

ROUTLEDGE FOCUS

MAXIMA MORALIA

Meditations on the Otherness of the Other

Ramin Jahanbegloo

ROUTLEDGE

Focus

Maxima Moralia

This book highlights the problem of one-dimensional, reductionistic life of the modern individual. An expression of crisis in our world, it discusses the imperative need to have a more comprehensive, non-reductionist life where the Other is incorporated, especially the relationship between the Other and the Self, based on virtues such as love, empathy, equality, and compassion.

The volume sheds light on how the world has forgone the art of living for a mutilated sense of well-being, the rise of conformity and complacency in human thought, and the lack of democratic dissent and citizenry responsibility in our contemporary societies, which is now characterized by mass immaturity, propelled by a process of thoughtlessness. It discusses how humans need to be aware of the life they lead, to think about Otherness of the Other not just as another virtue but also as a crucial element in the survival of humanity, for people to coexist with the world around them as equals. Furthermore, it advocates meaningful and thoughtful existence, in touch with the Nature we coexist with, to ensure that humanity is not robbed of its noble spirit as we live to survive in our techno-capitalist societies.

An introspective read, this book will be of great interest to scholars and researchers of moral and ethical philosophy, political philosophy, and political science.

Ramin Jahanbegloo is an Iranian–Canadian philosopher. He is presently the executive director of the Mahatma Gandhi Centre for Nonviolence and Peace Studies and the vice-dean of the School of Law at Jindal Global University, Sonapat, India. He is the winner of the Peace Prize from the United Nations Association in Spain (2009) for his extensive academic work in promoting dialogue among cultures and his advocacy for nonviolence. More recently, he is the winner of the Josep Palau i Fabre International Essay Prize. Some of his most recent publications are *Gadflies in the Public Space* (2016), *The Decline of Civilization* (2017), *Letters to a Young Philosopher* (2017), *On Forgiveness and Revenge* (2017), and *The Global Gandhi: Essays in Comparative Political Philosophy* (2018).



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**To Don Mario Aguilar, for his exceptional meaningfulness
and unparalleled empathy in the battlefield of life**



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Introduction

This book is the expression of a crisis in our world. It is a crisis in several senses. From a civilizational standpoint, we are living in an age of mediocrity. This is an age of imbecility and infantilism. It is an age of what Kant called “self-incurred minority.” This minority is expressed by the inability of today’s individuals to make use of their understanding and to think for themselves. As a matter of fact, in these troubled times, the art of questioning has been replaced by the rise of conformity and complacency among the citizens of the world. In other words, the contemporary world is characterized by mass immaturity and propelled by a process of thoughtlessness. The second expression of the crisis that humanity is living at a global level is the shortcomings of democratic passion and citizenry responsibility in our contemporary societies. Consequently, democracy in the 21st century has ceased to be a way of life. Democracy, to be worthy of obedience, must be structured so that every citizen can question and disobey unjust laws and institutions. However, the truth is that the corporate mindset which has conquered the economic, political, and academic institutions around the globe has, at the same time, destroyed the disobedient spirit of democracy. As a result, dissent is no more a moral and political imperative in liberal societies; it has become a cultural luxury, which is practised in the private spaces. The third and last aspect of the global crisis mentioned is the social and individual degradations of the moral of compassion and empathy among the peoples of the Earth. We are living in a world where the ideas of success and utility have replaced those of compassion and empathy. Therefore, what we call “well-being” as a mutilated meaning of life has replaced the art of living. While life has become meaningless, death is no more than statistics. Humanity is living a civilizational incapacity to generate a common horizon of shared values. And this is a handicap which goes beyond human civilizations. It touches the essence of life itself and the relation of humans with Nature. We, humans, have lost all contact with the biodiversity of the planet Earth. For the first time in our human history, empathy and compassion are

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no more parts of our civilizational upbringing. We live on the planet Earth without knowing why we share this planet with a diversity of plants and animals. This state of meaningless and thoughtless existence not only robs humanity of its nobility of spirit but also makes humans totally indifferent to the Otherness of the Other. Let us not forget that the acknowledgement of the Otherness of the Other is actually accompanied by an awareness of Man's fallibility and the impossibility to maintain itself unflinchingly in an unquestionable and unaccountable intellectual stance. This is where the democratic paideia and the exercise of empathetic pluralism and compassionate friendship in regard to the non-human world goes hand in hand with a permanent struggle against the spirit of violence and its unethical and utilitarian expressions in our democracies.

The liability to think about the Otherness of the Other is not just another virtue in the catalog of humanity morality. It is a crucial element in the survival enterprise of humanity. We do not live as humans to think the Otherness of the Other, but, on the contrary, we think the Otherness of the Other in order to continue to survive as human beings. It's time for humanity to start coexisting with the world around it as equals; otherwise, the world will continue not only to be inaccessible to the human race but also of no significance to it. It would be a shame and an indignity for humanity to continue to bless the lies with which its lives while it is cursed by them. Perhaps it's time for us to accept the fact that the iron necessity of our techno-capitalist world is neither iron nor necessary. In the final analysis, the meaning of life is in life itself. If we do not understand and respect the Otherness of life, ultimately there would be no life at all.