



GOOD, EVIL, AND THE MODERN HERO

Seminar Leader: NICOLE SELEME; House Leader: SHO HAYASHIDA

June 10th, 2014

Course Description

This course is meant to make the students question how they judge decisions made by world leaders, their peers, and themselves through the analysis of a fun and popular topic: heroes and their many forms. “Heroes” have traditionally been the embodiment of “morality, goodness, and right.” Many have been central to our childhood and icons of inspiration for many different audiences. However, it is important that we understand how the current images of heroes in popular media embody our modern views of what is “right” and “wrong”. How do they affect us, and what messages are they trying to give us? Should we accept these heroes? Or are those whom we thought heroes actually part (or fully) a villain, depending on what perspective we decide to look at them from?

Students will be able to participate in intense and engaging discussions questioning the actions of popular fictional figures from famous movies, manga, comic books, novels, and anime, as well as be able to draw upon their own experiences. Students will be able to make their own choice of heroic characters and storylines to put themselves in these heroes’ shoes and make their own informed decisions. By analyzing what motivates a character to make a decision or take action, we can change the way that our world works, be it at a personal or global level.

Message from the Seminar Leader

Hello everyone! My name is Nicole Seleme, and I am currently a rising Junior studying Computer Science at Columbia University. Ever since I was little, I loved looking for the different messages that my favorite videogames, books, movies, and anime were trying to tell me. I realized that these forms of media were much more than just casual entertainment for me, they were also a source of valuable messages and life-changing lessons. I hope that, through this seminar, we will be able to explore some of the deeper, underlying questions that arise from some of our favorite mediums of entertainment, as well as enjoy ourselves by having thought-provoking discussions in a friendly environment. I am very excited to meet you all!

Message from the House Leader

Hello! My name is Sho Hayashida. Call me Sho. I major in Aerospace engineering at Kyushu University. In other words, I am studying to design airplanes and rockets. I chose it as my major because airplanes and rockets look really cool. In addition to my major, I used to be a big fan of super heroes because heroes looks always cool when I was a kid (probably I love heroes still now). However, we should think critically about heroes’ acts as they sometimes do



something bad such as destroying buildings, ignoring traffic rules, and so on. In this course, we will discuss about justice, heroism, evil, and even human nature, using a topic of modern super heroes.

I can't wait to meet you all! If there is anything you want to talk about, send message to my line You all are always welcome even when you just want to say hi :)

Pre-Assignments

- The *Essential Gandhi*: Part II, Ch15, “Gandhi’s message to all men” (p. 120-125) and Ch26, “Love versus war and dictators” (p.188- 193)
- Watch *Batman: The Dark Knight* (second entry of the Christopher Nolan Trilogy)
- Read article: “Should superheroes kill” (<http://the-artifice.com/should-superheroes-kill/>)

Course Schedule

Day 1: *What is a hero?*

Today, we will explore what and who we consider as “heroes” from our favorite forms of media. We will see if Batman can be considered a hero, especially by Gandhi’s definitions of true heroism, and think about whether the ends justify the means he uses to fight evil.

- Discussion about what we consider a hero, deconstruction of the concept, and analysis of recent vs. past conceptions of heroism
- Can violence be justified? Comparison with Gandhi’s ideals of *Ahimsa* [Love and non-violence]
- Project Activity: Decide on a character of the student’s choice to put into conversation with Batman. Decide on what things he differs or is similar to Batman, and map them out.

Day 2: *All for one or one for all?*

Today we will discuss the morality of self-sacrifice for the good of society. Is it fair for one person to suffer for the sake of others? We will analyze difficult situations and sacrifices that Batman has to go through in the movie, and compare his actions to what Gandhi calls self-sacrifice.

- Analyze clips of the Batman movie.
- Discuss Gandhi’s ideology of *self-sacrifice*.
- Project activity: Place the character chosen in the previous class in place of Batman at different points of his movie. What would the character have done, and how? Why?

Day 3: *Come to the dark side. We have cookies*

How do we classify villains? How can we tell who are the “good guys” and the “bad guys” of a story? These are only some of the questions that we will be looking at today, as we try to look at how media tries to show us what “evil” means.



- Discussion about what makes a “villain.” How are they portrayed in media? What does Gandhi say a villain is?
- Analyze and compare the Joker and Two-Face as different kinds of villains. (From The Dark Knight movie)
- Project Activity: Choose a guest villain character from any series, game, book, etc. and make them sit in conversation with your previously chosen character. Are there any points where they would agree?

Day 4: *The modern-day superhero, and how to be one*

Today we will finally dare to step further out from the fictional world and explore how the concepts that we have been studying apply to our daily lives. Can we draw any practical, valuable lessons or conclusions from these sources of entertainment?

- Analyze and compare how the different morals and concepts of “evil” portrayed in the media apply to the problems that the world is facing in modern time.
- Identify world crises in the last centuries and analyze one from the moral viewpoints of each opposing side.
- Project Activity: Present shortly how their favorite hero/own created hero would tackle a world crisis today or a potential world crisis as if they were being interviewed in a talk show.