

Transcript

Matthew Grizzard:

When we meet somebody, you know, a lot of research in psychology says that we kind of ask two questions. One is: Can this person do me harm? And: Does this person desire to do me harm, essentially? And so, that desire to do harm is kind of a basis for a lot of moral judgments, right?

Is this person capable of hurting me: yes or no? That predisposes me to like or dislike them. But those moral judgments are creeping in everywhere. I mean, I think if you were to ask OSU fans, right, like: Who has the most immoral football team? They're going to immediately say Michigan, right? And they're going to have all sorts of reasons to point to it.

But if you were to ask, you know, Michigan: Who is the most immoral? They're going to say OSU, probably. If you were to ask UNC, they're going to say Duke. If you were to ask Duke, they're going to say UNC. And so this morality element is something that I think we're just doing all the time. We can't turn it off, essentially.

A lot of times, we need to pay attention to the people that are immoral more than we need to pay attention to the people that are moral. If I see two characters in a story, I might be drawn to pay attention more to the immoral villain in the story, simply because I'm kind of biased to look out for them. Like, what could they do to me? What could they do to this other character? And things like that.

I mean, a lot of the people that we have experiences with, we know personally. But there's also this whole realm of people that we have experiences with in the modern world that we don't know personally—that they're mediated some way through narratives. This could be politicians, you know, celebrities, sports athletes, all sorts of individuals.

And so, we think of those individuals—we've got some more recent research showing that when we are evaluating people in our everyday lives, we are kind of evaluating them slightly differently than we would a character in a story.

But when we evaluate a politician, for example, somebody that we don't have interpersonal direct connections with, we tend to be evaluating them much more as a character in a story. So they are, for all intents and purposes—even though they're a real person—in our mind, they're a character. They're fulfilling some kind of role.