

Human cruelty essay samples

[Health & Medicine](#), [Addiction](#)



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Introduction

There is genuine merit in the argument that it is in human nature to be cruel to others. This supposition is favored by the responses elicited by the various subjects in experiments conducted by Milgram and by Darley and Latane. In Milgram’s experiments, subjects were instructed to increasingly inflict electric shock pain on another human every time they failed to answer a question correctly (Milgram 60). Almost all the subjects obeyed, seemingly to maintain social etiquette or avoid disapproval from the authority figure of the instructor. In Darley and Latane, several experiments showed that people are less likely to help those in need if other people around them are not offering help than if they are alone. The experiments prove that humans require only simplistic settings to enable their suppressed cruel nature to come to the fore. The major argument against this idea is that humans act in aggression and hurtful manner if placed under the need to conform, to obey and to act in etiquette in response to instruction. However, pluralistic ignorance to the suffering of others shows that the true nature of man does not reveal itself when isolated but when in a group of people in similar circumstances. This essay provides evidence and arguments on the cruel

nature of man.

First, humans are innately cruel because, as revealed by Milgram's experiments, when given the choice between hurting others so as to save themselves from the trivial feeling of disobedience and deviation from etiquette or to avoid physically hurting others and face disapproval from an authority, they choose the former (Milgram 60). This shows that similarly, the true nature of humans is suppressed by the law which requires them to refrain from hurting others. This implies that the selfish and cruel human nature makes people choose to hurt others to life-threatening extents rather than face the tiny effect of disapproval or ridicule. This is evident in Milgram's experiments where subjects continued to inflict life-threatening pain on other innocent test subjects even without the presence of threat to their own life, careers, material possessions, friends or family (Milgram 60). This premise is further confirmed in Catherine Genovese's case where in a neighborhood, thirty-eight people witnessed a murder and rape without breaking silence or attempting to help (Slater 97). Rather than face the tiny inconvenience of leaving the comfort of their warm houses to save a life, they watched in cruel indifference. This selfishness breeds cruelty and is inherent in the very depths of human nature.

Secondly, humans are driven to act like others more than by their conviction that good deeds should be done. Therefore, human cruelty is seen in the diffusion of responsibility scenario. Darley and Latane note that is more unlikely for a person to help another if those around him or her do not attempt to help that person. This notion was expressed in empirical terms when Darley and Latane simulated a situation where one subject actor had a

seizure in a “ separate room” in the middle of a conversation with test subjects. The results reveal that subjects reacted to the actor’s calls for help only when other subjects showed concern. This underlines the premise that humans are driven to help others by imitation rather than an innate nature to do good deeds.

Thirdly, the presence of innate human cruelty is favored by the proven absence of innate good human nature. Absence of good human nature is confirmed by the fact that men are driven by the need to conform to the rules of etiquette and social cues more than they are driven by any other force to do good deeds. In the Catherine Genovese murder, no one in the neighborhood had an innate good human nature to perform the good deed of attempting to save her life (Slater 97). They were all held, as if by an invisible force, to remain in their houses and watch another human being suffer at the hands of a murderer to the point of death. The absence of innate good nature highly favors the presence of a cruel nature. This is if good is absent, bad will prevail. In addition, indifference should never be involved where human life is at stake. Slater (109) suggest a five-stage approach of helping behavior, which is predominantly absent in experiments. These five stages comprise of: noticing an event happening; interpreting the event to mean that help is required; assuming individual responsibility, making a decision on the necessary action and taking the action.

The major argument against the supposition that humans are innately cruel is that humans act in a cruel manner when compelled by social factors and the force of manners rather than their innate nature. This is supported somewhat by the social cuing principle when the subjects are the ones

whose lives are threatened. Darley and Latane's experiment involving a room and a smoke vent shows this. In this experiment, subjects in a room are instructed by confederates to fill out forms. As they fill the forms, smoke is channeled into the rooms in a manner that causes discomfort to the subjects through coking and the fear of death. Darley and Latane note that the social cues of the confederates were so restraining on the subjects to the point of causing them to choose to face potentially dangerous smoke rather than break rank or disobey social cues. This argument, however, is counteracted by the "safety in numbers" principle. The subjects in the experiment act more perturbed when alone in the smoke-filled room than when in the room with other subjects. There was a notion of safety in numbers whereby the subjects felt safer with others who were facing the same predicaments as themselves. This means that the experiment is invalid in raising an argument against the cruel nature of man.

Conclusion

Darley and Latane as well as Milgram examine social behaviors of humans in an attempt to explain why people behave as they do. Darley and Latane's experiments are conducted in the context of the discourse on Catherine Genovese's murder. They examine social cues and the force of manners as restraints against reaction or attempts to help others or as drivers of harm to others (Milgram 60). These experiments are useful in examining whether humans possess an innate cruel nature. This paper provides three arguments which show that humans are innately cruel. First, humans would rather harm others or watch harm befall others than face the tiny inconvenience of leaving the comfort social conformity or obedience.

Secondly, humans are driven to act like others more than by their conviction that good deeds should be done. Thirdly, the proven absence of innate good nature in humans supports the presence of a cruel nature.

Work Cited

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