

Dear Theo,

It is still early; I want to add a few words to yesterday's letter in order to try and make some things clearer to you. But I beg you to consider what I say in this letter something I should be silent about if I did not think I can always count on your discretion and intelligence.

I have not said a single word to Father and Mother about the real difficulty of two years ago. However, I did mention a matter of secondary importance – on their part Father and Mother do not even mention her, all right. They need not speak to me about it, neither need I to them. Indirectly, however, I touched upon the matter; I told Father and Mother that in my opinion it was seriously wrong that at a certain moment, two years ago, I was forced to leave the house. I said that for me this not only brought about considerable financial trouble, but also that it drove me to extremes, and that I was forced into a much more stubborn attitude than I should have adopted of my own free will. By way of example I pointed out the contrast between the behaviour of the Van Rappard family and that of the Van Gogh family. I pointed out that at times Van Rappard also has a difference of opinion with his father about this or that, but that they always avoid extremes, not only for the world's benefit but also for their own sakes, and that Rappard, though he does not earn a cent from his work (which for all that is very sound and even very beautiful), can always face the world in a dignified manner, also as regards his outfit and studio and such things. And that the family always sees to it that there is no money owing to the colour dealers, and so on. I told Father how noble, how manly, how just I considered it of you, Theo, always to have come to my aid to the utmost of your powers. I pointed out that if Father had been less iron-like and obstinate at the time – in short, less unintelligent – your help would have been efficacious, whereas now your help is not efficacious, and we have only half succeeded.

To this extent I certainly did touch upon the past. At the same time I pointed out that at present it is again difficult for me to avoid extremes, as the terms I feel I am on with the family are so bad that it becomes clear to me that the tie between you and me cannot last if matters are forever being left as they are.

That on thinking it over, whether I do right or wrong in accepting money from you, I must take how it looks into consideration.

I tell you frankly that more and more I think the spirit prevailing in our family, especially in Father, and for instance in C.M. is wrong.

With regard to you my position is like this:

On the one hand I believe there is yet a possibility of your character, like mine, repudiating many things we have been taught – aye, I say it is possible that a revulsion of feeling will come about in your mind, either gradually or suddenly, and that this will force you to adopt a new conception of life, which perhaps will finally result in your becoming a painter.

On the other hand, in sharp contrast to this, there is, for instance, your saying last summer, “I am getting more and more like Father.”

If this were true – that is to say, if you were to become more and more a “Van Gogh,” a character like Father or C.M. and if by always being in business you should acquire a conception of life entirely different from mine – namely a commercial spirit – more or less a political personality – well, putting it bluntly, in this case I should prefer to have no intimate relations with you; then, instead of strengthening the ties between us, I would rather part company, both understanding that we are not well matched.

At the moment I am right under Father's nose – I see, I hear, I feel what Father is, and I do not approve of it, decidedly not – if you are like that and getting more and more like it, then it would be wise to part company.

Now to revert to the fact that I told Father it was wrong that two years ago we quarreled so violently that I was locked out of the house afterward (it does not matter so much whose fault it was – it would have been according to Father's own principles – if he had been consistent – to avoid this quarrel at all costs). And what does Father say to this? – Yes, but I cannot take back anything of what I did then; what I have done I have always done for your own good, and I have always followed my sincere conviction. To this I replied that it may happen that a person's conviction is completely at variance with conscience; I mean, what one thinks one should do may be diametrically opposed to what one ought to do.

I told Father that in the Bible itself maxims can be found by which we may test our “convictions,” to see whether they are reasonable and just.

And that Father was too much in the habit of omitting to do so, and of flying into a violent passion, in my opinion very unjustly and very arbitrarily – very reprehensibly – not as regards his “conviction” but as regards his conscience.

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Enough, so I was standing before a barrier of implacability indeed – although Father tried to divert my reasoning and to confuse the issue, and to prevent my pursuing the subject. But I did not allow myself to be diverted, and I said, “Pa, here I am faced by your self-righteousness, which was and is fatal, for you as well as for me.”

Then Father said, "Do you expect me to kneel before you?"

And then I said that I took this very ill of Father, and that I thought it coarse of Father only to look at it that way, and that I should not waste my breath on the subject any longer.

There is no need for Father to say that he committed an error in my case, but Father should have learned what I learned in these two years – that it was an error in itself, and that it should be rectified immediately, without raising the question of whose fault it was.

Look, brother, in my opinion Father is forever lapsing into narrow-mindedness, instead of being bigger, more liberal, broader and more humane. It was clergyman’s vanity that carried things to extremes at the time; and it is still that same clergyman’s vanity that will cause more disasters now and in the future.

I do not beg for your mediation, I do not beg for anything personal on your part; but I ask you point-blank how we stand – are you a “Van Gogh” too? I have always looked upon you as “Theo.”

In character I am rather different from the various members of the family, and essentially I am not a “Van Gogh.” If you become a “personality” – if you were going to play a part in the world – like Father or C.M. or even V. – all right, I should not try to interfere, I should take you at your own valuation. I should be silent about it; but our ways would diverge so much that I should not think it advisable to continue our financial relations. I hope you will understand what I want to express. If not, you’ll have to give it time.

Who knows whether in the course of the next three years you will not come to look upon certain questions the way I do. Why? Because you will be influenced by art and intercourse with artists, and, in short, in consequence you will get to be bigger and broader instead of smaller and narrower. Well, old fellow, try to help me get away from here if you can. Kind regards and believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent