

Humans nature – good or bad?

[Environment](#), [Nature](#)



Human Nature Good or Bad? Whether human beings are instinctually good or evil in an elementary natural state is a question that has been boggling the minds of even the greatest philosophers. There is a spectrum of theories that support both good and evil within the human race, each with valid points that explains the range of our interests, being either for ourselves or for others. However, my personal stance is the sensible theory of Altruism. Past experiences and observations allow me to take the stance, and support the argument that humans are caring and genuinely good individuals and have the will and desire to help those around them.

Philosophers such as Mengzi (4th Century BCE) also known as Mencius in the West, explains how humans have an “ innate sense of right and wrong, a natural sympathetic reaction to people in distress or pain and natural sense of propriety. ” 1 His theory states that all human beings share an innate goodness that can either be cultivated through education and self-discipline or wasted with neglect and negative influences, but the inner good can never be lost altogether. Mencius uses the example of a man witnessing a child falling into a well, as an example for his theory of innate goodness within humans. If a man sees a child who is in danger of falling into a well, then that man will almost certainly try to rescue the child. ” 2 The witness is not saving the child for the gain of the parent’s friendship, or to gain admiration of the neighborly public, but for the sake of saving the innocent and for his own nature. This example not only supports the idea that benevolence and righteousness are more rational motives for human actions than that of desire for profit or personal gain, but because we are caught off

our guard, the example proves the manifestation of our good human qualities.

Mencius continues with the statement, “ If a man is constantly subjected to negative influence, his character is bound to be affected accordingly, despite occasional good education. But that is not his true character, or his original nature. ”³ Mencius views ones original nature as always being good, and the evil that gradually develops are due to the “ external influences. ”³ Such people would be individuals that do wrongs/evil and would inflict pain, which would damage other people.

These ongoing debates continue into literature and are for example the two philosophical authors Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and Joseph Butler (1692-1752). One philosopher fighting for the truth of the evil nature within humans, and the other rebutting for the good. Hobbes’ book the “ Leviathan” expresses harsh outlines for the nature of human and describes the human life as, “ solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short. ”¹ He concluded that humans are antisocial, and that cooperation between individuals or groups is nothing but self-interest.

Joseph Butler however, wanted to reestablish his belief and published the book “ Fifteen Sermons Preached at Roll Chapel. ” His goal was to prove that human nature included positive elements. Within his book, Butler states that humans have varying characteristics pertaining to their nature and this encompasses a measure of self-interest. This self-interest is a natural attribute that roots back to the human animalistic nature of “ survival of the

fittest. ” This self-interest is also a human quality that does not conflict with benevolence.

Butler arranged these human attributes into a hierarchy with the top being conscience. In regards to conscience, Hobbes maintained the opinion that acts of kindness and altruism are only ways for people to soothe their consciences. Additionally, Butler states that, “ One must heed his or her own conscience to fully experience human nature. That conscience is the key to making moral choices – and making moral choices is integral to human nature. ” ¹ This, therefore; supports the idea that one must perform acts of kindness and good in order to soothe the conscience.

This conscience must be heeded in order to fully experience human nature that is driven by good deeds. One of the largest impacts of human nature is the environment that shapes it. John Locke (1632-1704) characterized a new human mind as a, “ blank sheet of paper and a clean slate. ” ⁴ His theory stating that human nature is not predisposed to good or bad, but is dependant upon and is influenced by the environment that the individual was raised and lives in. Which is similar to the behaviorism theory of B. F Skinner, who claims that people’s behavior is completely controlled by their given environment.

Essentially, both theories depend on the surrounding environment to determine how the individual will fall into society on a spectrum of good and bad. An example of the influence of environment is easily displayed with the illustration of two dogs. If one dog is brought into a family with loving and caring owners another is brought into abuse and torture, which dog is going

to be good and which one evil? The answer is obvious, with the evil one being the negative and destructive environment. If the dog is raised with torture, neglect and shown no endearment how is good supposed to be good?

Clearly this is not a human example, but the same basic environmental influence can be applied. A human example of this would be the disasters of the September 11th twin towers attacks. American reporter Natalie Angier explained the reasons that tens of thousands of generous acts took place after the disaster, “ The altruistic impulse, they say is a non-denominational gift, the birthright and defining characteristic of the human species. ” 1 This example highlights the way humans responded to an evil event. However, even though their environment was changed for the worst, altruistic acts overcame the evil.

In conclusion, I believe that humans are intrinsically good, and that their human nature has an interest to help others rather than to help themselves. The philosophers throughout history have provided theories and arguments that have enabled my realization that human nature sides with altruism over egoism. No man chooses evil because it is evil; he only mistakes it for happiness, the good he seeks. ” – Mary Wollstonecraft Bibliography 1. Paquette, Paul G. , and Laura Ginni-Newman. Philosophy - Questions & Theories. Whitby, ON: McGraw Hill Ryerson Limited, 2003. Print. . Scott, Alex. " Mengzi (Mencius). " Angelfire: Welcome to Angelfire. 2004. . 3. Chen, C. W. " Good and Evil in Chinese Philosophy. " The Philosopher, Volume LXXXIV, 1996. [Http://www.the-philosopher.co.uk/good&evil.htm](http://www.the-philosopher.co.uk/good&evil.htm). Web. 4. Schouls,

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