

Are humans naturally  
bad or good  
philosophy essay



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I believe that humans are naturally bad because our base mentality is one of evil. Hundreds of thousands of years ago, human beings fought unnecessary wars, tortured prisoners, raped, murdered, and pillaged. Not surprisingly, all of that still occurs in today's society. The world we live in is an essentially bad one. Radical vigilantes bomb cities, open fire in crowded places, and incite disastrous riots every day. From looking at the world around us and seeing our degeneration, it is ludicrous to believe that we are naturally good. Although the evolutionary process has instilled a modicum of civility and humanity in us, we are still naturally evil beings.

Thomas Hobbes recognizes the evil nature of humans and paints a very blatant picture of it in Leviathan. He states that laws were devised for the sole purpose of keeping our evil nature in check. Without them, our base instincts would resurface and chaos would reign supreme. That is why Hobbes was in favor of authoritarian governments; they were necessary to keep us under control. Basically, they are needed to protect us from ourselves. Hobbes also states that our true natures arise in times of strife. For example, in war-torn countries, civilians kill and steal from each other in order to survive. Self-preservation is one of the most natural of human compulsions and we will do anything to survive. Hobbes also asks an interesting question to those who believe that humans are good. He asks that if humans are so benevolent in nature, then why do we lock our doors at night and guard our possessions? By doing so, we are unconsciously recognizing the evil nature of humans.

Hsun Tzu also maintained that man's nature is inherently evil. He believed that humans are born evil, but it is a teacher's responsibility to educate them

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and reign in those evil instincts and eradicate them. Although he has valid points, it is still unrealistic to think that man's naturally evil instincts can be curbed so easily. Those suppressed instincts that have been stored away in the annals of the human psyche will resurface eventually. It is also unrealistic to think that one can make man good simply by means of education. If anything, education leads to evil because it has the power to corrupt.

Those who oppose Hobbes and say that humans are naturally good are, frankly, idealists. The Chinese philosopher Mencius states that humans are naturally good and that one's circumstances influence their nature. The idea of one's circumstances influencing their nature is ridiculous. One may be unfortunate enough to be born into less than favorable circumstances, but it is up to that person to overcome them. Yes, one can become embittered and callous by their debilitating situation, but to say that their circumstances influence their nature is to give a justification for bad behavior.

Attributed to Plato, the idea that love can make one good has become another idealistic opinion for many. Plato stated that love is one of, if not the most, natural emotions that humans have, thus we are naturally good because love itself is good. While love is a very fulfilling emotion that can lead to change within a person, that change is not always for the better. Love has led to wars, murders, and the destruction of kingdoms, throughout history. For example, Helen of Troy and the iconic war fought over her. Her love for a foreign prince led to the deaths of thousands of soldiers and civilians and the complete destruction of an empire. Another example is Henry VIII and his love for Anne Boleyn. He divorced his queen, broke with <https://assignbuster.com/are-humans-naturally-bad-or-good-philosophy-essay/>

the Catholic Church, and tore his country apart in order to marry his mistress. Perhaps the most common examples of how love can change a person are domestic violence cases. In simpler terms, love often leads to recklessness, irrationality, impairment of judgment, and, in some cases, bad behavior in an individual.

In 20th century opinions, the idea of “ Nature vs. Nurture” was believed by some. Nature meaning that we are born with whatever behavior we exhibit, and nurture meaning that our culture has the ability to mold us into what we are. The scientist Edward O. Wilson stated that if the process of natural selection has determined our biological functions, then natural selection must have determined the operations of our brains. Basically speaking, he believed that humans are born with whatever nature they possess, therefore validating my argument that we are born evil.

At the opposite end of the philosophical spectrum, the anthropologist Ruth Benedict wrote that one’s culture and its social norm has the ability to mold that individual into a good or bad being. Once again, the concept of one’s surroundings influencing their nature is introduced. Benedict basically gives the same justification for bad behavior that Mencius gave thousands of years earlier.

In conclusion, humans are inherently evil in nature because it is our base mentality. Sadly, it is a part of us that is unchangeable and, try as one might, it cannot be quelled by education or instruction, nor can it be influenced by our culture or surroundings. We are born the way we are, and we must accept it.