

International workshop
Good and evil: Political education and the future of the humanities
International conference (online)

Friday, February 17, 2023 (5:00pm Japan; 10:00am Finland; 9:00am France;
8:00am UK)

Good and evil: Political education and the future of the humanities

In 1991, Raimond Gaita published *Good and Evil: an absolute conception* (re-published 2004). The topic of evil is an uncomfortable one for modern philosophy as it has strong religious connotations, and Gaita is writing against the mainstream. In his book, he is opposed to moral philosophy that lacks a first-person perspective, and he develops a Wittgensteinian approach to the question of good and evil. Gaita is emphatic that no matter what we do we remain answerable to moral judgement. In the world today, how should each of us, as academics, deal with this question of good and evil? And what might be the role of political education and more broadly the task of the humanities in addressing this issue.

In response to these questions. In collaboration with the JSPS International project, "Political Education for Living with the Other," we are organizing an international panel, centering on the theme of "Good and evil, political education and the future of the humanities."

Programme

17:00-17:10 Welcome

17:10 -17:55 (in Japanese time)

Anton Sevilla-Liu (Kyushu University)

"Can Science Think about Good and Evil? Examining Contextual Behavioral Science"

This presentation takes Raimond Gaita's *Good and Evil* as a catalyst for a reflection on good and evil from the point of view of Contextual Behavioral Science (CBS, a school of psychology best known for Acceptance and Commitment Therapy). Gaita makes brief references to science, primarily critical of science's inability to concern itself with the particular individual, and hence the very heart of the domain of good and evil. With the dominance of science in academic and intellectual life, it is relevant to ask, "Do we have potential dialogue partners in science as we try to restore the concern for good and evil in ethics?" I suggest a potential partner is CBS, which is equally critical of science's focus on the generic universal person found in mechanist, formist, and organicist philosophy of science. As a contextualism, it focuses on how unique, irreplaceable subjects respond to particular contexts. This response is grounded in a particular concept of self, self-as-context (which has a peculiar tension with Gaita's focus on the

narrative self). This self-as-context also allows for a different vision of the relationship between I and Thou, compassion, and transcendence. This remarkably shifts the way psychology and psychotherapy approach the question of human values and their relationship to good and evil.

17:55-18:40 (10:55am-11:40am in Finish time)
Sari Kivistö (Tampere University, Finland)

"Are there roses in Orwell's world? Religion, politics, and antitheodicy in classical dystopian fiction"

I have previously suggested (e.g., in Kivistö & Pihlström 2016; Kivistö 2020) that a certain kind of antitheodicy is a key to Orwell's classical dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that resists theodicy arguments by describing how the worst possible place feels from a personal perspective. I will here continue the argument about how the discourses and practices of totalitarian societies like the one in Orwell bear striking resemblance to the problem of theodicy by overlooking the plurality of voices and constructing their own perfections and abstract and totalizing visions. I will draw attention to Orwell's essay on Gandhi, which Gaita, in turn, brings up when he talks about the fearlessness of thinking and the obligation to choose between being a saint and being a human being. I will develop the latter contrast by considering the contradiction between perfection and humanity in Orwell's work. In addition, based on Solnit, I will present a few words about beauty as a form of resistance.

18:40-19:00
Break

19:00-19:45 (10:00-10:45 in British time)
Adrian Skilbeck (University of Winchester)

Living with the other and living with ourselves: the idea of a common humanity

Not only in *Good and Evil*, but in other works such as *A Common Humanity*, Rai Gaita has sought to draw far-reaching lessons from an analysis of racism that sees its denial of the full humanity of others as depending upon deep-seated distinctions between 'us' and 'them'. Acknowledging what is owed to those who have been wronged through such racism means coming to see what it is to wrong and be wronged in the light of that humanity. How we can be in a position to do so is not best captured by appeals to principled ethics but through powerful examples and the authoritative words of others that move us. For Gaita, this has profound implications not only for what it means to live in relation to the other but what it means to live with oneself. Gaita's own work in taking these powerful moral insights into the political realm will be drawn upon to identify how educators can address issues like racism and the extent to which the idea of a common humanity can illuminate our experience of living with the other.

19:45-20:30 (10:45-11:30 in British time)
Emma Williams (Warwick University)

Rai Gaita, J.M. Coetzee and the Education of Ethics

In my paper, I will explore the connections between Rai Gaita's and J.M. Coetzee's ethical thought. Gaita engages with Coetzee's novels across various points in his writings, and in my paper I will examine themes of good and evil as they emerge within Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*. Taking this as a basis, I will consider what Gaita and Coetzee oppose and critique in philosophy and in philosophy's traditional ways of thinking about moral issues. I will also explore how Gaita's reflections on Coetzee unfold in connection with issues of human-animal relations, but ask whether this risks obscuring the primary importance of our lives with other human beings and our continual need for education.

20:30 (13:00am Finland; 12:00am France; 11:00am UK)
Closing