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Appendix: Review of "The Many Faces of Evil: Historical Perspectives"

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APPENDIX

**Review of *The Many Faces of Evil: Historical Perspectives*.
Edited by Amélie Oksenberg Rorty. London: Routledge, 2001. 346 pp.**

Amélie Rorty has put together a wonderfully varied collection of writings, with a range in time of three thousand years and a range of style from sacred writings to fiction to analytical philosophy. There is nothing like it in print, and it will be an invaluable source for many of us. The writings she has collected are all about—well, I'm not sure that there is something that they are all about. The title suggests that the collection is about a phenomenon called Evil that has many faces: one underlying factor in human life, which can manifest itself in varied forms. In fact, the writings are about uncooperative behavior, sin, cruelty, lust, vice, impiety, indifference, and cynicism, among other things. All of these are bad; they impact on human life in many different deleterious ways. Some of the writings, for example the selection from the book of Genesis and the excerpt from Jean Hampton, assume that all immorality is of a kind and may be treated together. Others, for example the selections from Theophrastus and from Nietzsche, are trying to persuade us to see differences before disapproval clouds our vision.

The collection has an introduction, which could sustain three interpretations. The realist interpretation: there is a deep unity to serious wrongdoing, which some have seen as disobeying God, some as the exercise of individual will, some as the assertion of self, and so on. The pluralist interpretation: there are many possible combinations of non-benevolent human motivation and social disruption, and at different times and places people have found different ones important or interesting. The constructivist interpretation: we live our lives by concepts, and the concepts that register our disapproval of others can shape our lives and our experience in these varied ways. In fact, I suspect that Rorty is torn between the first and the

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second of these. The last item in the book, an excerpt on sociopathology from a diagnostic manual, suggests that there is a range of phenomena in which particularly deviant motivation figures, and which at various times has been explained in theological or metaphysical terms. And the extreme, almost carefree, variety of themes in the selected writings suggests that there is a hodge-podge of concepts denoting different ways and reasons our acts can evoke reasonable disapproval in others. Realism for deep evil, pluralism for the many varieties of bad.

What is deep evil, as I have just called it? The words in the various languages englished in this collection do not give much of a clue. *το κακον*, *malum*, *le mal*, *das Böse*: all of these can be used in context to refer to just about any wrongdoing. English is unusual in having a word, 'evil', whose core meaning denotes some special kind of badness, though in all languages badness-intensifiers can be fine-tuned for special effect. Is there an insight here, in contemporary English usage? Is there a stable point between the infinite variety of wrongdoing and the superficial fact that all of it is wrong? The authors of the papers in this issue of *The Monist* think so, and provide some impressive reasons for agreeing. But many of the authors that Amélie Rorty has brought together would not agree. Some would see all wrongdoing as essentially the same, and some focus on particular kinds of wrong that have a characteristic rationale that is not that of evil. Though it may not fit well with the collection's title, that varied focus is one of the stimulating and valuable features of the book.

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