

# Creatures of habit

[Psychology](#), [Behaviorism](#)



Creatures of Habit Human behavior is a study that will never end, nor will there be one distinct theory or answer to the question that most people have pondered at one time or another: why do humans behave the way they do? Or, were human beings born inherently evil or good? Human beings are naturally selfish and carnal beings, having these tendencies from birth without having to be taught. Basic and consistent human behavior, Barbara Tuchman's "This is the End of the World: The Black Death," and Philip Gourevitch's "After the Genocide" reflect how Thomas Hobbes' theory of human behavior may, very likely be true. At a very young age, humans show signs of selfishness and greed. An infant or toddler naturally wants all the toys for their self and are forced to share with other children or siblings. An infant or toddler calls everything "mine." Before an infant can even speak, they show signs of mischievous behavior by touching that hot oven when the parent isn't looking and they know not to, or simply not listening to a parents instructions or requests. A child does not have to be taught how to do these things, they were born with this capability to know how to behave badly. As a child ages, a parent does not have to illustrate how to lie, be selfish with their toys, or be disobedient because these actions and behaviors come naturally to a child. It is a part of life to teach a child right from wrong because no child is born knowing the difference; they have to be informed. The process of teaching one right from wrong does not end in childhood. As a child ages into a young adult, they still show signs of this natural ability. Adults do have the capacity to learn more quickly from their mistakes because they are more mature. However, adults are naturally judgmental, envious, boastful, self-seeking, and power seeking, which are all traits that

do not have to be demonstrated or developed. A human being does have to develop the right behaviors and practice them before it becomes part of their character. No matter what age, humans are continually learning right from wrong. Barbara Tuchman's "This Is the End of the World: The Black Death" demonstrates how when overwhelmed with fear, humans resort back to their natural carnal and selfish behaviors. Tuchman describes the scene as "one man shunned another... kinsfolk held aloof, brother was forsaken by brother, oftentimes husband by wife; nay, what is more, and scarcely to be believed, fathers and mothers were found to abandon their own children to their fate, untended, unvisited as if they had been strangers" (784). This shows that human beings abandon all love and good morals out of fear and selfishness to protect only their lives. Tuchman states the plague "was not the kind of calamity that inspired mutual help. Its loathsomeness and deadliness did not herd people together in mutual distress, but only prompted their desire to escape each other" (783). The people affected by this plague were not acting based on character or inhibitions, they resorted back to their natural ability to only worry about self. Tuchman mentions that the nuns of the municipal hospital had no fear of death so they were not abandoning the sick, they stayed and cared for those in need. These actions by the nuns demonstrates clearly that those who are more developed as human beings and have a sense of character and morals are not moved by fear and do not resort back to self seeking behaviors. Integrity is also a characteristic human beings are not born with, however, we are born with greed and envy. Tuchman describes man's behavior during the plague when she states "Lawlessness and debauchery accompanied the plague... men

grew bold in the indulgence of pleasure: ' For seeing how the rich died in a moment and those who had nothing immediately inherited their property, they reflected that life and riches were alike transitory and they resolved to enjoy themselves while they could.' Human behavior is timeless" (787). So even during one of the most tragic events in history, men were self seeking and greedy and would abandon their children, husbands, and wives but when a rich man dies they don't think twice about stealing their belongings or inhabiting their mansions, seeking any form pleasure they could possibly get. These events clearly show how human beings are inherently selfish and carnal. Philip Gourevitch's essay " After the Genocide" describes, in great detail, the scene of 800, 000 murders in one country. This horrific event in history took place because of simple greed and power struggle. The Hutus that were to blame for this genocide planned, physically trained, and mapped out this entire event for one result. The Hutus simply wanted control and ultimate power in Rwanda. Gourevitch states " Perhaps, in examining this extremity with me, you hope for some understanding, some insight, some flicker of self-knowledge-a moral, or a lesson, or a clue about how to behave in this world... but when it comes to genocide, you already know right from wrong" (841). Human beings do not have to be taught to desire control, power, wealth, etc. Human beings already have these desires within them naturally. As a child we dream about being a person of power- the president, actor, singer, police officer, children don't dream at a young age of being someone who makes a positive difference or being inspiring. We naturally seek power and authority. As Gourevitch stated, anyone should know right from wrong in this situation but there has to be a greater desire

to do wrong than right for someone to go through with an act as abominable as the genocide in Rwanda. Somehow, the members of the Hutus who murdered these 800, 000 people missed some sort of development or illustration of good versus evil. The Hutus were very likely not developed to have good character or common morals. Humans are born with selfish and carnal tendencies, they are not later acquired. Humans do not have to be taught or need demonstration of these behaviors in order to act them out as they already have the capability within them. It is significant that a human being knows this in order to develop a sense of right and wrong. They also need be aware of this theory in order to develop character, develop healthy relationships, achieve goals or dreams, and most of all to have a sense of integrity. When a human being is cognizant of the fact that their behavior and inner self has to be molded and trained to be good, they are then able to be proactive in establishing good values, morals, and behaviors.