# The good and evil of ghosts, governments, and machines

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Good and evil may spring from the human mind, but new research reveals how they extend beyond humans to the artificial and supernatural.

## Good Ghosts on the Mountains, Evil Spirits in the Caves

Gray shows how good and evil lead to immortality, and what that means for the afterlife. Pulling from their research [To Be Immortal, Do Good or Evil](), Gray will discuss why people believe evil spirits reside in places like caves and good spirits are visualized as being in places like mountains.

"People especially see the minds of good and evil people as continuing to exist—that's why there's a heaven and hell but no place where great bowlers go," says Gray.

Gray will also discuss how people's perceptions of good and evil in the afterlife influence their perceptions of paranormal events.

## Moral Governments

How does good and evil play out for a government? Based on five studies, governments are rated as more moral than nonprofit organizations, corporations, or individuals after a moral transgression,

according to research being presented by Rebeca Harpster (University of Texas of the Permian Basin).

"Governments have more 'moral credentials' in people's minds than organizations or corporations, and this comes from a perception of shared values," says Harpster.

In the studies, Americans rated the ethicality of behaviors, as well as rated positive motives and shared values across several scenarios. One scenario involved the funding a terrorist group. In a stable government situation, people were more willing to overlook a moral transgression by their government than they did for corporations or nonprofits.

The effect may not hold if replicated with participants who do not feel that their government share their important core values, notes Harpster.

She hopes to focus additional research on real world scenarios and possibly look at differences within unstable governments.

## Mindless Machines

Recapping their recent study on machines making moral decisions, Bigman says people have an issue with machines decision making is the "perceived lack of mind" in a machine.

From self-driving cars to automated delivery robots, the devices offer convenience and the potential increased safety. However, people don't think it is OK for machines to make life and death decisions will affect humans, such as cases when an automated vehicle kills a person or is involved in an accident.

Bigman notes these concerns may limit what jobs machines can take over or do in the future, and should be considered by those making

polices and decisions.

"People are ok with machines making a decision when the machine is better than people at it, so there's room for growth," says Bigman.

Bigman's future research may look at understanding why people hold the machines, rather than the programmers, responsible for harm caused by [machines](#).

**More information:** "The Morality of Ghosts and Governments, Machines and Masses," symposium, [event.crowdcompass.com/spsp201 … /activity/E34LznGL0C](#)

Kurt Gray et al. To Be Immortal, Do Good or Evil, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* (2018). [DOI: 10.1177/0146167217754068](#)

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