



The Risk of Being: What It Means to Be Good and Bad

Michael Gelven

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The Risk of Being attempts to forge a new language and a new way of reasoning about what it is like to be good and bad by focusing on existential phenomena that reveal what it means to be good and bad. It is thus a work that cannot be located among or compared to the more traditional theories of ethics or morality. What distinguishes this inquiry is not only the use of existential themes, such as outrage, temptation, and corruption, but the reasoning itself in an existential critique, which allows us to consider how and what we think as well as feel about being good and bad—the logos and pathos of these existential phenomena—and thus provides an access to the question about the reality of good and bad.

Recognizing that we have done wrong may induce frustrated responses, such as, "How could I have been so stupid?" or "Why was I so weak?" or even, "What has become of me?" These reactions, Gelven argues, point to folly, weakness, and corruption as ways of being bad, which can then be countered in phenomena such as judgment, courage, and integrity of character, as ways of being good. The analyses of these phenomena can reveal a great deal of existential understanding that no mere ethical or moral approach can offer. The emphasis is on understanding that "good" and "bad" are not mere axiological terms, but can refer to ways of existing.

By careful analysis, these ways can be forced to reveal the truth about goodness and badness. As Gelven's argument proceeds to show not only what it is "like" to be good and bad, but also what the reality of being good and bad must be, he offers new and often unorthodox insights into one of the great philosophical issues challenging the thinking mind.

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