

Gresham Lectures 2017-18
Divinity Lecture 4

If Humans Are So Great, Why is the World Such a Mess?

Alister McGrath
Gresham Professor of Divinity

William Hazlitt (1778-1830)



William Hazlitt (1778-1830)

“Man is the only animal that laughs and weeps; for he is the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are and what they ought to be.”

In a letter of 1887, Lord Acton observed that “power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

From this, he drew the conclusion that “great men are almost always bad men”.

Abraham Lincoln

“If you want to test a man’s character, give him power.”

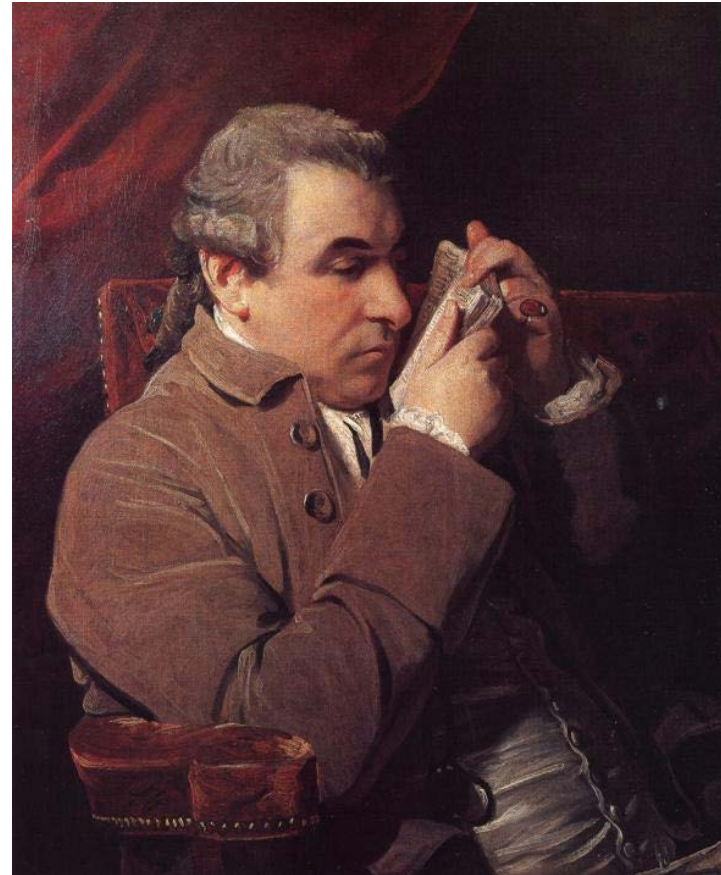


Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

“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. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?”

Giuseppe Baretta

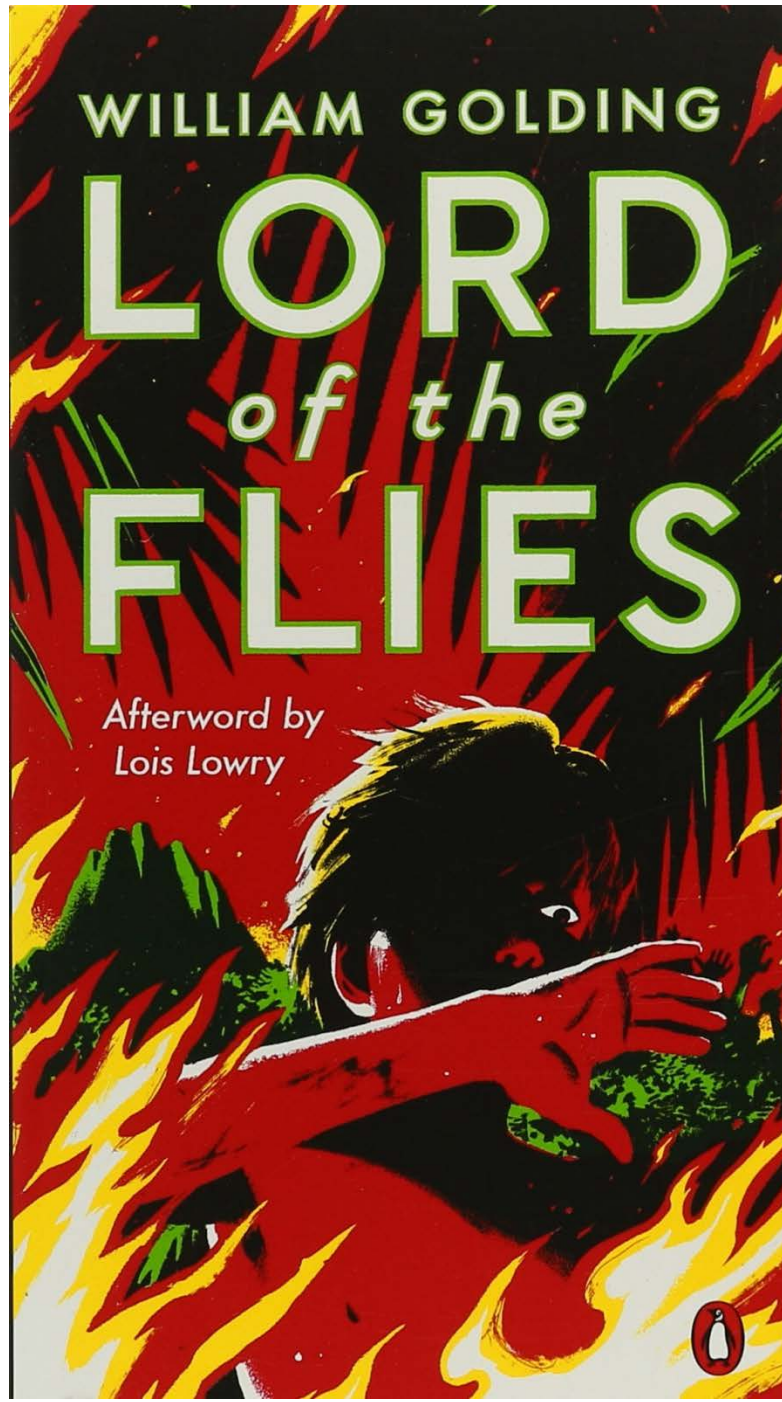
“I hate mankind, for I think myself one of the best of them, and I know how bad I am.”



WILLIAM GOLDING

LORD
of the
FLIES

Afterword by
Lois Lowry



Giovanni Pico della Mirandola

Oration on the Dignity of Humanity (1486)

We have given you, Adam, neither a fixed dwelling place, nor a form that is yours alone, nor any function that is peculiar to you alone. This is so that you may have and possess whatever dwelling place, form, and functions that you yourself may desire, according to your longing and judgment. . . .

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola

Oration on the Dignity of Humanity (1486)

“ The nature of all other beings is limited and constrained within the bounds of laws prescribed by us. You are constrained by no limits, and shall determine the limits of your nature for yourself, in accordance with your own free will, in whose hand we have placed you.”

Iris Murdoch

“By opening our eyes, we do not necessarily see what confronts us. . . . Our minds are continually active, fabricating an anxious, usually self-preoccupied, often falsifying veil which partially conceals the world.”

Bertrand Russell

“Man is a rational animal – so at least I have been told. Throughout a long life, I have looked diligently for evidence in favour of this statement, but so far I have not had the good fortune to come across it.”

St Paul

“I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” (Romans 7:18-19).

Ovid

Video meliora proboque deteriora sequor (“I see and approve of the better, but I follow the worse”).

Metamorphoses VII. 20–21

J. R. R. Tolkien

I will not walk with your progressive ages,
Erect and sapient. Before them gapes
the dark abyss to which their progress tends.

End