

EVIL,
GOOD
AND
BEYOND

the selfish, the generous and the fair

Flávio Gikovate

Translated by Alison Entrekin

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MG EDITORES

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My reflections on morality began in the second half of the 1970's. I had begun to detect certain characteristics in my analyses of what brought couples together. The frequency with which psychological opposites were attracted to one another impressed me precisely because it was completely out of keeping with probabilistic forecasts. Almost all quieter, relatively nonaggressive sorts married extroverts with "strong personalities". And they continue to do so.

In 1977 I published the book *Você é feliz? (Are You Happy?)*, in which I described more selfish people in detail. At the time people were beginning to speculate about the "Era of Narcissism", in which it was apparently OK to free oneself of all kinds of inner limits and live according to one's desires. I never shared this point of view, because I saw selfishness as a moral flaw. I believed generosity was a virtue and selfishness, a vice. That's how all the "nice folks" thought.

In 1981 I published *Em busca da felicidade (In Search of Happiness)*, in which I emphatically aired my early doubts about the "purity" of generous behaviour. I was beginning to tune into the strong presence of vanity and certain aspects of the power play between generous and

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selfish types, who have always been intensely attracted to one another.

I have worked with thousands of patients and meditated a lot on the subject, which, throughout these decades, has always proved an important factor in the choice of romantic partner, as well as a basic element in the difficulties that arise in intimate relationships. Additionally, I have studied the ways in which sexuality manifests in these two types of human beings. Moral issues have thus always been present in my books.

I have often been labelled as Manichaeian, as someone who only sees things in black and white, incapable of understanding that we are complex creatures. I think the reasons for this criticism reside, above all, in my own expressive limitations. We aren't always able to put what we think into words. I believe I have made important progress in this area, both in writing and in speaking to a wide range of audiences.

I also believe that people's willingness to consider my hypotheses and thoughts on morality has changed. I am better able to express myself, but people are also reading with less resistance! When I started to write about these issues, Brazil was living under a military dictatorship. There were those who were opposed to it — the "good guys" — and those who supported it — the "bad guys". It was impossible to try to convince people that the "good guys" weren't so good after all. There was the Berlin Wall: those on this side of the wall thought that "evil" resided on the other side, and vice-versa. In ad-

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dition to the cultural tradition in which we were raised, which has always held generosity as a virtue, we lived in a divided world, in which taking sides seemed imperative.

Today this has all changed, and only a few people still believe in “axes of good and evil”. Perhaps it is time to revisit, without bias (free of the prejudices that constitute our beliefs, and paying closer attention to the facts than to ideology), the values that are going to guide us from here on. We have been living in a vacuum, without references and anchorage in our moments of greatest suffering. This might explain why depression is becoming more and more commonplace.

It is not my intention — nor am I equipped — to exhaustively examine such a complex subject, which perhaps should be revisited from time to time. The book you are about to read is an overview of everything I have managed to understand about morality seen through the prism my profession has provided me. If it serves as inspiration and a springboard for all of us to concern ourselves with building a set of values to guide us on this planet we have changed so radically, I will have fulfilled what I set out to do.

Flávio Gikovate

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I recently read a review of a book published in the United States called *Evil: An Investigation*¹. The author of the review was critical of it, among other reasons, because it didn't make a significant contribution to solving the problem at hand; in other words, it didn't put forward any worthwhile hypotheses about the origin of "evil". Nor did the critic, in turn, consider himself capable of answering such a complex, difficult question, despite his considerable qualifications. This prompted me to write a new text dealing with my own reflections on a subject I have been mulling over since 1977.

Reading this interesting critical text (and others), I learned that "good" and "evil" are not actual entities. They are constructions, almost myths, which have been developing for millenniums and have, in a way, formed a dichotomy seen as inevitable. God and the Devil have fought and will go on fighting forever! As such, "good" looks to "evil" for definition and existence, just as "evil" is defined in comparison with "good". Most people believe this duality describes us to a T; that we essentially

¹ Lance Morrow, *Evil: An Investigation*, New York: Basic Books, 2003. Review by Philip Cole in *Radical Philosophy*, issue 126, July 2004.

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belong to two opposing factions, not just morally, but in everything: Yin and Yang.

My concern with this essential issue has grown over the years. It arose spontaneously and unexpectedly in my analysis of how human relationships are established, especially marital ties between men and women. **What has always surprised me is the fact that the overwhelming majority of “voluntary” choices — those which take place spontaneously and are attributed to romantic love — repeat a single pattern: people who are very different to one another, opposites in certain essential aspects of their personalities, are drawn to one another.** I was also intrigued by the fact that people seemed to consider it the natural order of things. In other words, the coming together of opposites was encouraged — as registered in nursery rhymes such as “Jack Sprat could eat no fat / his wife could eat no lean / and so betwixt the two of them / they licked the platter clean” and popular expressions such as “opposites attract”. Freud’s reflections in *On Narcissism: An Introduction* (1914) also took this path, suggesting that the most sophisticated thing, from a psychological point of view, was to seek in others whatever we were lacking, instead of seeking an affinity based on “narcissistic identification”. In other words, people who were shy, discreet, passive, and who found it hard to stand up for themselves should marry people who were outgoing, bold, aggressive, and demanding.

The uniting of opposites was defined and built upon