

Mass shootings are on the rise. According to a recent investigation by [Mother Jones](#)¹, there have been 102 mass shootings since 1980, and 79 of them have occurred in the past twenty years. All, or at least most, of us want to solve the problem of mass shootings, but discussions about what to do have become ineffective. In this essay, I am going to focus on how I believe our political representatives are discussing mass shootings.

In response to the Las Vegas shooting, President Trump said, “[i]t was an act of pure evil.”² At a vigil in the days following the Sandy Hook school shooting, President Obama remarked, “No single law — no set of laws can eliminate evil from the world, or prevent every senseless act of violence.”³ So, our current president, and his immediate predecessor, believe mass shootings to be evil. While this line of thought is understandable, I believe the way our representatives conceptualize evil is blocking their attempts to find workable solutions. I believe our representatives, when talking about a mass shooting, are conceptualizing evil as what English philosopher Mary Midgley called a “Beast Within.”

EVIL AS A BEAST WITHIN

That our political representatives conceptualize evil as a “Beast Within” is unsurprising when we track human thought development in the West. The concept of evil that is consistently relied upon is that of some unintelligible and uncontrollable force that consumes a person and makes them act irrationally. Labelling a mass shooter as *evil* is suggesting that when the shooter was engaged in the action of killing a bunch of people, the shooter was being

Where Plato conceptualized human reasoning as normal, Aristotle conceptualized human reasoning as good, or the method to attain the good. Aristotle "in the *Nicomachean Ethics* [1.7] asks what the true function of man is, in order to see what his happiness consists in, and concludes that function is the life of reason *because that life only is peculiar to man.*"⁵ If the ability to reason is peculiar to humans, and the ability to reason is the good, then we should be unsurprised at Kant's claim that "sexuality exposes man to the danger of equality with the beasts."⁶ In other words, sexuality can interrupt our reasoning skill, and influence us to act like other animals, and acting like other animals is not good.

HOW WE ARE LED INTO THE GUN CONTROL DEBATE

To return to the contemporary example of mass shootings, both Trump and Obama are suggesting that the shooter was gripped by unreasonable forces beyond human control – a Beast. From this Beast conceptualization, our concept of evil leads to two equally promising hypotheses that contradict each other:

1) Less regulations on access to guns will prevent mass shootings. Since anyone can be taken over by an unpredictable irrational force, and, even with more regulation, anyone can still easily acquire a gun, then access to guns should be easy for everyone. The core idea, as Wayne Lapierre, CEO and an executive vice president for the NRA, famously put it, "The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun, is a good guy with a gun."⁷

⁵ *Animals and the Problem of Evil*: 54

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⁷ <https://www.npr.org/2012/12/21/167824766/nra-only-thing-that-stops-a-bad-guy-with-a-gun-is-a-good-guy-with-a-gun>

audibly through the ceiling or swamp the kitchen floor. They just quietly distort and obstruct our thinking."¹¹

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