

In response to Ewan McEwen's A message from Paris:
http://edge.org/conversation/ian_mcewan-a-message-from-paris
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As Popper taught us, there are open societies and closed societies. The latter seek to impose a vision of the future, for what they perceive is the betterment of all. Open societies understand we can neither control nor foresee the future. We have diverse visions of the future which we passionately dispute, through elections and other means short of violence. On the other hand, all who resist a closed societies vision of the future are it's enemies, which includes us in the open societies. Because they are sure of the truth, they have little hesitation in using violence to attempt to impose their story of the future. Thus, closed societies produce refugees, whom open societies welcome as people who will invigorate and enrich them.

Sadly, this is an old story. At one time, Islamic societies were open and Christian societies were closed. Jewish refugees from the Spanish Inquisition found hospitality in the Islamic centres of Morocco, Istanbul and Damascus. Within living memory, closed societies have been imposed by fascists, Nazis, communists, military dictatorships, as well as religious extremists of several kinds. Paris has suffered violence from several of these. The stories of these conflicts show open societies lose only when we are intimidated into closing our own minds and borders. For example, in the short history of Canada, refuge has been offered to people fleeing the violence of the American Revolution, the slavery practiced by Christians in the Southern states, Naziism, Communism, Chinese expansionism in Tibet, and religious extremism of several varieties. The current policy of accepting 25,000 refugees from Syria by the end of the year is an expression of this lasting tradition.

So if there is a message from Paris, it is that what just occurred there is the same violence, by the same people, that is impelling so many to leave Syria. Part of the answer to this barbarity must be not to let up our efforts to rescue people from the horrors of that war.