



Because I Say So: The Dangerous Appeal of Moral Authority

Nikki Stern

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Newly minted 9/11 widow Nikki Stern was at first surprised, then disturbed, to find that she and other relatives of victims were assumed to have a special authority that brought with it both influence and an untouchable quality. In a voice that combines memoir with commentary, Stern examines the power a label like moral authority grants and how it permits misunderstanding and even abuse in the name of a static, inflexible certainty.

Stern finds absurd the idea that proximity to tragedy might automatically tender anyone morally special; or that a moral edge is ceded at times to celebrities, spiritual leaders, medical professionals, politicians, or other so-called opinion leaders, only to be removed and reassigned by an anxious and fickle public. She worries about the influence of popular culture in forming views and opinions, the capacity of fear to triumph over reason, and the seductive comfort of unexamined beliefs. *Because I Say So* makes a strong case for rejecting absolute certainty, but it doesn't stop there. Thoughtfully and persuasively, Stern also makes us believe that an open mind and an open heart can lead to the most unlikely of places hope.

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