

# Nature vs nurture term paper examples

[Science](#), [Genetics](#)



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## **Nature vs. Nurture**

### Abstract

For centuries man has been trying to determine what makes a person moral. Some have theorized that babies are born with an innate sense of morality while others debate this theory with their own beliefs that human ethics are molded by their environment. Those in the field of psychology have long endeavored to find commonalities that would explain human personalities. Even though all humans have similar traits there are also many ways that make us all unique. In the search to understand the relationship between commonality and uniqueness, several different theories of personality have been developed (" The study of," pg. 1 ). By looking at the psychological and biological reasoning behind personality theory one can better determine the root causes of human behavior, new developments in the study of personality are constantly changing what we know about diversity.

## **Biological Theories**

Biological theory implies that an individual's actions and personality is a direct result of our genetic makeup (" The study of," pg. 2). Genes, brain structure, and evolution are all cited as possible influencers (" The study of," pg. 2). The heritability of personality traits illustrates the reasoning that uniqueness comes from the mix of genes passed down through generations. Charles Darwin as among the first to suggest that biological theory could be the result of natural selection, thus coming up with an evolutionary personality theory that is very close to biological theory (" The study of," pg. 3).

Biological theory has four separate dimensions of personality that include: activity level, emotionality, sociability, and aggression/impulse (Derlega & Winstead, 1999, pg. 112). The traits often have very close ties with genetic makeup.

## **Behavioral Theories**

Behavioral theories indicate that personality determined by the relationship between an individual and their environment (" The study of," pg. 4 ). The study behavior appeals most the behavioral theorists, not genetics.

Behavioral theory likes to study and measure what they are able to observe (Berk). The exploration of cognitive thought and emotion does not hold as much prominence in this theory.

Cantor's studies suggest that our personalities are adaptable (Cantor, 1990, pg. 737). The idea that individuals can change their tasks, strategies, and patterns of thought in face of experience is the basis for behavioral theory (Cantor, 1990, pg. 737). Cantor states, " A structural approach to personality

can reveal much about basic stabilities, and an emphasis on the doing side can contribute knowledge of the mutability of personality.” (Cantor, 1990, pg. 740).

Even though most theories attribute behavior as a factor that influences personality, behavior theorists take this idea to a more extreme level.

Skinner divulged that both satiation and deprivation influence behaviors but are not the root. Emotion is also viewed in a very similar manner (“The study of,” pg. 11).

Kant’s concept of moral obligation is that there is a priori concept of our minds. This essentially removes God as the basis for morality, and argues that we have free-will in regards to our own moral compass.

He wishes to determine what motivates a person to do the right thing.

Obviously rewards or punishments can be factors that influence behavior. Systems of rewards and punishments only allow for self-interest roles, the external factors to conform may or may not have a place in this theory. “

Such a good “will” is, Kant insists, the only thing that is really good in itself.”(Stevenson & Haberman, 2009, pg. 123)

Kant does not think of moral praise and blame as just more external incentive for people to comply with ethical duties (Stevenson & Haberman, 2009, 123). Praise and blame only work if you are able to rationalize why it is important. For example; if someone hits you and you have no idea why, nothing is learned for the experience. However, if someone hits you every time you take a particular object without asking, then you are able to rationalize that to take the object is wrong, and thus adapt the idea that stealing is morally wrong. Reason should appeal only to the uncompelled assent of anyone

capable of rational judgment.

“ All external rewards and punishments for Kant concern only " the realm of law," not the realm of ethics. No ethical duties can be enforced through rewards and punishments of any sort without violating the rights of free beings.”(Stevenson & Haberman, 2009, pg. 123) This concept separates Kant from other moral traditions of the past. He feels that we teach children the morals we want them to have as a society.

Kant's point is that, “ as rational beings, we are not just bundles of innately given or socially trained inclinations; we have reasons for our actions, and those reasons are always implicitly general, so they can be made explicit as " maxims" and rationally and morally assessed. He proposes three questions that sum up interests of reason, both speculative and practical. They included: 1. What can I know? 2. What ought I do? and 3. What may I hope? It is not enough for us to effect appropriate results in the world: distinctively human virtue involves having morally good reasons and intentions.”(Stevenson & Haberman, 2009, pg. 124)

## **Recent Advancement in Biological Theory**

More and more academics, medical providers, scientists, psychologists, and those in criminal justice are finding personality theory an instrumental element to help explain behaviors of individuals. Recent literature on alcoholism has been linked to biological theory. Berman indicates that genetic information allows for the explanation of behaviors as well as determines that likelihood for physical or mental illness (Berman & Bowrirat, 2005, pg. 213). The literature closely looks at hormones and their place in determining behavior. Berman proposes that the chemical balance in the brain

work in conjunction with genetic material to determine our personality, in her case she alleges an addictive personality (Berman & Bowrirat, 2005, pg. 214).

In Derlega's book " Personality: Contemporary Theory and Research", this new interest in tracing the origins of personality is carefully studied by contemporary psychologists looking into heredity, the structure of the brain, gender, and child development. The research completed by those in the early days of psychology are being re-examined with more complex techniques and scientific understanding (Derlega & Winstead, 1999, pg. 54). This especially important the field of biological theory. Since biological theory focus largely on what can't be seen by the naked eye, such as cognitive function and hormones, new improved methods and technology has allowed for more accurate analysis. Dergla feels that topics of personality also relates to all other areas of psychology to determine what makes up an individual (Derlega & Winstead, 1999, pg. 31).

## **Recent Developments of Behavioral Theory**

Questions about nature versus nurture often arise when discussing behavioral theory the attempt to identify their effect on personality have been the subject of many recent studies (Berk). Plomin examines this question often in his studies of behavior. His findings state that both the environment, both in and outside of a family, as well as genetics are factors. Genetics contribute to how the environments are created (Plomin, 1994, pg. 211). Again we see researchers looking to determine how all elements work together, not isolating behaviors or genetics alone.

Plomin has become one of the foremost contemporaries in the field of

behavior, in addition to his interest in nature versus nurture; he also proposes that personality can change. The idea that personality is mutable is still a deeply debated topic that is sure to be the subject of more study in the future.

In his study “ Behavioral Genetics and Personality Change” he alleges that the continuity of traits can be changes as the person experiences different life events (Plomin & Nesselroade, 1990, pg. 214). He especially wants to drive this point home about children who he feels changes personality at an alarming rate before the reach maturity (Plomin & Nesselroade, 1990, pg. 200). Plomin wishes to link life events and mile markers to changes within the personality over time. This ground breaking literature about behavioral theory may soon redefine the term personality itself.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, personality is made up by a pattern of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that make someone different from another (Berk). Different personality theories have been developed to help explore both the origins and results of personality. Personality dictates who we are, what we do and what we may feel.

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