

Letter 313  
The Hague, 18 August 1883

Dear brother,

I wish you were able to see that in several things I must be consistent.

You know what an “*erreur de point de vue*” [error in one’s point of view] represents in painting, viz. something far different and far worse than a faulty drawing of such or such a detail. A single point decides the greater or lesser gradient: the development more to the right or left of the sideplanes of the objects throughout the whole composition.

Well, in life there is something like this.

When I say I am a poor painter and have still years of struggle ahead – my everyday life I must arrange “*à peu près*” [approximately] like a farm labourer or a factory hand does; then this is a fixed point, from which many things result, which one tears from their roots, when one considers them otherwise but comprehensively. There are painters in other circumstances who can and must act differently.

Everyone must decide for himself. If I had had other chances, had been in different circumstances, and if no decisive things had happened, of course that would have influenced my actions. Now however, and “*à plus forte raison*,” [with all the more reason] if there were even the slightest question of it being considered arrogance on my part to assume a right to which I had no claim – even if I had this right as a matter of course – the mere suggestion of the thing would have made me withdraw of my own accord from any intercourse with people who occupy a certain rank in life, even my own people.

So this is the fact: My firm resolve is to be dead to anything except my work. But it is very hard for me to speak about those things, simple in themselves, but which unfortunately link up with much deeper things.

There is no anguish greater than the soul’s struggle between duty and love, both in their highest meaning.

When I tell you I choose my duty, you will understand everything.

A simple word said about it during our walk, made me feel that absolutely nothing is changed in me in that respect, that it is and remains a wound which I carry with me, while it lies deep and cannot be healed. After years it will be the same as it was the first day.

I hope you understand what battle I have had to fight within myself of late.

The upshot was this: *quoiqu’il en soit* [be that as it may] (not taking the *quoi* as interrogative, for I have not the right to consider it so) I will do my utmost to remain an honest man and doubly attentive to duty.

I have never suspected her, nor do I suspect her now, nor shall I ever suspect her, of having had any but right and proper financial motives. She went as far as was reasonable, other people exaggerated. But for the rest, you understand that I do not hold any delusive convictions about love for me, and what we talked of on the road remains between us. Since then, things have happened that would not have taken place, if at a certain moment I had not had to face in the first place a decided “no,” and secondly a promise that I would not stand in her way. I respected in her a sense of duty – I never have suspected, shall never suspect her of anything mean.

Of myself I know this one thing, that it is of the greatest importance not to deviate from one’s duty, and that one should not compromise with duty. Duty is absolute. The consequences? We are not responsible for them, but for the choice of doing or not doing our duty, we are responsible. This is the direct opposite of the principle: The end justifies the means.

And my own future is a cup that may not pass away from me except I drink it.

So “*Fiat voluntas*.” [Thy will be done]

Regards – good luck on your journey – write soon – but you know now how I shall face the future, with serenity, and without a line on my face to betray the struggle in my very depths –

Yours, Vincent

You will understand, however, that I must avoid everything which might tempt me to hesitate, so that I must avoid everything and everybody that would remind me of her. In fact that idea has made me this year sometimes more resolute than I otherwise would have been, and you see that I can do it in such a way that nobody understands the real motive.