

LS 813: Religious and Secular World Views: Cruelty and other Human Vices
Instructor: Eleanor Stebner – estebner@sfu.ca
Tuesdays – 6:30 – 9:20 pm - Online

“I am haunted by humans.” (p. 550)

Markus Zusak, *The Book Thief* (2005)

Cruelty and other human vices are exhibited by all people regardless of who they are, what they think, where they live, and how they identify. These individual vices also manifest themselves collectively.

Philosopher and political theorist Judith Shklar argued that the greatest human vice is cruelty followed by hypocrisy, snobbery, betrayal, and misanthropy. Her ordinary vices, as she called them, differ from the seven capital vices (aka the “seven deadly sins”) - pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony and sloth. Mohandas Gandhi suggested seven social blunders of humanity: wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity, worship without sacrifice, politics without principle.

Each of these various perspectives point to something about human beings that is ultimately harmful, destructive, and sometimes horrifying and seemingly inexplicable.

This course will explore the dimensions and varieties of cruelty and other vices as manifested in all-too-common human actions, inactions, and ambivalence. Students will consider the insights of scholars from various disciplines and read a selection of literature.

Each student will make one presentation related to the assigned course materials and make a seminar presentation on their individual essay or project a week before submitting it for evaluation.

January 7th

Judith N. Shklar, “Putting Cruelty First,” *Daedalus* 111:3, Summer, 1982, 17-28. [pdf provided]

CBC Radio, “Is Cruelty worse than Hypocrisy?” July 20, 2021 [pdf provided]

David Runciman, host, “Shklar on Hypocrisy, Talking Politics,” *A History of Ideas*, 2021-04-20

Podcast: <https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/talking-politics-history-of-ideas/id1508992867?i=1000517869772>

January 14th

Craig A. Boyd and Kevin Timpe, “The Capital Vices: love gone wrong” in *The Virtues* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 89-107 [pdf provided]

Arun Gandhi, “Blunders of the World,” M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence [pdf provided]

Philip Hallie, "From Cruelty to Goodness," *The Hastings Center Report*, Jun., 1981, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Jun., 1981), 23-28 [pdf provided]

January 21st

Giorgio Baruchello, Ársæll Már Arnarsson, "Cruelty in Philosophy and in the Humanities," 223-315 in *Humour and Cruelty*, Vol. 1 (2022) [pdf provided]

January 28th

Giorgio Baruchello, Ársæll Már Arnarsson, "Cruelty in Psychology and in the Social Sciences," 316-410 in *Humour and Cruelty*, Vol. 1 (2022) [pdf provided]

February 4th

Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) [pdf provided]

Steve Paulson, Heather A. Berlin, Christian B. Miller, and Michael Shermen, discussion, "The Moral Animal: Virtue, Vice, and Human Nature," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1384 (2016) 39–56 [pdf provided]

February 11th

Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (1890) - available online through SFU library

February 18th - no class session (reading week)

February 25th

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1899) - available online through SFU library

March 4th

Albert Camus, *The Stranger* (1942) - available online through SFU library

March 11th

Arthur Miller, *The Crucible* (1953) [pdf provided]

Film: *McCarthy Trials: An Exploration Through Archival Film* (2006), 15 minutes [SFU library]

March 18th

Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1964), chapters III, VII and VIII [pdf provided]

Hannah Arendt, "The Banality of Evil: Failing to Think," an excerpt from "Thinking and Moral Considerations: A Lecture," p. 417-423 in *Social Research: An International Quarterly of the Social Sciences* 38, no. 3 (1961): 417–46. [pdf provided]

March 18th

J.M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* (1999). Amy Gutman, ed., and intro., with reflections by Marjorie Garber, Peter Singer, Wendy Doniger, Barbara Smut - available online through SFU library

March 25th

Adam Kirsch, *The Revolt Against Humanity: Imagining a future without us* (2023) [pdf provided]

April 1st

Discussion of student essays/projects

April 8th

Final discussion and papers/projects due

Many films could be suggested in relation to our course, but here are a few to consider watching. Please let us know if you have other suggestions. These films are available through the SFU library.

Jane Eyre (2002) - based on Charlotte Bronte's 1847 novel

Paul Robeson: Songs of Freedom (2008) - singer/entertainer caught in the anti-communist frenzy of the United States

Backlash: Misogyny in the digital age (2022) - increasing online violence toward women

Life is Beautiful (2013) - one man's attempt to rescue hope (and life) during the Holocaust

The Great Gatsby (2013) - M. Scott Fitzgerald's 1925 critic of the decadence of the 1920s American Dream

Seven (1995) - seven people brutally murdered based on their particular deadly sin

1958-1969: not a dinner party - the cultural revolution (2005) - Mao and China

Black Beauty (2013) - Sewell's 1877 novel advocated the humane treatment of animals

The Lives of Others (2013) - a Stasi agent spies on a playwright and his girlfriend

The Strangest Dream (2023) - Nuclear physicist Joseph Rotblat leaves the Manhattan Project

Wall Street (1987) - the world of stock trading, junk bonds, and corporate takeovers

Shake Hands with the Devil (2007) - Romeo Dallaire's 2003 book on the Rwandan genocide

Hannah Arendt (2012) - the stormy reception of Arendt's coverage of the Eichmann trial