

Does Believing in Evil Make Us More Violent and Less Tolerant?

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New York Magazine:

Two weeks ago, many people will tell you, we saw the face of evil. Well, not its face, exactly, since James Foley's killer wore a black mask as he horrifically beheaded the missing journalist who was kidnapped in Syria in 2012. But the sheer brutality, the sheer inhumanity displayed toward an innocent human being was, in the eyes of much of the world, simply evil incarnate.

Since the video was released, there's been a hardening in public opinion about the Islamic State, the group which murdered Foley and has seized shocking amounts of territory in Syria and Iraq. It was generally understood that this is a ruthless organization, but since the release of the video, the rhetorical stakes have been heightened: Now almost everyone agrees this isn't just a dangerous group, but an evil one.

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But what does it mean to believe in evil? How do our attitudes about its existence shape our worldviews? While researchers stampeded over one another to understand evil behavior in the wake of the 20th century's seemingly endless bloodletting — a procession of intellectuals led by Hannah Arendt, Stanley Milgram, and Philip Zimbardo helped to illuminate humanity's darkest corridors — much less research has been done into how the idea of evil itself colors our understanding of the world and its inhabitants.

Read the whole story: [New York Magazine](#)