

ASG Blood

GOOD AND EVIL

Blood is an essential part of human life, so fundamental that it has been equated with life itself. However, blood has a complex and contradictory cultural value. While mostly associated with positive values as a symbol of life and of strong bonds between human beings, it has also been linked to evil and danger. For example, blood frequently represents crime, war, and danger in art, literature and film. In many religions it may symbolize impurity, and within both medicine and society it may be regarded as a carrier of dangerous disease. Blood donors are often urgently needed for lifesaving medical interventions – but certain donors' blood is considered dangerous and is not accepted for donation. Furthermore, blood in itself may contain medical features and elements that for some people and under certain conditions may cause serious bodily harm. Thus, the meanings and uses of blood are neither self-evident, nor stable across, or within, different cultural and historical locations.

Blood is the subject of scientific research in a great variety of disciplines: medicine, physiology, art, sociology, history, social anthropology, religion, media studies, just to name a few. Blood also has the propensity to travel between different scholarly domains; thus it requires a broad scope to be properly analyzed and understood. Traditionally, however, there is little, or no, interdisciplinary interaction between scholars from different backgrounds – particularly not between the so-called hard and soft sciences – analyzing the good and evil aspects of blood, its cultural, social, and medical value in society.

It is the purpose of the Advanced Study Group "Blood – Good and Evil", to create a forum for such a multi- and cross-disciplinary interaction and analysis. We bring together scholars from within social sciences and humanities with natural science and medical researchers to scrutinize myths and metaphors, practices and politics of blood – in science, in medicine, in society and culture. This will allow for a deeper understanding of blood. It will be seen not only from a medical or a cultural standpoint, but from an intersection of perspectives. Areas to be discussed are the meaning and usages of blood within media and popular culture, in politics, science, and the medical system. In this way, we expect new insights to be gained concerning lay and expert considerations of blood and kinship, about the gift of blood and of various illnesses linked to blood deficiency or contamination.