

# THE FRAMING AND PRODUCTION OF VILLAINS IN A CAPITALIST SOCIETY



Authors: Rifal Imam

Affiliations: New York University Abu Dhabi class of 2023

Major/ Field of Study: Social Research & Public Policy;  
Literature & Creative Writing

## INTRODUCTION

Jens Kjeldgaard-Christiansen's "Evil Origins: A Darwinian Genealogy of the Pop cultural Villain" explores the role of evolutionary and social psychology in the manufacturing of the pop-cultural villain. I disagree with the notion of human's inherent selfishness. That is a Western thought process that has no place in a collective society. The thought of an individual having an inherent me-first (or individualistic) mindset is rooted in the west's ideal economic system, capitalism, a system that not only is informed and backed up by theories of inherent selfishness but reproduces the same figure, which is what we'll explore today, basically how this creates a framework for how modern villains in western society are produced

## OBJECTIVE

Is the human being innately selfish? What does it mean for something to be innate? Do all human beings share the same innate motivations? What makes a villain a villain, and who decides? Is selfishness equitable with evil?

## METHODOLOGY

I explore the influence of capitalism in creating a framework for how modern villains in western society are produced through a sequential analysis of multidisciplinary theories to analyze their application on capitalism and its consequential effects on society's understanding of the human. Moreover, I analyze the emergent framework produced and its application in art.

## RESULTS

Capitalism has functioned as more than just an economic system in the modern Western world, spreading its influence into disciplines such as psychology, biology, politics, and most significantly art, or literature in particular. Authors, representative of the common citizen, recreate the framed "evil" and "good" into narratives through the creation of a character. In the Western capitalist society, the evil character is an exaggerated primal selfish figure whilst the hero is the unattainable truly altruistic character.

## ANALYSIS

Through a critical multidisciplinary analysis of Capitalism in relation to psychology, biology, and literature we see a significant influence in the art emergent in such a society. All art embodies an implicit theory of personality and human nature. When we live in a capitalist society we internalize the idea that humans are innately selfish because that is what is produced and highlighted by capitalism, that is how capitalism functions; we internalize selfishness as innate, as this "evil" not only because of how it subjugates the majority of people but as we strive to repress our innate negative traits as much as we can as we psychologically cannot be purely altruistic.



## CONCLUSION

Approaching characters through a different lens illustrates that the idea of evil may not be as universal as western theory likes to promote and is, instead, a build-up of interdisciplinary theories.

To reiterate, what makes a villain and who decides? Before naming a character a villain, let's rethink how our society paints them as a villain and what that says about our larger society as a whole? Is it bad to be selfish?

### Related literature

- [1] Kjeldgaard-Christiansen, J. (2016). Evil origins: A Darwinian genealogy of the popcultural villain. *Evolutionary Behavioral Sciences*, 10(2), 109–122. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ebc0000057>
- [2] Tibor R. Machan (1974) Selfishness and capitalism, *Inquiry*, 17:1-4, 338-344, DOI: 10.1080/00201747408601731
- [3] Greenblatt, Stephen, 1943-. *Learning To Curse : Essays in Early Modern Culture*. New York ; London :Routledge, 1990.
- [4] Johnson, John A., et al. "Portrayal of Personality in Victorian Novels Reflects Modern Research Findings but Amplifies the Significance of Agreeableness." *Journal of Research in Personality*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2011, pp. 50–58., doi:10.1016/j.jrp.2010.11.011.

