

Governed by instinct

Business



The remnants of a man, still alive, yet no longer human, stands hunched over the body of his companion.

This animal carves into the chest of his former friend, chewing his flesh. After a certain amount of suffering, the immorality of cannibalism stops crossing his mind; all the man knows is the pain of starvation. His decision to ignore the boundaries of society results in his survival, but this drive to live makes one question how long our civilization would last if our primitive instincts replace the law. Could children, governed by their stomachs, turn to murder. People can commit unthinkable crimes when driven to survive. In a state of nature, humans are only interested in staying alive.

Therefore laws, rules and punishments are necessary to ensure that people don't resort to savagery. According to Thomas Hobbes, without limits, "human life would be nasty, brutish and short" ("[http://www. iep. utm. edu/rousseau/#H4](http://www.iep.utm.edu/rousseau/#H4)").

When forced to meet basic survival needs, people forget the societal norms and can only focus on what it takes to stay alive. When facing death, starvation, thirst, or even fear itself, the worst part of human nature surfaces. *Lord of the Flies*, written by William Golding, presents a story of human nature where civilization ceases to exist, where savages come to rule, and where little boys become killers. With the laws and rules of their old society still imprinted in their minds, their violent descent into savagery does not occur immediately. In the beginning Ralph easily persuades his peers to act responsibly, each person equally contributing to the health of one

another. However, with no punishments to enforce the rules, the boys begin to neglect their duties.

They innocently defy the laws of society, skipping fire watch, and playing instead of building shelters and hunting. They each test their boundaries, noticing they are no longer bound by their old limitations. For the first time in these boys' lives they are able to do whatever they want without a reprimand in sight. Luckily however, some of the unspoken laws of society are still programmed into their minds. For instance, when Roger decides to throw rocks at another one of the boys on the island, he maintains a "space around Henry, perhaps six yards in diameter, into which he dare not throw. Here, invisible yet strong was the taboo of the old life"(62).

Roger is still "conditioned by civilization" (62), only committing small harmless acts. These tacit limits forced upon him in early childhood are still unable to be broken. Society's influence becomes clear when the boys, fresh from civilization and the laws of the land, are incapable of challenging the status quo. Operating under the norms of society, Jack cannot bring himself to harm another living creature. Jack is able to understand the "enormity of the knife descending and cutting into living flesh; because of the unbearable blood"(31). Even when hunger digs into his stomach, Jack cannot bring the knife to the young piglet's throat.

But as the story progresses, "the world, that understandable and lawful world, starts to slip away"(91). Jack begins to forget the boundaries and rules of society and becomes a killer. Driven by hunger, his gang of hunters spear pig after pig until they shatter one of the most accepted rules in hunting;

they murder a sow. Instead of doing the honorable thing and killing a pig without young, Jack and his gang of hunters purposefully, look “ a little apart from the rest [of the pigs], [and kill a mother who is] sunk in deep maternal bliss,” (134). By killing that pig they also murdered her offspring, just for the fun of it.

With hundreds of different pigs to pick from, it becomes apparent they are hunting for reasons other than finding food — they are hunting to kill. The decent into savagery suddenly becomes all too clear. These young men, with no clear consequences for their actions, begin to go beyond their primitive values. Resorting to murder for reasons other than eating. Without the laws of society to govern them, these boys turn into beasts.

With no compassion, empathy or guilt, Jack and his hunters illustrate that when people are taken from society, the defects of human nature surface. The drive to stay alive defies all other instincts, and as we see in the story, people can commit heinous acts when punishments are absent. When one is stripped from society, all that makes us human disappears. We slowly decline from human to animal, from animal to beast. Even the characters who remain true to themselves are still affected by the horrors of the island. Ralph will never be the same innocent boy; the flaws of humankind will remain in his mind forever.

This obvious transition into vile instincts forces him to accept “ the darkness of a man’s heart” (202). While society does leave small clues of the flaws in human nature, this island made the shortcomings all too clear. Even now, our so-called “ civilized” society shows the “ failings of a rather selfish

human nature” (Thomas Hobbes). Seeping into the very foundation of society are flaws. People who disobey laws, and disrespect limits, are a constant reminder of the defects in human nature.

Jails and prisons exist solely because society still has not succeeded in creating an environment that does cure savage behavior. Civilization is supposed to keep these instincts in check, but it has only slightly tamed the behavior. People figure that since these impulses are no longer needed, they will just disappear. But they have not; these instincts that kept our species alive so many years before, still exist. According to Golding, “ civilization is largely a heroic struggle to build up layer upon layer of varnish upon the rough and splintered raw material of humankind” (“ Why Boys Become Vicious”). Human nature required these boys to fight for their lives.

They honorably attempt to stay true to the values instilled in them, but once their survival instincts kick in, no one could possibly ask them to change their ways. The boys had to choose between two competing compulsions: one to get along with people, and live under rules and laws, and the second, to survive and rule over others. The boys had to decide, “ which is better- to have laws and agree, or to hunt and kill” (180). The longer the boys are cut off from civilization, the more their decision becomes clear. The savagery of human nature is exposed; people governed by instincts can kill.

Without resorting to savagery, the boys might never have survived, so ultimately, if it is between two extremes, how is success measured? Staying true to society, or surviving? It is not their intention to descend into savagery. It is their instincts.