

Is there such a thing as too much empathy?

The Excess of Empathy. Towards a Functional Indifference

IGNAAS DEVISCH

Empathy is the power to imagine and feel what you believe to be another person's experience. In times in which social contrasts and social inequality are becoming more and more pronounced, there are loud calls for more empathy. Many regard the human ability to put oneself in someone else's shoes as a driving force behind morality and a tried and tested remedy for indifference. But is empathy always good? Or can we have too much of it?

This book stimulates reflection and nuanced thinking: no mean feat in these turbulent times.

CUTTING EDGE

At the level of personal relationships, empathy is a good thing. However, it is not a miracle cure that will solve all social problems. In his latest book, 'The Excess of Empathy', Ignaas Devisch argues that a certain degree of indifference is desirable, sometimes even necessary. The author guides the reader through the history of thinking about empathy, taking examples from current debates about society as his starting point and showing that empathy can be troublesome in certain situations. He challenges us to reconsider our view of humanity: deep down, aren't we all not just friends but scoundrels as well?



AUTHOR



Ignaas Devisch (b. 1970) is professor of ethics, philosophy and medical philosophy at the University of Ghent and the Artevelde College. He publishes in the fields of social, medical and political philosophy. His critical essay about medicalization, 'Sick of Health', was published by De Bezige Bij in 2013. In his latest book 'Fire. A Forgotten Issue' (2021, De Bezige Bij), philosopher Ignaas Devisch demonstrates why the moment man gained control over fire is such an important tipping point in history. Photo © Koen Broos

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