Ordinary Vices (Belknap Press) by Judith N. Shklar

A Serious Look At What Vices Are Worst.

The seven deadly sins of Christianity represent the abysses of character, whereas Shklars ordinary vices--cruelty, hypocrisy, snobbery, betrayal, and misanthropy--are merely treacherous shoals, flaving our characters with mean-spiritedness and inhumanity.

Shklar draws from a brilliant array of writers--Moliere and Dickens on hypocrisy, Jane Austen on snobbery, Shakespeare and Montesquieu on misanthropy, Hawthorne and Nietzsche on cruelty, Conrad and Faulkner on betrayal--to reveal the nature and effects of the vices. She examines their destructive effects, the ambiguities of the moral problems they pose to the liberal ethos, and their implications for government and citizens: liberalism is a difficult and challenging doctrine that demands a tolerance of contradiction, complexity, and the risks of freedom.

My Personal Review:
This marvelous book takes after Montaigne and asks what vices should we avoid. She points out that if you hate all vice, you hate mankind - a vice in itself. One must then, she argues, choose which of the ordinary everyday vices are really the worst. She nominates cruelty as the vice to best avoid, but points out that this is not the same as avoiding hypocrisy as the worst, and that working hardest at avoiding the sin of pride - which basically is the scorn of God - also will produce different priorities and results.

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