

TO BE GOOD

or

NOT TO BE

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—

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Alanis Morissette - That I Would Be Good

“That I would be good even if I did nothing
(..)

That I would be good if I got and stayed sick
That I would be good even if I gained ten pounds
That I would be fine even if I went bankrupt

That I would be good if I lost my hair and my youth”

*To my dearest friend
who endured my millions of tears and pains
in coming back to life.*

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Philosophy is not a science

Philosophy, in its thirst for wisdom (Sophia) and knowledge about life and the world, formulates questions and preliminary answers in anticipation of scientific proof. After all, the latter forces reality to provide answers to previously phrased questions (experiments based on premises) in such a way that the answers are immediately clear and apparent to all: the one precondition for obtaining the stature of science.

Philosophy, on the other hand, enjoys much greater freedom: truth is what I feel to be true and for as long as it continues to do so. This means wisdom cannot be simply passed on from one person to another or handed down from generation to generation. This does not mean that philosophy lays no claim to the truth: the fact that insightful wisdom¹ is not immediately clear and apparent to everyone doesn't mean we do not all have a chance of attaining it someday.

Someday, because attaining wisdom takes time. There is a good reason why philosopher Martin Heidegger speaks of *Sein und Zeit*: Being and Time.

The path that leads to wisdom has to be travelled time and again, there is no avoiding that, but maybe we can try to improve the clarity and user-friendliness of the topographical map that shows us how to get there. After all, all societies experience an enduring need for wise people, and we all have two eyes, one nose and one heart: so why shouldn't the way our hearts attain wisdom be the same for everyone?

¹ The "entendre", hearing, according to Descartes, as opposed to the "comprendre", understanding.

Let it be clear that this book primarily embraces a philosophical approach rather than a purely scientific one.

We will successively discuss the characteristics of life, of man and of the problems experienced by man when he attempts to attain wisdom. For it's mainly when something is not working that we are quickest to realise how it is really supposed to, and maybe also understand what we could do to prevent problems.

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1. Characteristics of the self-willed life:

Life is primarily defined by a desire to

- move itself forward
- preserve itself
- develop itself, because everything that wants to live often starts out small.

In addition, the survival of a gregarious animal is highly dependent on its safe integration in a group of its own kind, which is most likely why this type of animal comes equipped with a certain “primal social urge”, exactly because acceptance into the pack is so crucial to their survival. The instinctive defensive reaction elicited by the threat of social exclusion is in a herd animal therefore comparable to the primal force generated by all living organisms when they fears for their lives. This also holds true for man, as, according to the great philosopher Aristotle, man is “a social creature by nature”. (Ethics, p. 34)

2. Characteristics of mankind:

2.1. Man is a hybrid

Human beings are not defined by their

- their ability to speak
- their ability to make instruments
- their social structures
- their mutual care.

Other living creatures share these characteristics.

Dolphins communicate in a variety of dialects; birds cut saws from leafstalks; dogs have a highly hierarchical social structure and meerkats will mobilise the whole group to rescue one of their own who is trapped.

So wherein lies the difference between humans and all other living creatures? Probably in the abstract nature of all these characteristics, which can be attributed to the explosive growth of the human brain's neocortex.

In his book "Tears of a Crocodile, Dutch psychologist Piet Vroon, describes the truly explosive growth of a new structure in the human brain that proliferated across the more primitive parts; parasitizing as it were on the underlying, older, more reptilian parts without any kind of real integration ever taking place. Vroon argues it never developed beyond a mere accumulation of separate layers.

As a result, man, even more so than the other vertebrates, is condemned to go through life with these two – largely - separate, more or less autonomous regions of the brain, which, as Plato