What Is Evil?

Theological & Philosophical Investigations

Thursdays, 2:00 - 3:30pm (- Oct 12)
frederickuu.org/fcc

Covenant

- Use **"I" statements**: *speak from your own experience*.

- **Ask permission before sharing** other participants' stories outside the group.

- **Lean-in/back:** be conscious of the level of participation that you bring to the conversation. Allow everyone a chance to speak before you speak again.

- You always have **permission to "pass."**

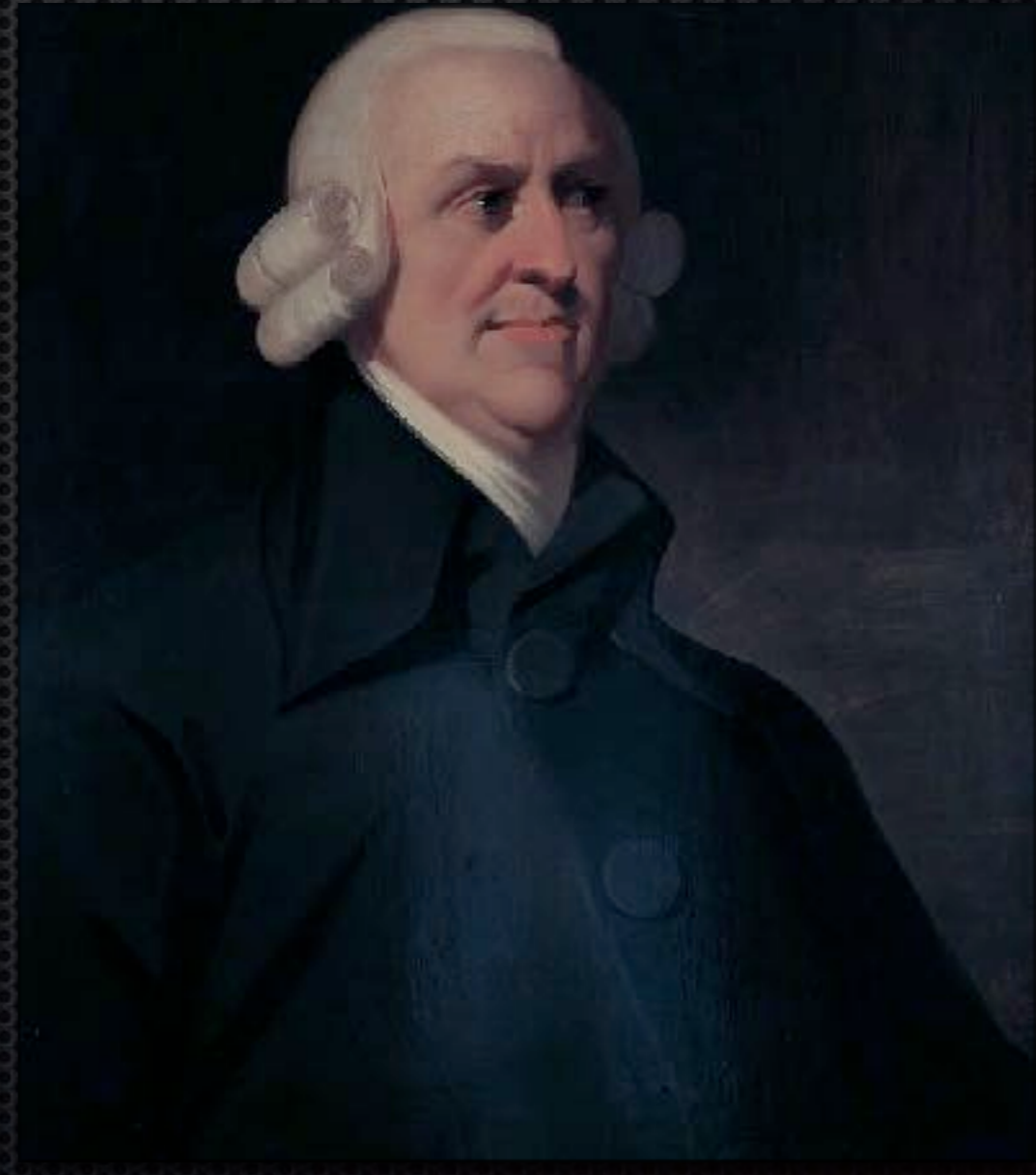# Check-in

- Attendance

- "Evil" show & tell

Outline

Adam Smith

* "Imagine for a moment that 100 people are going to be killed somewhere in a far away place that you do not know.

* Now imagine that you are going to loose your middle finger."

* Most humans sense with a peculiar immediacy the loss of the middle finger

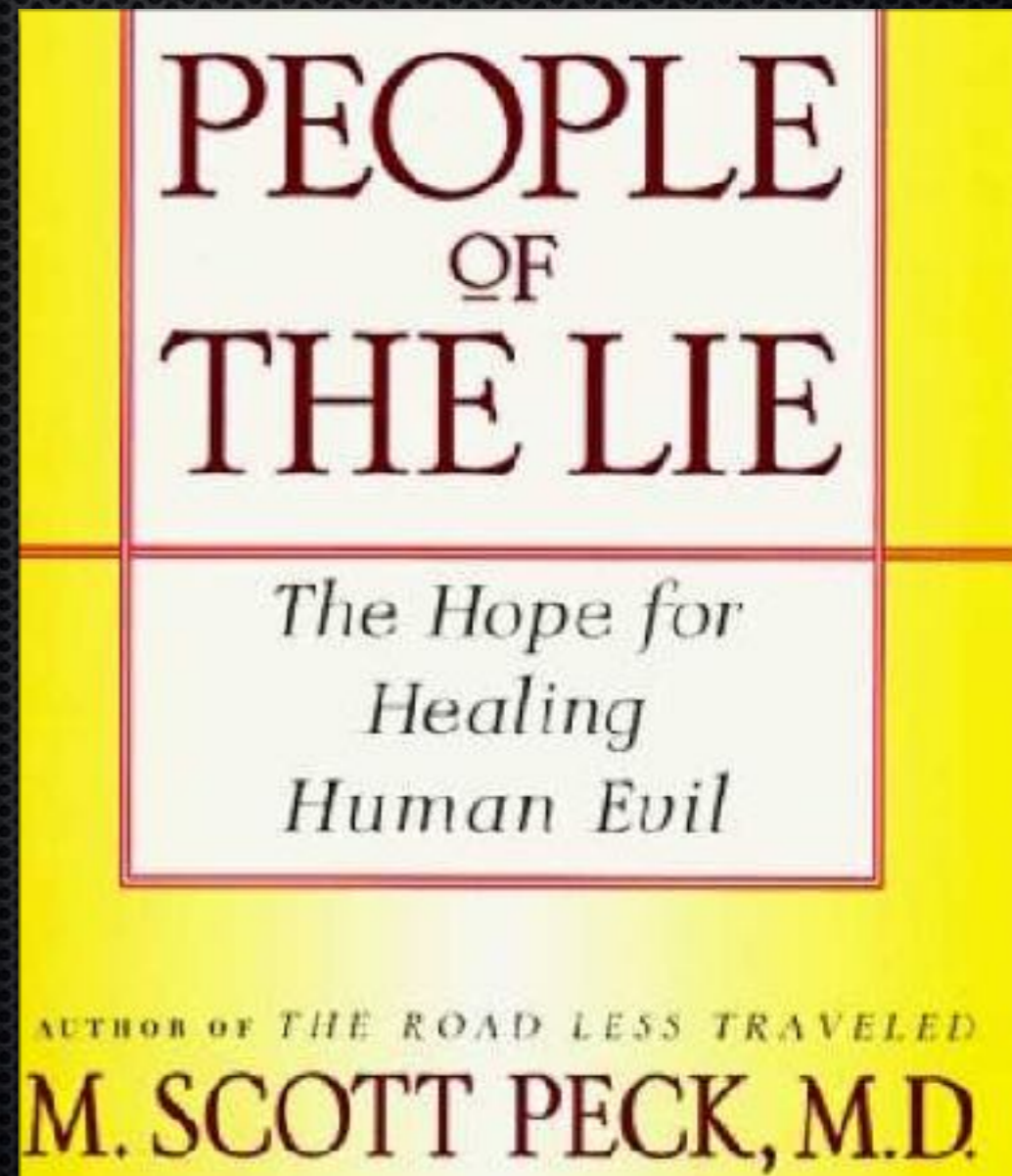* But our felt sense must struggle to experience the loss of the people in some far away place.

1723 - 1790

Matthew Cordle: "I Killed a Man"

youtube.com/watch?v=MmpK_EshSL4
(4 min)

- Sad state of affairs, but fact of the matter is that the healthiest people—the most honest, whose patterns of thinking are least distorted are the very ones easiest to treat with psychotherapy and most likely to benefit from it.

- Conversely, sicker the patients—the more dishonest in their behavior and distorted in their thinking— less able we are to help them with any degree of success.

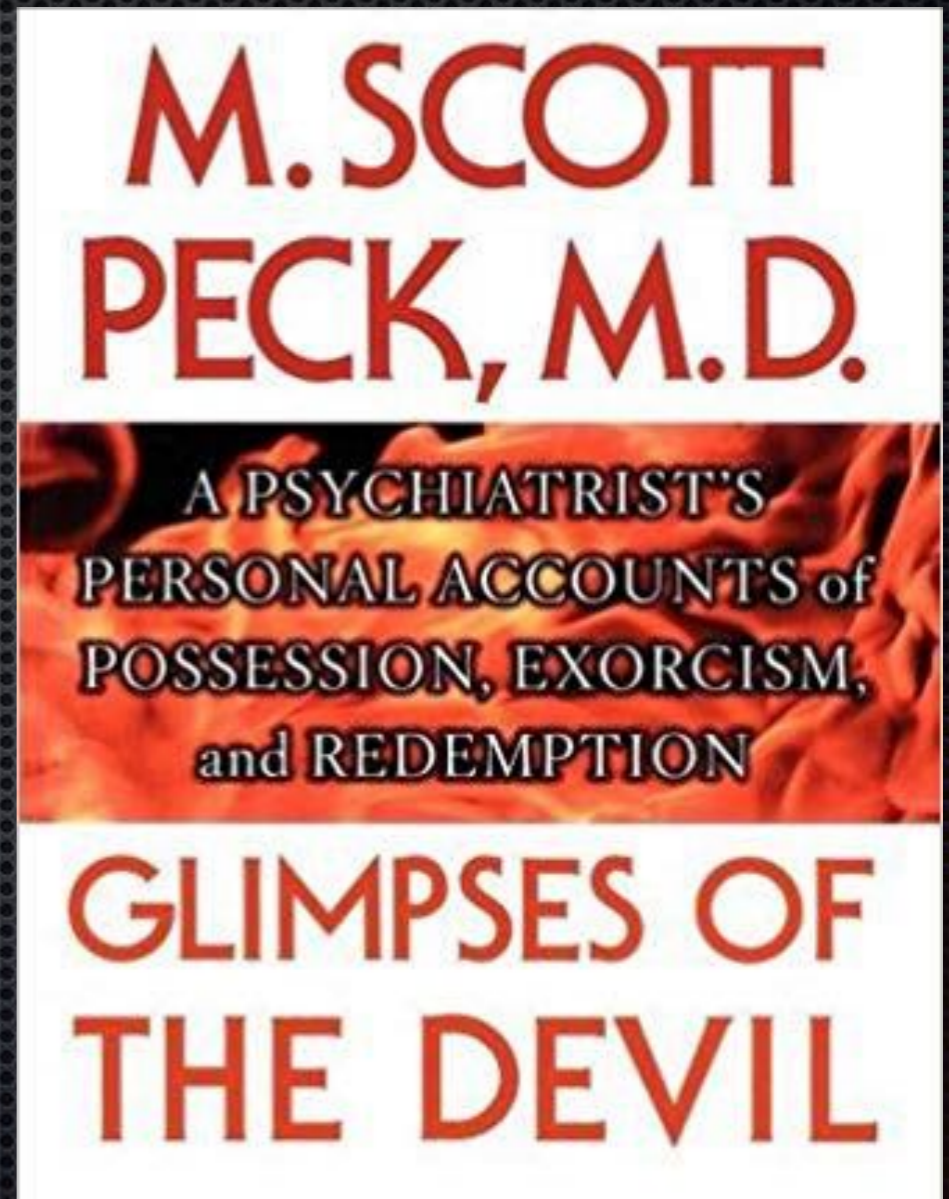- When they are very distorted and dishonest, it seems impossible.

PEOPLE
OF
THE LIE

The Hope for
Healing
Human Evil

AUTHOR OF *THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED*

M. SCOTT PECK, M.D.

- Among themselves, therapists will not infrequently refer to a patient's psychopathology as being "overwhelming."

- We mean this literally. We literally feel overwhelmed by the labyrinthine mass of lies and twisted motives and distorted communication into which we will be drawn if we attempt to work with such people in the intimate relationship of psychotherapy.

- We feel, usually quite accurately, that not only will we fail in our attempts to pull them out of the morass of their sickness but that we may also be pulled down into it ourselves.

PEOPLE OF THE LIE

The Hope for Healing Human Evil

AUTHOR OF *THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED*

M. SCOTT PECK, M.D.

- We are too weak to help such patients—to blind to see an end to the twisted corridors into which we will be led, too small to maintain our love in the face of their hatred.

- This was the case in dealing with Bobby's parents. I felt overwhelmed by the sickness I sensed in them.

- Not only would they likely reject any offer I made to help them but I also knew I lacked the power to succeed in any attempt at healing.

M. SCOTT PECK, M.D.

A PSYCHIATRIST'S PERSONAL ACCOUNTS of POSSESSION, EXORCISM, and REDEMPTION

GLIMPSES OF THE DEVIL

2005

Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael

- Religion splits neighbor from neighbor, so does gender, nationality, class, caste, even political affiliation, etc.

- Social or institutional structures that perpetuate these splits uphold the power differentials that channel money, influence, etc. *to* "us" & *away from* "them."

- This is one of the structural realities that leads me to my definition of evil. The key word for me is **"distance."**

Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael

- <u>Milligram's Authority experiment</u>: closer the teacher was to the learner, the harder it was for the teacher to inflict pain.

- When the learner was in the same room as the teacher, right next to the teacher, touching the teachers hand, the teacher refused to do harm.

- It was impossible for the teacher (while touching the learner) to separate "us" from "them."

- Each step, however, the teacher took, away from the learner – no longer touching, not in the same room – the teacher was more and more capable of obeying the rules of the experiment, more and more capable of consciously inflicting pain, causing profound suffering.

Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael

- Distance gives us the room, the space, to perpetuate evil.

- It is, I believe the most dangerous catalyst.

- Distance need not be physical. It can manifest in the psychological, intellectual, or emotional realm.

Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael

* Distance is different than Difference.

* There is dignity in difference, and a necessity.

* Life is perpetuated by the complexity inherent in the natural universe.

* Distance is, on the other hand, a construct - a way of seeing ourselves and our world - that is chosen (sometimes for us, and sometimes by us.)

Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael

Definition of Evil

- Evil is perpetuated by distance, by the breaks, splits, and chasms that grow between otherwise inseparable aspects of being.

- Evil is a force, greater than individual choice, but channeled and catalyzed by human intervention, that desecrates the sacred quality of being (it's essential and and eternal dependency and interconnection.)

[Total: 300 words]

Chris Rock: "Confederate Flag"

youtube.com/watch?v=SZ8_49BRSiw
(5 min)

* Racism in the United States is often referred to as a **systemic evil**,

* perpetuated not as much by the prejudicial intentions of individuals but by customs, institutions, collective fears

* Can you see a way to break or repair this system?

NETFLIX
A NETFLIX ORIGINAL DOCUMENTARY
FROM AVA DuVERNAY
DIRECTOR OF SELMA

FROM SLAVE TO CRIMINAL WITH ONE AMENDMENT

13TH

OCTOBER 7

THE CLASSIC NATIONAL BESTSELLER

HOWARD ZINN

A

PEOPLE'S
HISTORY
OF THE
UNITED
STATES

MORE THAN TWO MILLION COPIES SOLD

"Historians may well view it as a step toward a coherent new version
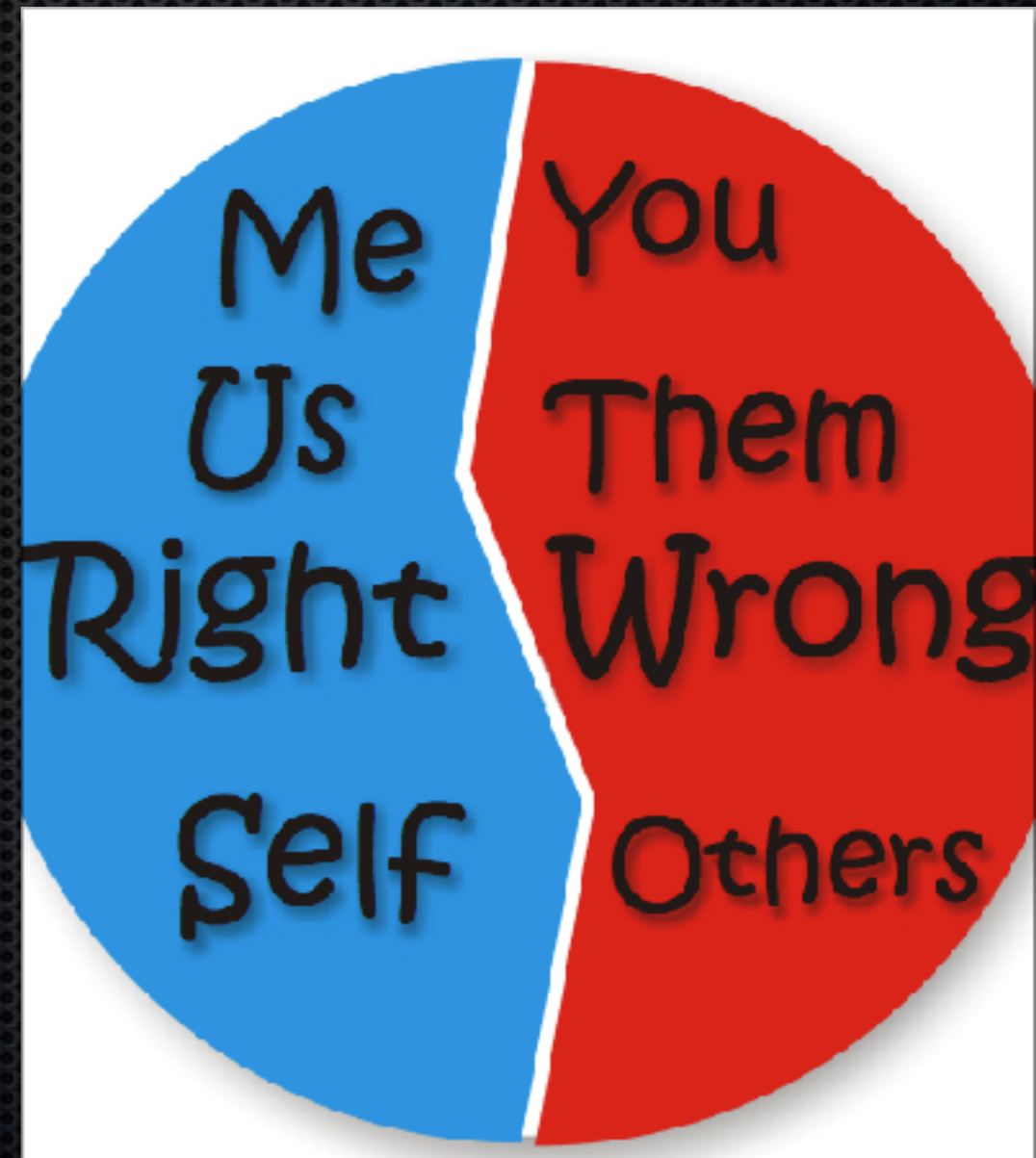of American history." —Eric Foner, New York Times Book Review

P.S.
INSIGHTS

The New Jim Crow

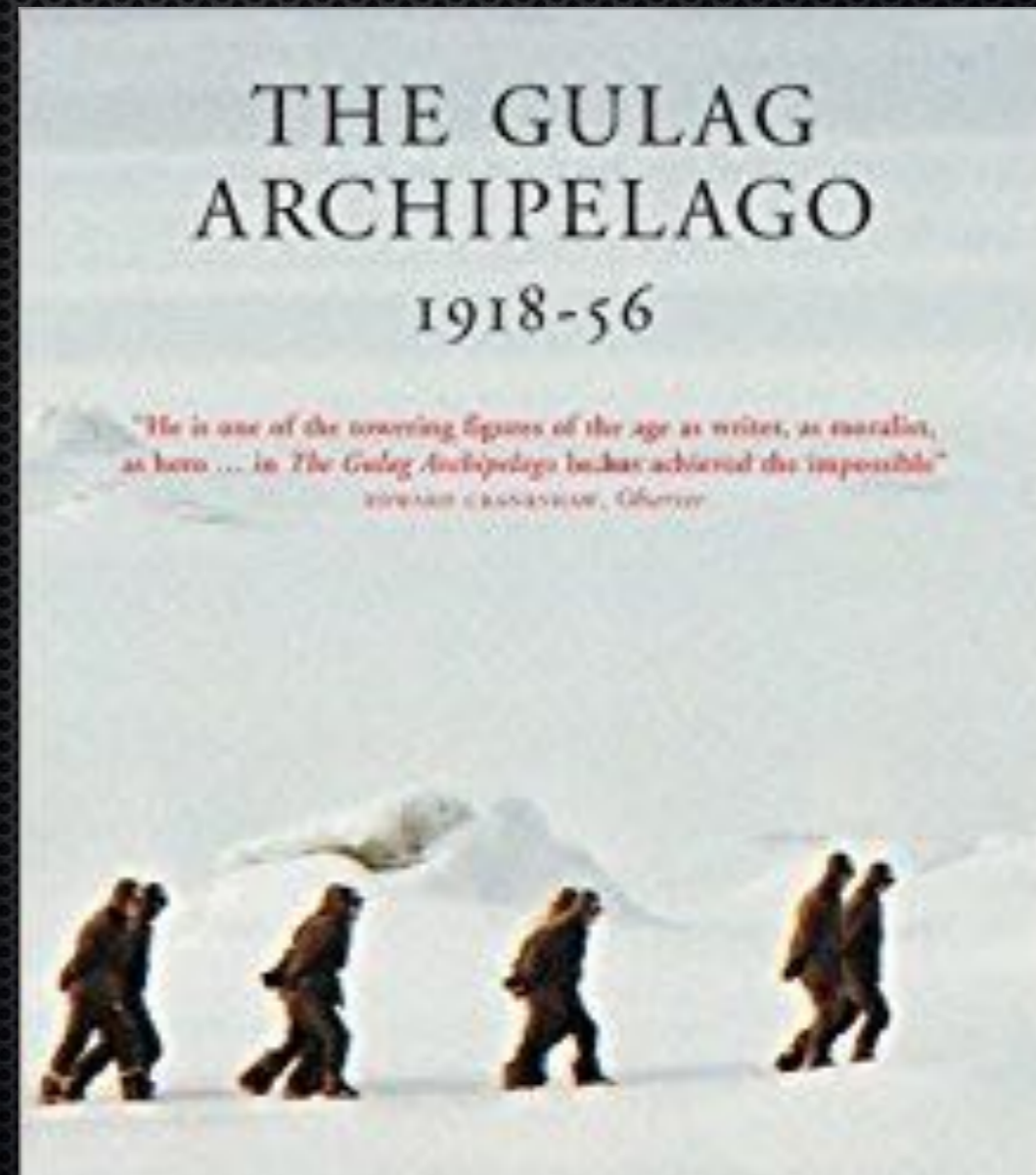Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness

MICHELLE ALEXANDER

- Have you ever felt that you were being regarded as "them," not "us," that you were seen as an outsider, or that you were not accepted for some aspect of your person?
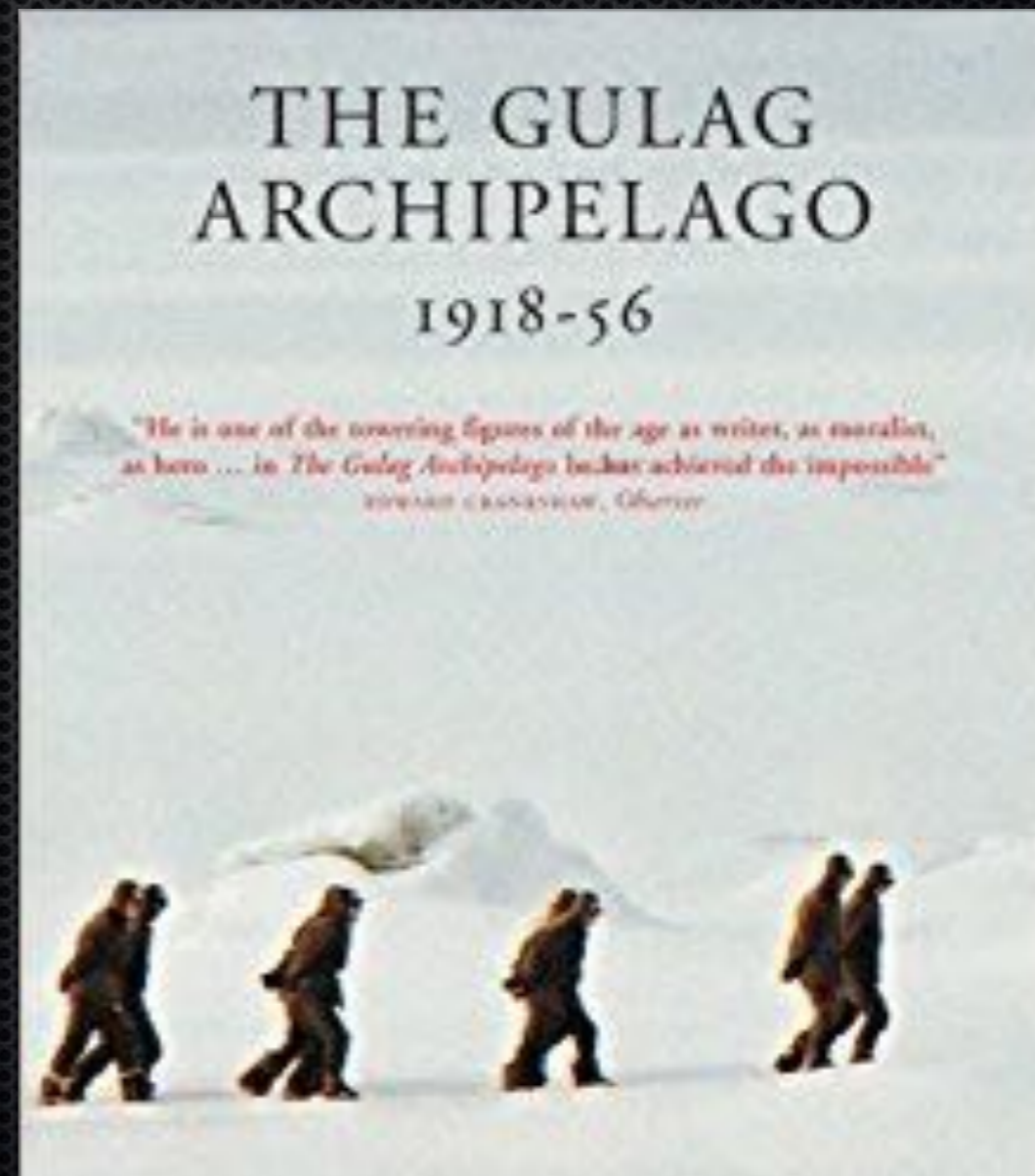
- How did it feel?

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

* "If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them.

* **But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being….**

THE GULAG ARCHIPELAGO
1918-56

"He is one of the towering figures of the age as writer, as moralist, as hero … in *The Gulag Archipelago* he has achieved the impossible"
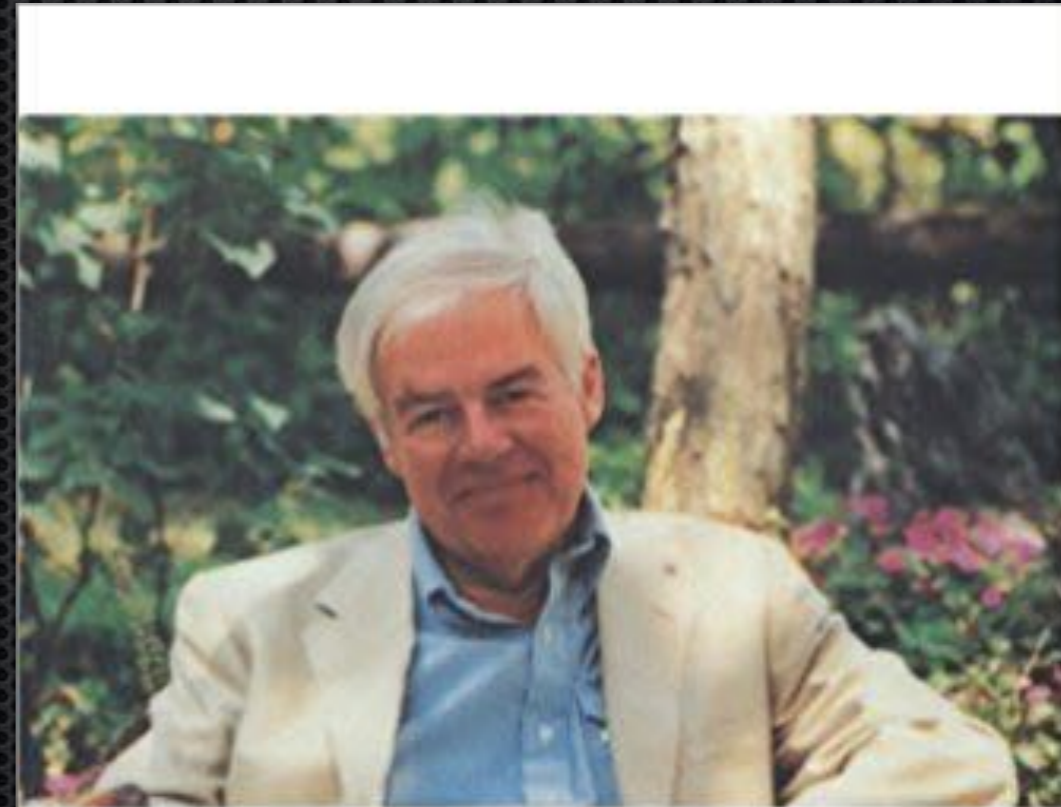EDWARD CRANKSHAW, *Observer*

(1918 - 2008)

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

* During the life of any heart this line keeps changing place;

* sometimes it is squeezed one way by exuberant evil and sometimes it shifts to allow enough space for good to flourish.

* One and the same human being is, at various ages and various circumstances, a totally different human being.

* At times…close to being a devil, at times to sainthood….

* From good to evil is one quaver, says the proverb. And correspondingly, from evil to good."

THE GULAG ARCHIPELAGO
1918-56

"He is one of the towering figures of the age as writer, as moralist, as hero … in *The Gulag Archipelago* he has achieved the impossible"
EDWARD CRANKSHAW, *Observer*

(1918 - 2008)

Richard Rorty

* Evil is a **heavily freighted** word

* Human language is a **social construction**

* Words are **imperfect tools** for communication that have evolved in meaning over time for contingent historical reasons.

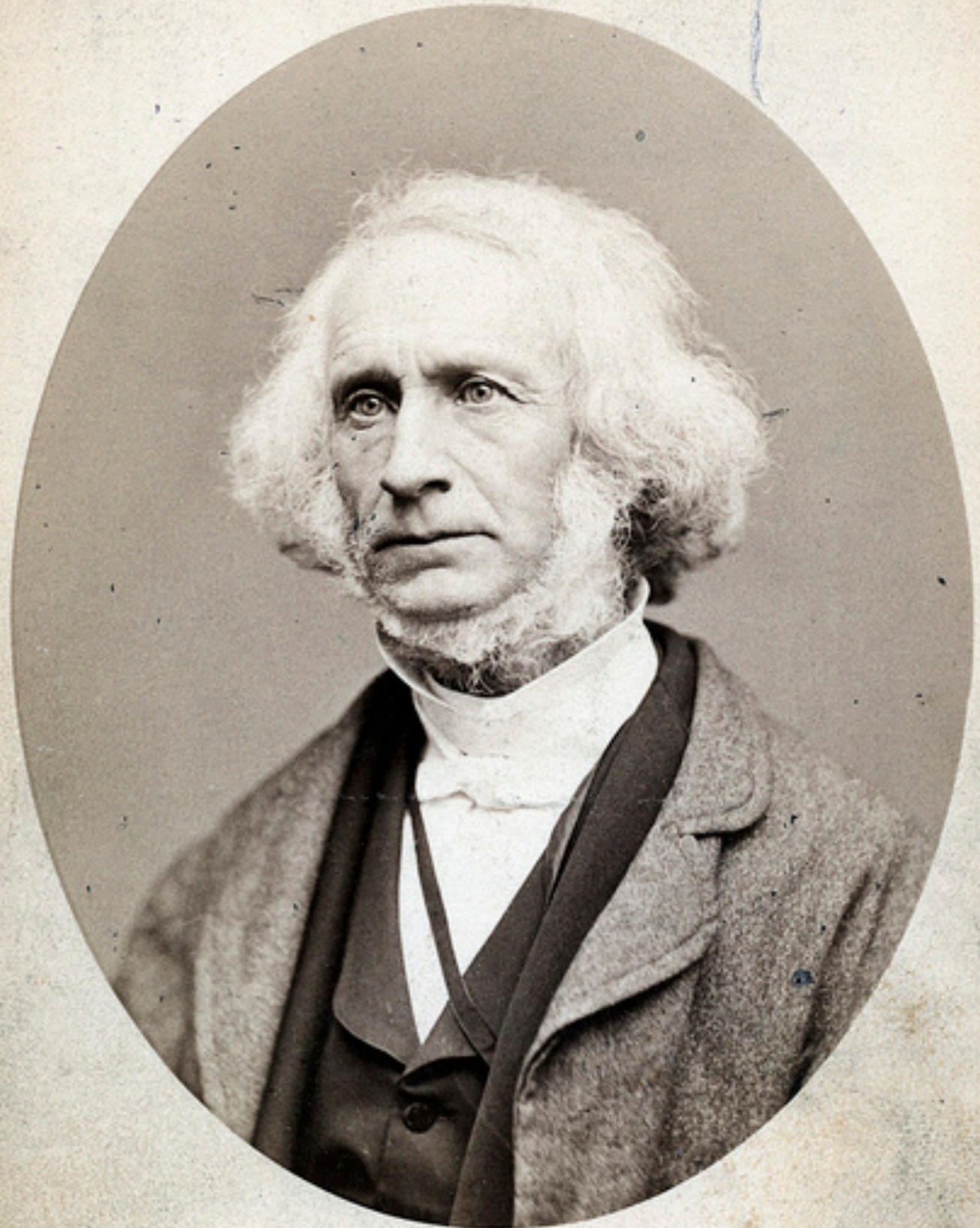*Contingency, irony, and solidarity*

1989

Cyrus Bartol's *Radical Problems* (1872)

"I spell
   my God
      with two o's
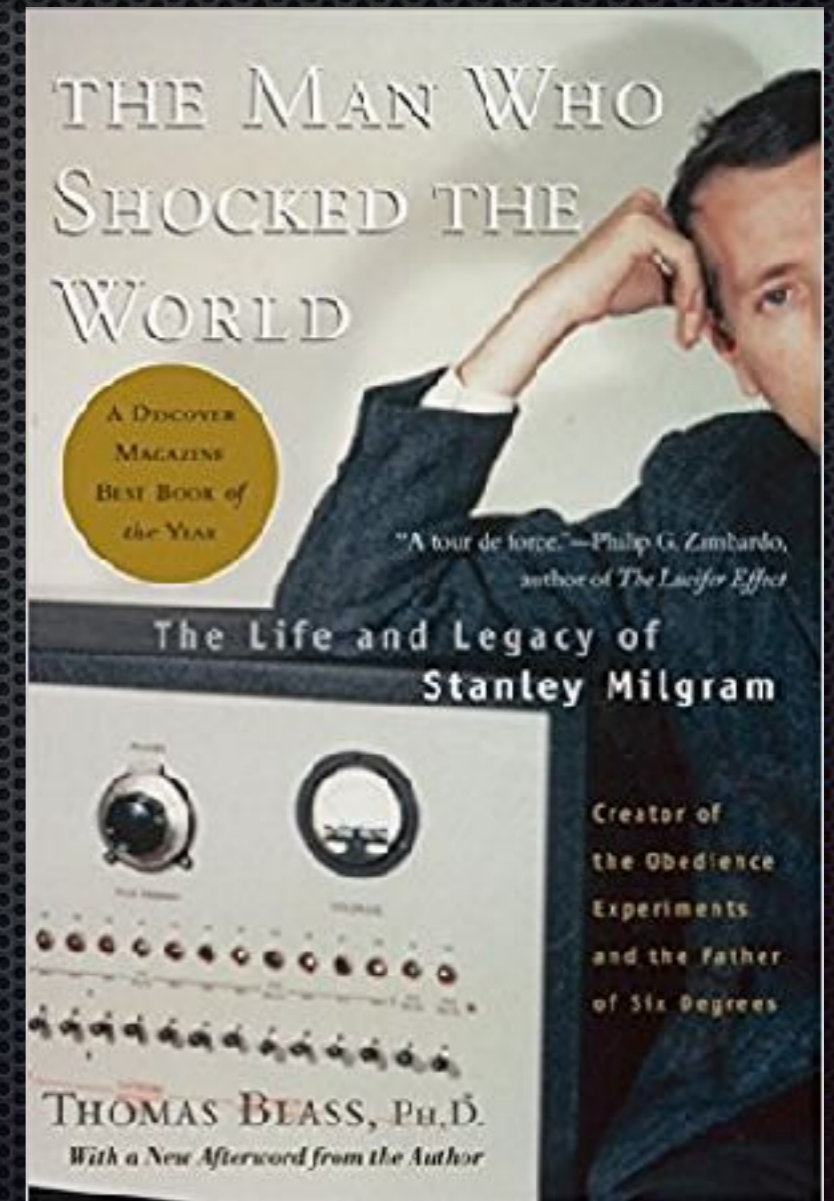and
   my devil
      without a d" (111)

G(o)od

(d)evil

Stanley Milgram's Obedience Experiments

* Son of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe.

* Both of his parents' families arrived in this country well before World War II, but his Jewish heritage contributed to his interest in understanding how human beings could end up participating in genocide.

THE MAN WHO SHOCKED THE WORLD

A DISCOVER MAGAZINE BEST BOOK of the YEAR

"A tour de force."—Philip G. Zimbardo, author of *The Lucifer Effect*

The Life and Legacy of Stanley Milgram

Creator of the Obedience Experiments and the Father of Six Degrees

THOMAS BLASS, Ph.D.

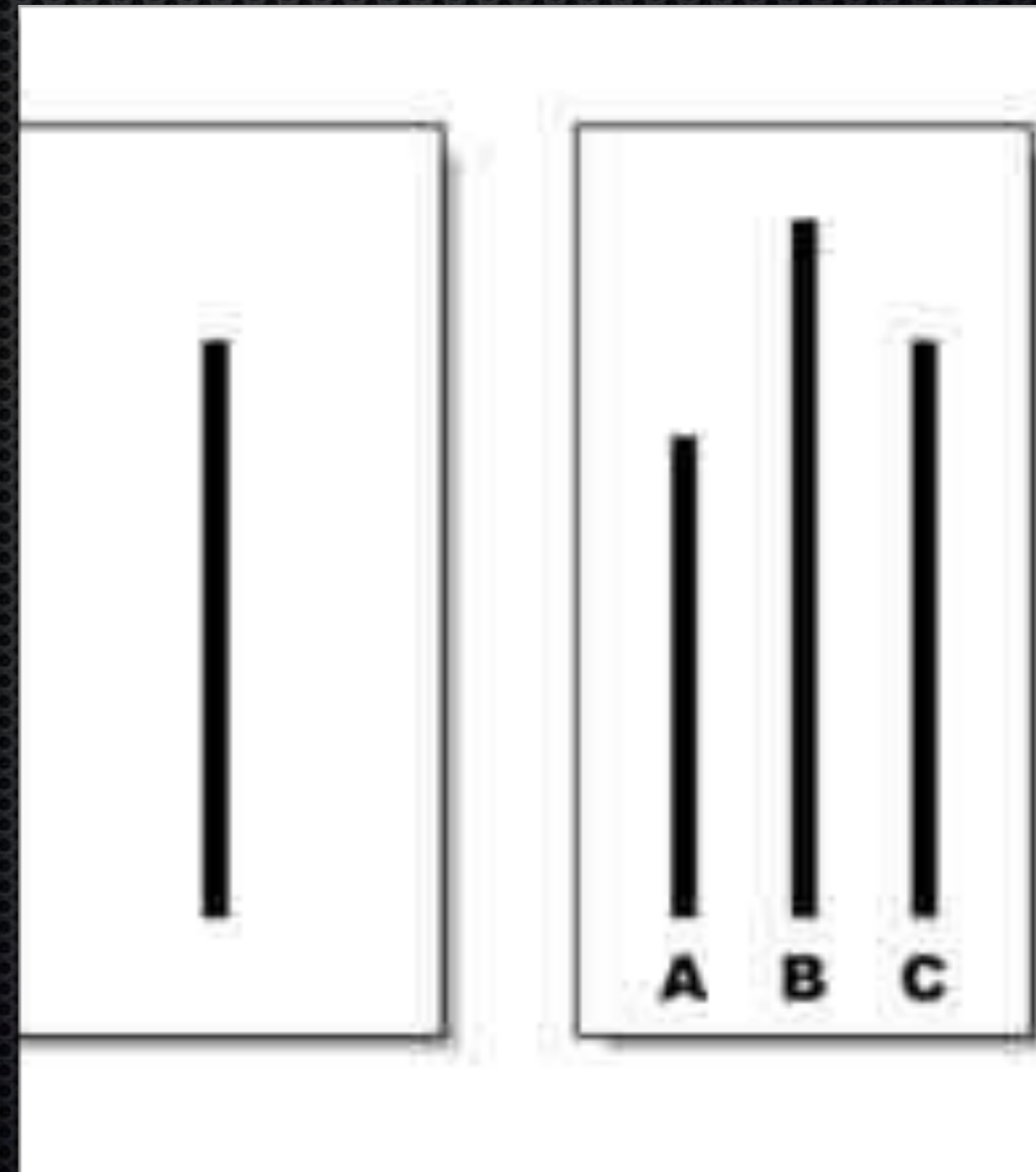With a New Afterword from the Author

(1933 - 1984)

Stanley Milgram's Obedience Experiments

- **Influence**: previous study on independence & conformity by one of his mentors, Solomon Asch.

- Asch's most famous experiment invited a volunteer test subject to sit at a table with 7 other participants.

- **Allegedly**: about perceptual judgement

- **Twist**: other 7 people sitting at the table working with Asch & following a script.

Stanley Milgram's Obedience Experiments

* Asch would stand in front of all 8 participants and hold up different sets of 4 vertical lines.

* Each person, in turn, had to say aloud which of the other 3 vertical lines matched the first line.

* 18 sets of lines in total.

* Initial 7 participants always went first, leaving the real test subject for last.

- <u>First few rounds</u>: seemed absurdly easy.

- <u>But</u> after choosing the correct match the first few times, the 7 participants began to purposefully choose an incorrect line on a predetermined 12 of the 18 trials.

- As person after person would choose the same incorrect line, the real test subject was faced with a growing dilemma:

- Should I trust my own perceptions or go along with what everyone else has said?

- Resisting peer pressure is hard when seven people have each said confidently that an answer—that clearly seems wrong to you—is right.
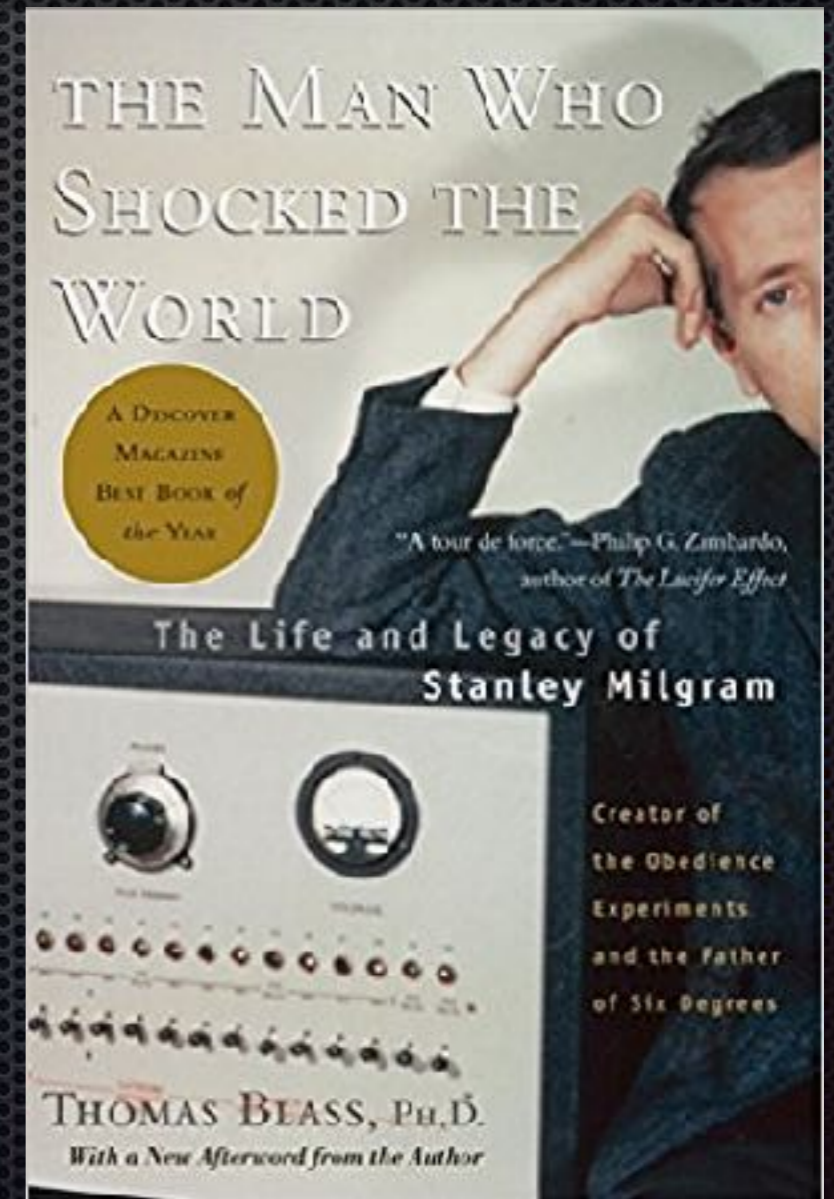
Stanley Milgram's Obedience Experiments

* **"Subjects went along with the bogus majority's answers about a third of the time"**

* ~33% of people would rather conform to a majority *(that they are pretty sure is wrong)*

* rather than risk going out on a limb to support an unpopular position *(that they are pretty sure is actually correct).*
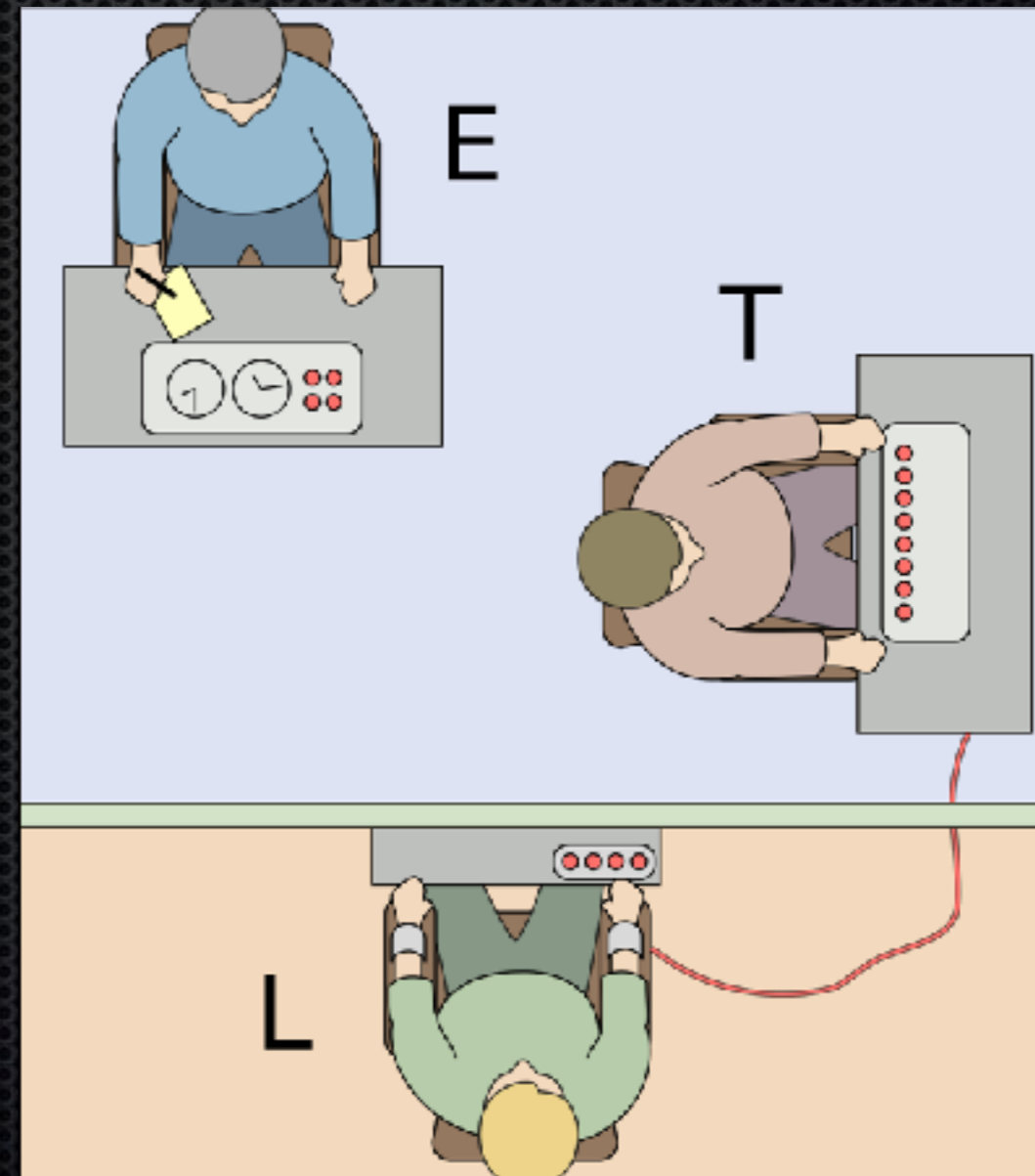
Stanley Milgram's Obedience Experiments

* Milgram's obedience experiments conducted starting in 1961 in New Haven, Connecticut.

* Advertised: study of memory.

* Pay: $4.50, adjusted for inflation, ~**$36**

* Paid at the beginning, and participants assured they could keep money regardless

* Age range of citizens of New Haven who responded: **25-50 years old**

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Stanley Milgram's Obedience Experiments

- Similar to Asch's conformity study, participants in Milgram's Obedience Experiments, led to believe that there were two subjects being studied— when in fact **everyone else was part of the experiment team.**

- Both "participants" were asked to draw a slip of paper to determine their roles in the "memory study."

- Told: one "Teacher" & other "Learner."

- Both said "Teacher"

- Fake participant would pretend slip said, "Learner"

Stanley Milgram's Obedience Experiments

* <u>Teacher</u> led to a box that said "Shock Generator"

* <u>Series of switches</u>: 15- 450 volts in 15-volt increments.

* <u>Additional labels</u> every four switches in a progression that read from left to right, "Slight Shock, Moderate Shock, Strong Shock, Very Strong Shock, Intense Shock, Extreme Intensity Shock, Danger: Severe Shock.

* <u>Last two switches</u>: simply and ominously labeled XXX"

Stanley Milgram's Obedience Experiments

* "Teacher": instructed to administer a series of memory tests through a microphone to the "Learner," who was seated in the next room out of sight behind a closed door.

* Whenever the "Learner" answered incorrectly, the "Teacher" was told to flip the next switch, administering a **15-volt higher shock each time.**

* Not actually shock the person in the next room, but it appeared to through a realistic series of lights, meters, and buzzing sounds on the machine.

Stanley Milgram's Obedience Experiments

* <u>Preplanned script</u> ensured a series of wrong answers.

* "Teacher" was instructed to **continue administering shocks in the face of increasingly pitiful and painful pleas** from the "Learner" that had been prerecorded and set to play on cue from the next room when various voltage switches were pressed.

* "Teacher" also given an actual shock of 45 volts at the beginning as a point of reference. Final shock label was 450 volts, ten times that initial amount.

Stanley Milgram's Obedience Experiments

* "**65%** of subjects continued to obey the experimenter to the end, simply because he commanded them to do so"

* Many **questioned** whether they should continue

* But when **assured by the scientist in the white coat** that it was vital to the experiment to continue, a significant majority **set aside their conscience** & **obeyed to instruction of authority figure.**

Repeated by other scientists

* <u>Consistently show</u>: ordinary individuals can be induced by an authority figure to act destructively, even in the absence of physical coercion,

* Doesn't take evil or aberrant individuals to carry out actions that are immoral and inhumane….

* One might think that when confronted with a moral dilemma we will act as our conscience dictates…

* But in a concrete situation containing powerful social pressures, our moral sense can readily get trampled underfoot.
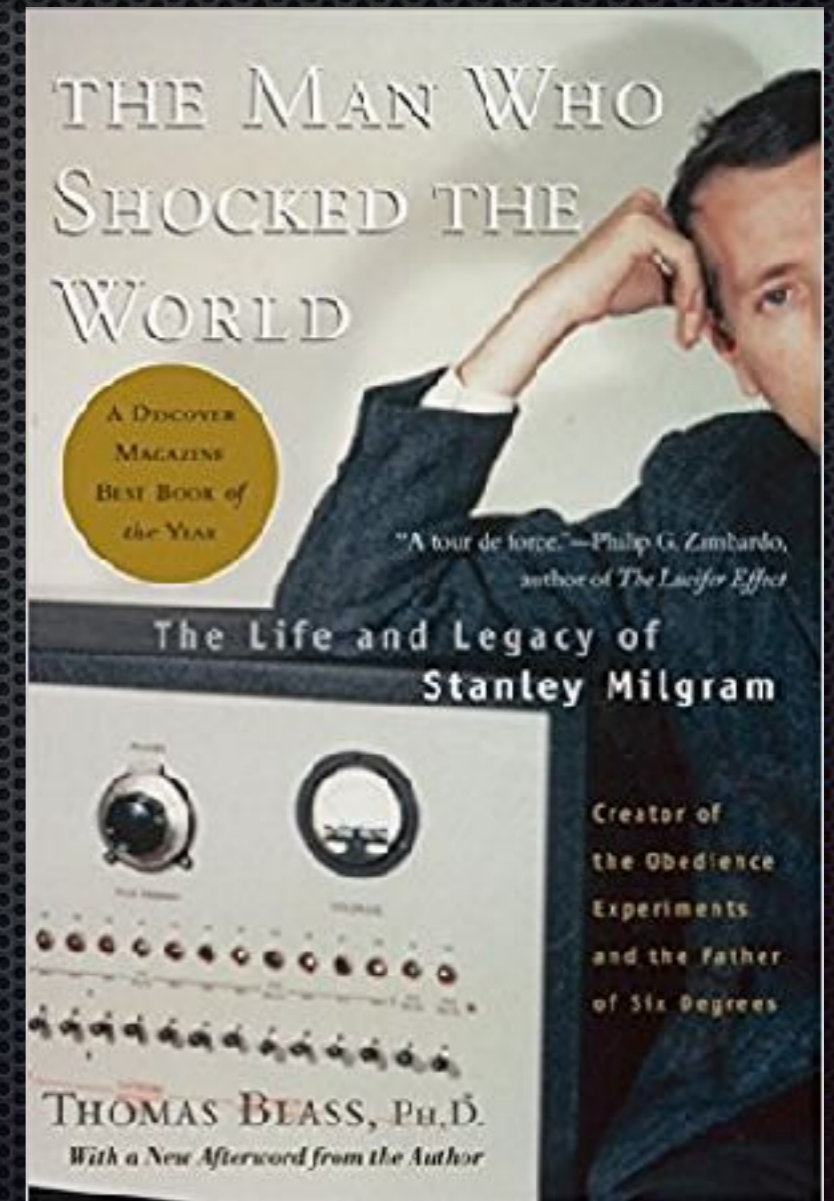
Repeated by other scientists

* Obedience experiments stopped worldwide

* Last ones in India (1983) & Austria (1985)

* <u>Findings parallel to Milgram</u>: ~79% of Milgram's subjects who continued past 150 volts *(first time the lerner complains of a heart condition and begs to be let out)* ended up giving the 450 volt maximum

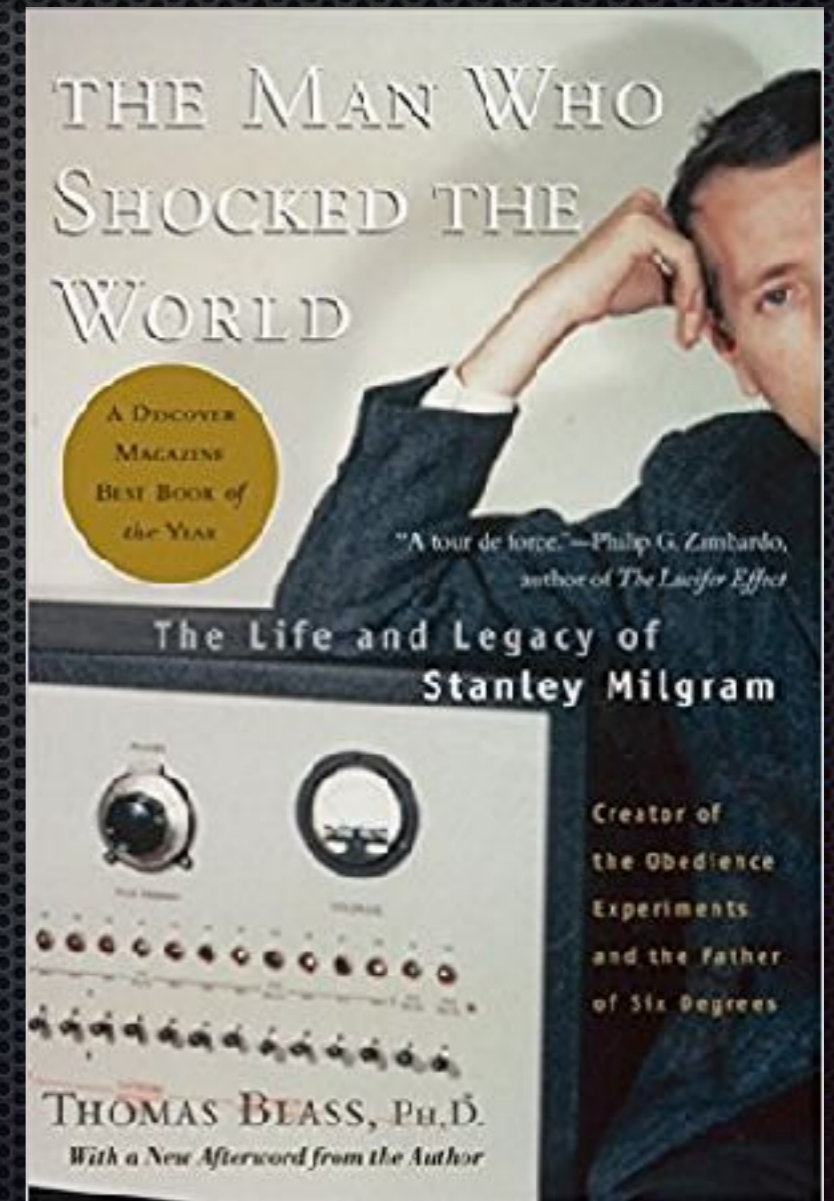* Male & Female participants did *not* differ in levels of obedience

DANGER: SEVERE SHOCK

Stanley Milgram's Obedience Experiments

* <u>Prior to Obedience Experiment:</u> Milgram did *not* think it would be possible—even given the much larger population of U.S.—to find enough "moral imbeciles" to staff the number of death camps built in Germany during the Holocaust.

* <u>After Obedience Experiments</u>: "I am beginning to think the full complement could be recruited in New Haven.

* Substantial proportion of people do what they are told to do, irrespective of the content of the act, and w/o pangs of conscience, so long as they perceive that the command comes from a **legitimate authority**"

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Responses to Milgram

- *(and to My Lai Massacre)*: Military introduce instruct ructions for "how to <u>disobey</u> illegitimate orders"

- Without a well-developed capacity for obedience, society could not function.

- Yet, under the sway of obedient dispositions, morality vanishes.

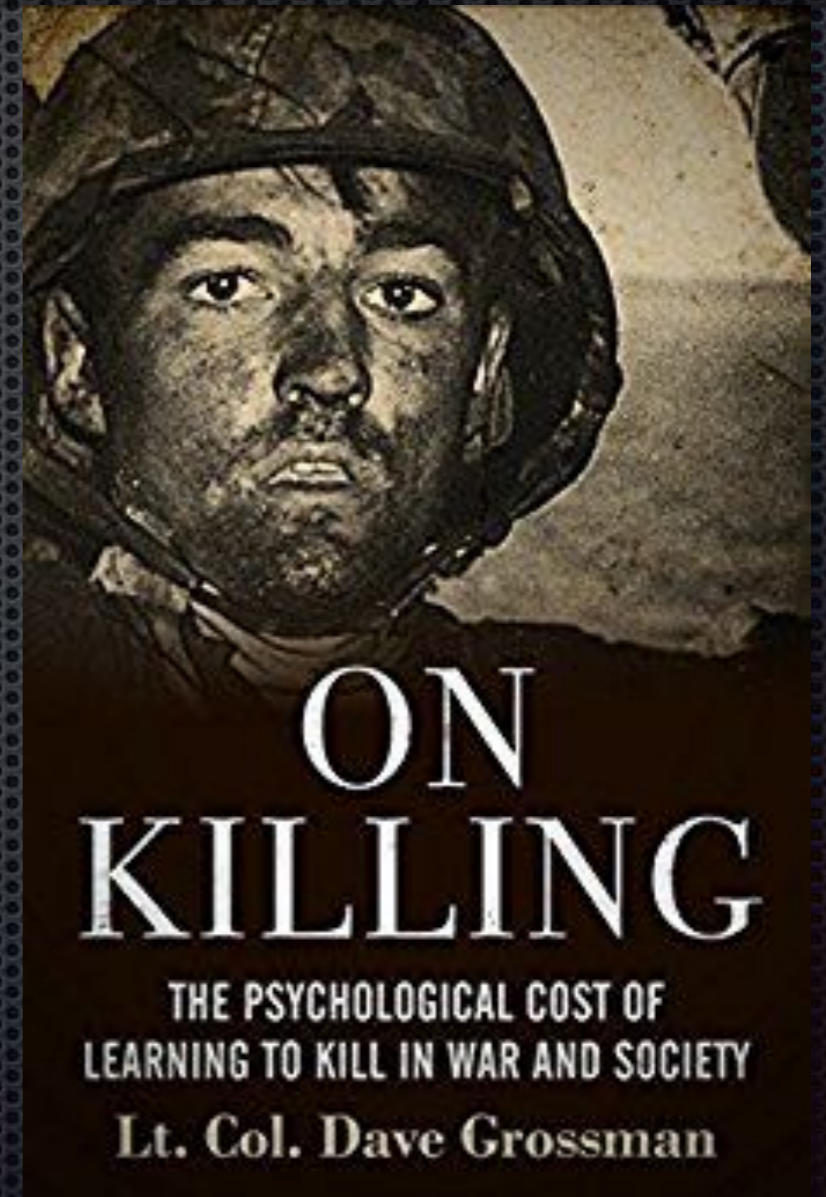ON KILLING

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL COST OF LEARNING TO KILL IN WAR AND SOCIETY

Lt. Col. Dave Grossman

TABLE 7.1   Now That I Have Read the Report, and All Things Considered, . .

	Defiant Subjects, % (n)	Obedient Subjects, % (n)	Total, % (n)
1. I am very glad to have been in the experiment.	40.0% (146)	47.8% (139)	43.5% (285)
2. I am glad to have been in the experiment.	43.8 (160)	35.7 (104)	40.2 (264)
3. I am neither sorry nor glad to have been in the experiment.	15.3 (56)	14.8 (43)	15.1 (99)
4. I am sorry to have been in the experiment.	0.8 (3)	0.7 (2)	0.8 (5)
5. I am very sorry to have been in the experiment.	—	1.0 (3)	0.5 (3)

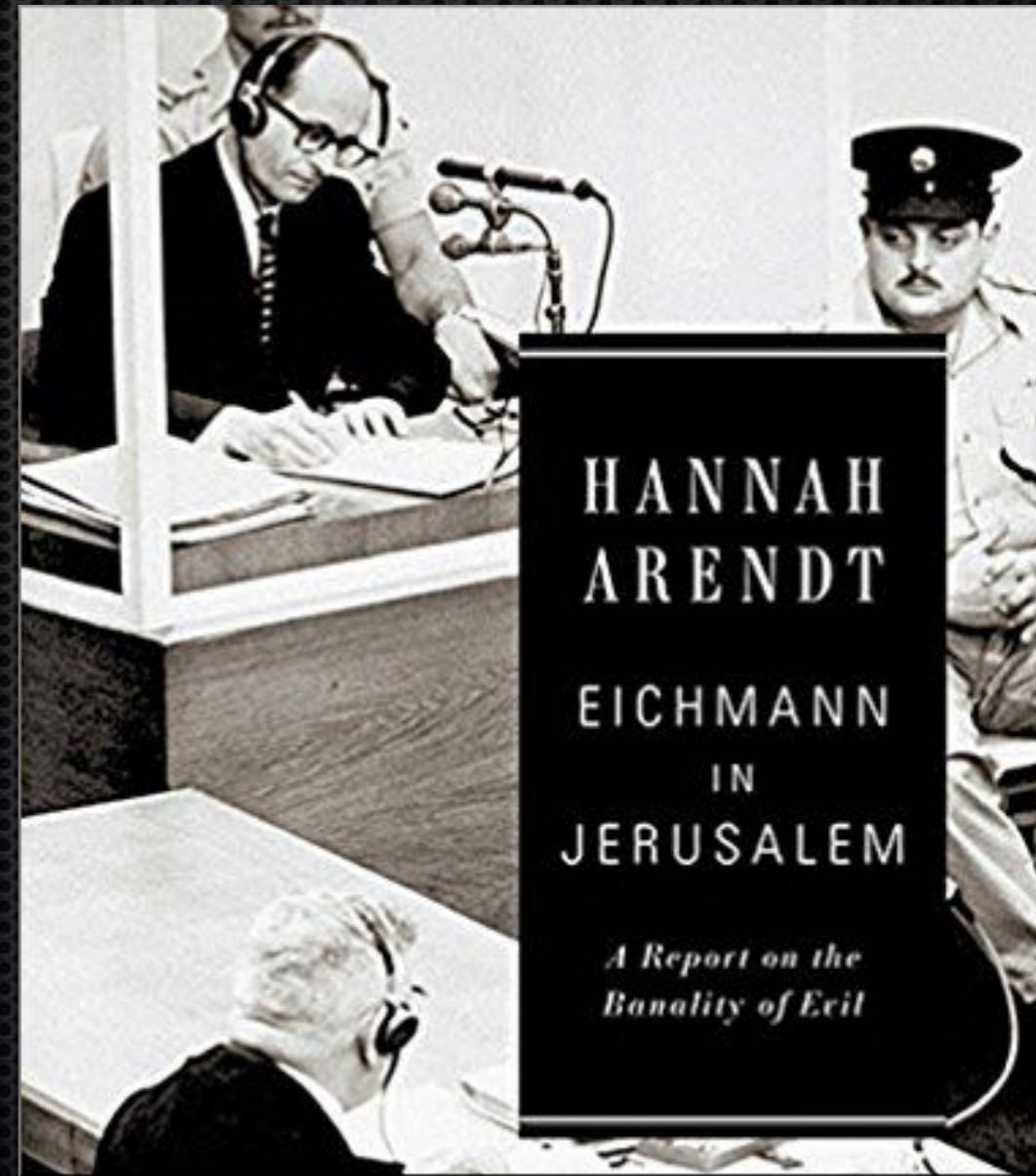**TABLE 7.2** During the Experiment, . . .

	Defiant Subjects, % (n)	Obedient Subjects, % (n)	Total, % (n)
1. I was extremely upset.	8.7% (32)	12.0% (35)	10.2% (67)
2. I was somewhat nervous.	48.8 (179)	51.6 (150)	50.0 (329)
3. I was relatively calm.	38.2 (140)	30.2 (88)	34.7 (228)
4. I was completely calm.	4.4 (16)	6.2 (18)	5.2 (34)

TABLE 7.3 Since the Time I Was in the Experiment, ...

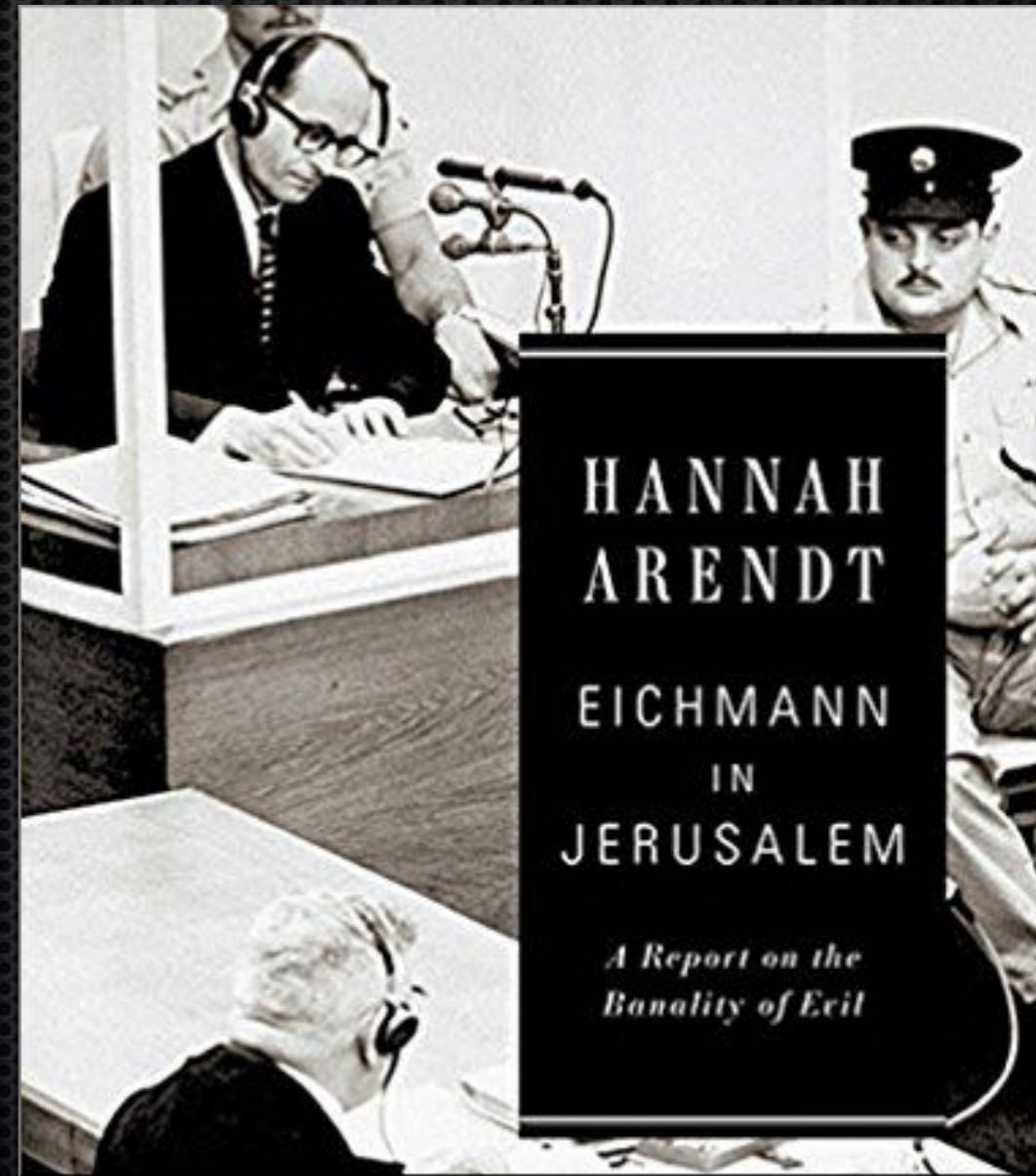|	Defiant Subjects, % (n)	Obedient Subjects, % (n)	Total, % (n)
1. I have been bothered by it quite a bit.	7.7% (28)	6.2% (18)	7.0% (46)
2. It has bothered me a little.	29.6 (107)	28.9 (84)	29.2 (191)
3. It has not bothered me at all.	62.7 (227)	65.0 (189)	63.6 (416)

"Banality of Evil"

* Watching trial of Nazi leader Adolf Eichmann

* became convinced that Eichmann was *not* a uniquely "sadistic monster"

* More disturbing: "uninspired bureaucrat who simply sat at his desk and did his job"

HANNAH ARENDT
EICHMANN IN JERUSALEM
A Report on the Banality of Evil

"Banality of Evil"

- Nazi records *(parallel to the psychological studies of conformity and obedience):* orders given to begin large-scale executions

- At first: ~50% of soldiers would refuse to obey orders at first, and would allow the other half to carry out the heinous acts.

- Over time: increasing numbers would participate, moving up toward 90%

HANNAH ARENDT

EICHMANN IN JERUSALEM

A Report on the Banality of Evil

Evaporation of Individual Responsibility in Hierarchical Organizations

* **Automaker employees**: willingness to follow bosses' directives to produce unsafe cars

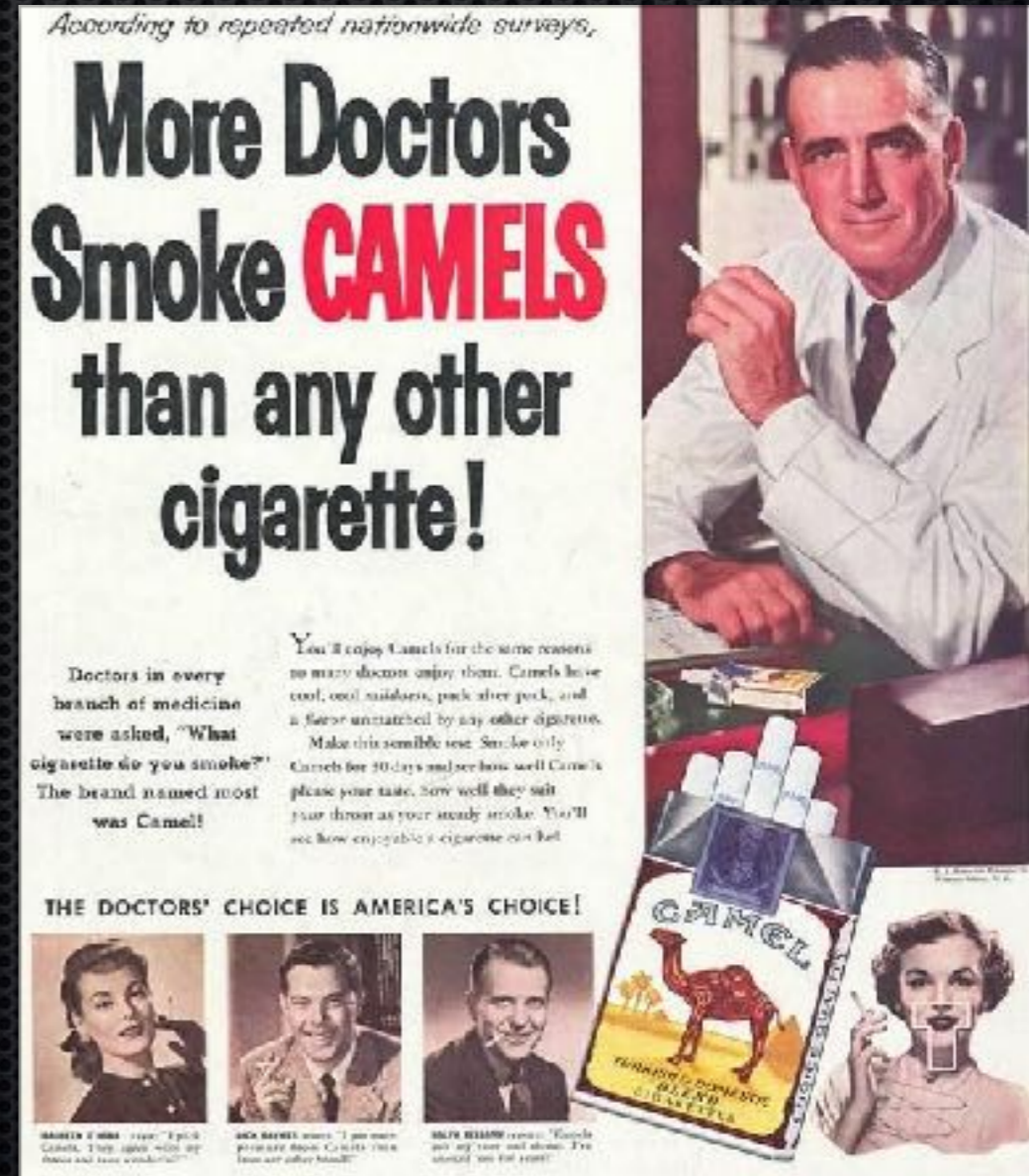* **Tobacco employees**: acquiescence to policies designed to deceive the public

- Prank caller poses as a police officer, convincing manager of a fast food restaurant to carry out intrusive and unlawful procedures on an employee.

- Based on strip search phone call scam that extended over 10 years before an arrest was made in 2004.

- Man would prank calling a restaurant or grocery store, claiming to be a police officer, then convince managers to conduct strip searches of female employees, and perform other bizarre acts on behalf of "the police".

INSPIRED BY TRUE EVENTS

"SUPERB - A MUST-SEE RIVETING, UNFORGETTABLE VIEWING"

"SHATTERING A FASCINATING FILM."

"TAUT, GRIPPING THIS IS INTELLIGENT FILMMAKING"

"CHILLINGLY BRILLIANT"

"BRILLIANT ONE OF THE MOST AUDACIOUS MOVIES OF 2012"

"SIGNIFICANT CEMENTS CRAIG ZOBEL'S PLACE AS A SERIOUS FILMMAKER WITH AN IMPORTANT VOICE."

COMPLIANCE

"DEEPLY, VISCERALLY UNNERVING THE CAST HERE IS SO TERRIFIC"

"GRADE A UTTERLY CAPTIVATING."

2012

Compliance

* Calls were most often placed to fast-food restaurants in small towns, located in rural areas of the United States.

* Over 70 such occurrences were reported in 30 U.S. states, until an incident in 2004 in Mount Washington, Kentucky (population 9,117), finally led to the arrest of David Richard Stewart, an employee of Corrections Corporation of America, a firm contracted by several states to provide corrections officers at private detention facilities.

* On October 31, 2006, Stewart was acquitted of all charges in the Mount Washington case. He was suspected of, but never charged with, having made other, similar scam calls.

Compliance

* Caller had an authoritarian speaking style, peppered with police lingo

* No stolen property was ever found

* Case at a McDonald's in Kentucky was captured by a surveillance camera: four-hour ordeal

* Milgram would not have been surprised.

Social Psychology

- Behavior is believable

- "Only in action can you fully realize the forces operative in social behavior. That is why I am an experimentalist." -Milgram

"Monster" vs. "Monstrous Act"

Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done.
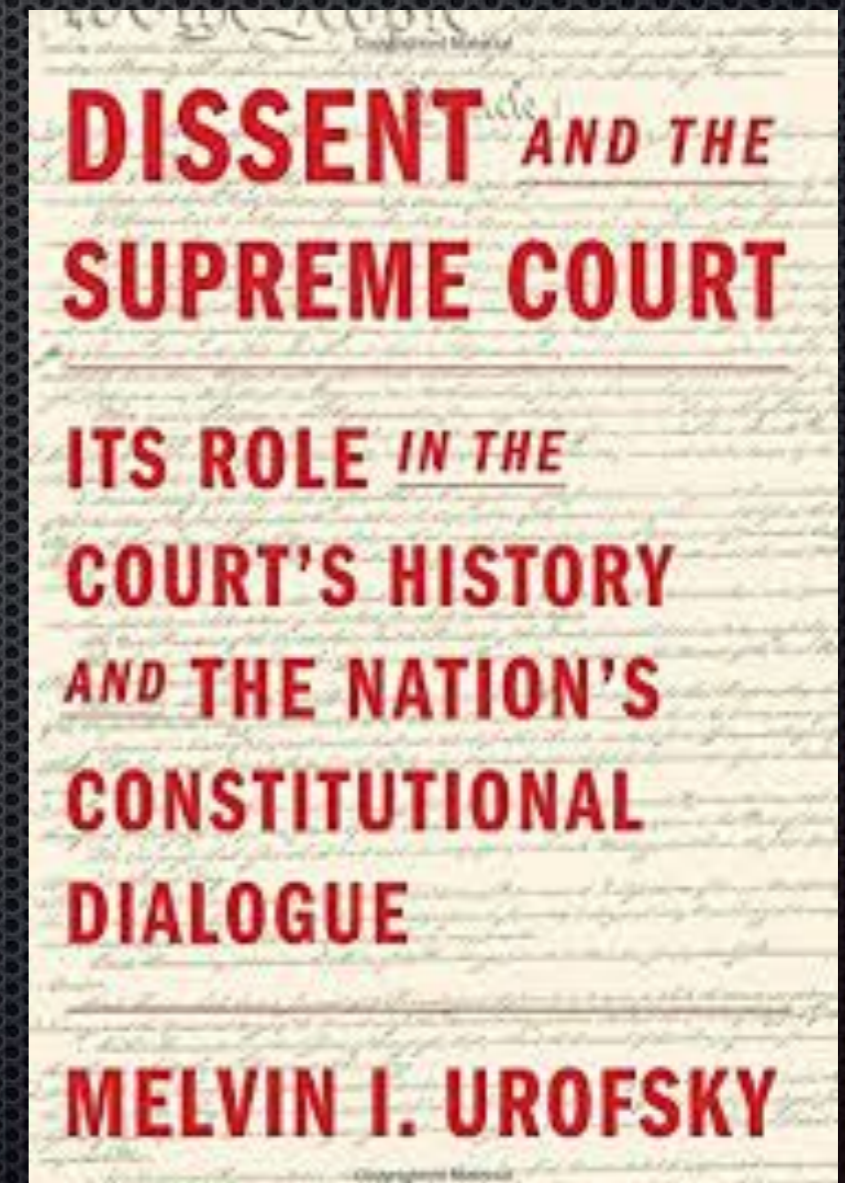
— Bryan Stevenson —

AZ QUOTES

Just Mercy

More **Hopeful** Perspective

* One dissenter can inspire a cascade of rebellion against an unjust authority.

* But you **need that crucial first person** with the bravery to protest

* As well as the **essential second and third person (and more!) to step up in solidarity** in order to create a potential domino effect.

More **Hopeful** Perspective

* Milgram variation: 3 "Teachers"
  (2 were actors)

* When fake Teachers defied the experimenters and refused to continue ("one at 150 volts, the other at 210 volts): **90% of the naive subjects followed their example** and dropped out at some point *before reaching 450 volts*

* No other variation Milgram conducted was as effective in undercutting the power of authority" as **someone modeling dissent**

DISSENT AND THE SUPREME COURT

ITS ROLE IN THE COURT'S HISTORY AND THE NATION'S CONSTITUTIONAL DIALOGUE

MELVIN I. UROFSKY

* <u>First Follower</u> transforms "lone nut" into a ***leader***.

3 min

* <u>Second Follower</u> transforms two lone nuts into a ***crowd*** — and a crowd is news.

* <u>Momentum</u>: as an increasing numbers of people come forward, there is **increasingly less risk of standing out or being ridiculed**.

* <u>Tipping Point</u>: certain point, **if you don't hurry, you miss out on being be part of "in crowd"** up there dancing first.

* <u>Too long</u>: made fun for not stepping up and dancing.

21st-century, postmodern perspective

- What is evil?

- What is/are the *source(s)* of evil? (Why does evil exists in history? Why does evil exists in the human heart?)

- What is/are the *nature(s)* of evil? (*How* is evil at work?)

- How we might best respond individually & collectively?

Discussion Questions

* Do you use the word evil?

    * Are you *comfortable* using the word "evil?" Why or why not?)

    * Should I/you/we/they be using the word evil more or less in such a time as this?

* Do you have a felt sense of what you mean when you regard something as "evil?"

    * Can you describe what it is that makes something "evil?"

Personal Definitions of Evil

- Review all the slides from this class.

- Reflect on the sharing, discussions and what has resonated with you most personally—positively or negatively.

- Consider any moments of insight, when you were suddenly seeing something differently or perhaps from a different angle.

- Spend a few minutes journaling these recollections.

Commitments

- As individuals, we cannot rid the world of evil.

- But evil can be fed by individual actions or systemic realities.

- What commitment(s) do you feel led to make to feed evil less?

- What single, achievable goal might you set?

Outline