

TO BE GOOD

or

NOT TO BE

TO BE GOOD

or

NOT TO BE

—

Richard Livingstone

2015

© Richard Livingstone.
ISBN 9789402149463
Second edition.
All rights reserved.

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.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: philosophy is not a science

1. Characteristics of the self-willed life 11

2. Characteristics of mankind 12

2.1. Man is a hybrid

2.2. Man is a rational animal with a task 15

2.2.1. Reason as a protective shell 16

2.2.2. Reason: curse or blessing 18

2.2.3. The heart as a mouldable lump of clay 19

2.2.4. The difference between individual fairness and rational generality 19

2.3. Mankind as a possible set of communicating vessels 21

2.4. Man as an internal acrobat 22

3. Educating a human being 23

3.1. Becoming reasonable 24

3.1.1. Human nature is nothing to be afraid of 25

3.1.2. First find out who you're dealing with 26

3.1.3. The need for room for error 28

3.1.4. The need for boundary markers 30

3.2. Introducing the term 'good' 32

3.2.1. Is man inherently socially good? 34

3.2.2. Man's deepest sense of happiness 35

3.3. Parents are not superhuman 36

3.4. The importance of good friends 39

3.5. Love and stalking 40

4. The problematic young life 41

- 4.1. The unbearable emptiness of existence 45
- 4.2. The next step: unhappy rebellion 47
- 4.3. The persistent attraction of approval 50
 - 4.3.1. The requester or do-gooder 51
 - 4.3.2. The demander or person with an NPS 53
 - 4.3.3. The demander and the requester: allergic to mistakes 58
 - 4.3.4. The other as the goodness territory of the demander to be monitored 59
 - 4.3.5. Words as the demander's favourite weapon 60
 - 4.3.6. Vampire behaviour by the demander 62
 - 4.3.7. The demander's envy of someone else's attention 63
 - 4.3.8. A requester or demander as parent 64

5. Societal deterioration? 71

- 5.1. Living dead 73
- 5.2. Religion 76
 - 5.2.1. The sinful man 77
 - 5.2.2. A louder voice among many 78

6. The wise, emotionally mature man 82

7. Education and society 83

8. Back in search of the unique heart base 87

- 8.1. Dealing with fear 88
- 8.2. The layers of sorrow 90
- 8.3. Good, equal friends 92
- 8.4. The magical circle as a birthplace for emotional growth 94
- 8.5. The primary circle: the birth family 94

List with used abbreviations for the bibliographic reference 103

Bibliography 104

Glossary 106

In loving memory of the actor Robin Williams 110

About the author 112

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.

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