of Util:

The utilitarian saint:

His private thoughts about us will be hypocritical condescending (doesn’t want to make others around her feel bad, so he won’t tell us what he thinks of our non-moral behavior)

But can’t the utilitarian just say that pursuing personal interests will leave the agent better able to maximize good?

2 probs: practical prob (there's always more good to be done)

Conceptual prob: The minimally personally-invested saint will have the *wrong kind of attitude toward her personal interests*. She has ‘one thought too many’ about the things she cares about. This isn’t the right *kind* of attitude needed for the interests to contribute to a good life.

The Kantian Saint:

Maybe not so bad: The Cat Imperative *restricts* our behavior, but doesn’t seem to prevent us from pursuing non-violating personal interests

But Kant says we have a duty of benevolence “a duty not only to allow others to pursue their ends, but to take up their ends as our own.”

The more you perform a virtuous action, the more moral you are—if there’s no upper limit to virtue, then the Kantian saint’s life will be dominated by moral pursuits

Alternate interpretation: Benevolence is an *imperfect* duty

-explain imperfect duty: a duty that we owe to no particular person  
-this doesn’t help the Kantian saint to cultivate the right attitude toward his personal interests. He’ll only be able to value his activities as manifestations of the moral law. But this isn’t the *right kind of attitude*.

Say we interpret him as saying there *is* an upper limit

More trouble: Kant thinks we have duties not too allow our passions to interfere with calm, practical deliberation

But what kind of life is that? Would a Kantian saint ever be allowed to become a great artist?

**What are our intuitions about moderation? We’re regularly told that we should be moderate and “balanced”, but should we really? Why?**

Maybe worse: no possibility of supererogation. Saints aren’t particularly great after all.

But can we really say that Mother Theresa is not a morally good person?

“among the immensely valuable traits and activities that a human life might positively embrace are some of which we hope that, if a person does embrace them, he does so *not* for moral reasons.” (93)

“a person may be *perfectly wonderful* without being *perfectly moral*” 95

Qs:

**Why are artistic/athletic/whatever endeavors valuable? Why should we think that a person without these endeavors cannot live a good life?**

**What role should morality play in our lives? How do we balance moral concerns against personal pursuits?**

***How good should we strive to be?***

Next time: Discuss Ackerman's story