

The Reality of Us: Where the World Currently Stands

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Abstract

In recent years, it seems as if the world has gone through many different problems, such as a global recession, war, and a virus pandemic. Because of this, there have been several debates over whether or not human nature is inherently “good” or “bad,” as well as whether or not humanity will continue to live and prosper. While scientific evidence has provided a lot of information to prove that human nature is demented, and maybe even suicidal, thoughts from religious and philosophical sources may indicate that mankind is not as bad as scientific evidence is making it out to be, which ultimately paints a more positive picture of the human race continuing into the future. This research paper dives deep into exploring this topic, citing several books, websites, journal articles, and encyclopedias from authors, professors, scientists, theologians, and philosophers alike.

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Climate change. Nuclear tensions. Classism and discrimination. These are some of the worst crises that different parts of the world are currently locked in a struggle with. Some climate scientists have warned the masses that rising temperatures in the atmosphere are irreversible, which may indicate human extinction. World leaders are coming for each other's throats while clumsily fumbling around with their respective nuclear buttons. Global prices continue to rise, while issues such as poverty and income inequality show little to no signs of improving in areas where it needs to be.

Problems like these usually require a systematic reassessment of the situations on hand, whether that would be through voting for a new system, protesting for a specific cause, or in the most extreme of cases, a coup d'état. However, one may argue that these actions are pointless, considering that voting does not guarantee that needs being met, protesting will not always yield a solution, and attempts to overthrow the government are almost always for malevolent purposes and are destined to fail; one of the most recent examples involving the latter was the self-coup attempt carried out by Peruvian President Pedro Castillo, which was quickly thwarted and resulted in Castillo being removed from office (Presidente Pedro, 2022). Nevertheless, the fact that there are people in the world there who are willing to take a risk for something they stand for already speaks volumes about the true nature of humans as a whole, no matter where the globe itself is heading towards.

While scientific findings suggests that the end of the world is more inevitable than one may think, due to the somewhat destructive physical nature of humans, evidence coming from religious and philosophical thoughts offers a more positive outlook on how humans are innately wired, suggesting that there is a chance that the struggles of the world can be turned around.

Thus, overall, the “good” nature of humans will end up sparing the world from further catastrophic collapse.

Scientific Evidence

A common phrase that is thrown around in most weightlifting gyms and circles is “comparison is the thief of joy,” meaning that constantly comparing oneself to others is subject to feelings of inferiority and depression; it is usually taken as an initiative to focus on yourself and your own goals, rather than get stuck watching the other man next to you grow larger in size by the second. Replace the word “comparison” with “objectiveness” and now the phrase more closely relates to what a handful of scientists across different fields are trying to preach in the 21st Century: the destructive nature of humans have done irreversible damage to the planet and as global temperatures rise and natural resources deplete, more and more catastrophic weather events will become more frequent. Unfortunately, a blunt statement like this has quite a bit of scientific research to back it up, along with other negative facts about humans in general.

Ever since the 1970s, as the global population has more than doubled in size, so has human consumption and the pressure on nature itself. Begum expands upon this thought by mentioning a rise in the expenditure of available land, and in turn a rise in the number of invasive species throughout different ecosystems, specifically stating that the increase in the latter “disrupts and often diminishes the richness local diversity” and “threatens many endemic species” (Begum, 2019). As a result of largely human impedance, diverse species across the world are becoming extinct in mass numbers. Furthermore, Leslie information on how human interaction with the environment is slowly contributing to the weakening of the planet’s stability. Large releases of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) into the atmosphere are creating several holes in the ozone layer, which results in higher levels of ultraviolet sunlight being cast on the earth and

may end up contributing to rising cancer rates and tree deaths; CFCs usually come from using aerosol sprays, blowing agents for foam, and packing materials (Elkins, 1999). The “greenhouse effect” is contributing to the melting of frozen arctic soils, which further increases the amount of carbon dioxide and subsequently leads to higher average temperatures. And, in the case of wide scale pollution, Leslie adds that “severe pollution seems almost inevitable when uncontrolled population growth is combined with demands for an acceptable standard of living” (Leslie, 2002). On top of Leslie’s analysis, Chew brings up the idea of climate change being one of the main driving forces of humanity, in which it has resulted in another “dark age” that consists of downfalls in first the environment, then the economic and political structure of most countries (Chew, 2007).

In addition to environmental faults caused by humans, recent developments in artificial intelligence have threatened careers across several different industries. From AI-powered illustrators that can draw anything with just a simple key command, to writing whole songs and movie scripts, the rise in capabilities from artificial intelligence has elicited concerns from people who are directly impacted. Torres even writes about the dangers of advancing something called “superintelligence,” a more powerful AI form that “could manipulate the world at speeds that confound any human attempt to control it” (Torres, 2017). At the same time other researchers, like Hruschka, have decided to take a closer look into the reasoning by humans, not just the actions that have been undertaken by them. However, the Arizona State professor discovered that not only is human nature not characterized properly, it is actually grossly misrepresented through various data and statistics; a large majority of studies published in the flagship journal of the Association for Psychological Science is conducted in Anglophone (English-speaking) and western European nations, which really only constitutes about 15% of

the total world population (Hruschka, 2018). If studies are not being diversified to better represent everyone, then it will only become harder to accurately gauge the psychological nature of humans.

The destructive side of human nature can be somewhat attributed to the idea that people, in general, are known to be one of the most territorial creatures on the planet. Tomashoff mentions how the act of marking territory is just as much a human trait as it is a dog's or a cat's, talking about how "territoriality is not only about grabbing something that will set you apart from the crowd; it's about our disdain of sharing—an act that just rankles our possessive nature" (Tomashoff, 1992). From using a jacket to save a seat at a stadium or in a movie theater, to traveling to a foreign land to forcibly and brutally colonize the indigenous people that occupy it, territorialism comes in all shapes and sizes. Expanding upon the latter, colonialism is yet another blemish on the reputation of the human race. During the era of European colonization throughout the 19th Century and the first half of the 20th Century, science was frequently utilized as a form of justification for imperialism, with white settlers being seen as a benchmark for superior health and medicinal practices (Roy, 2018). In conjunction with the status quo in this time period, eugenics and social Darwinism were still regarded as legitimate scientific theories at the time, which only further perpetuated a feeling of superiority for white Europeans while discrediting minority groups as inferior races in all categories. Eugenics would only then be fully discredited following its use by Nazis to justify discriminating and committing genocide against Jews and other ethnic groups (Black, 2012). With the provided evidence, it can be seen that not only are humans destructive to the environment, but they are also destructive to themselves.

If humans were only judged based on scientific findings of themselves, that is their actions toward the environment and other humans, one may think that the species intentionally suicidal and that it is only a matter of time before the planet is wiped clean of any homo sapiens. The planet may very well be slowly crawling into a coffin as a result of mostly human action, which ultimately does not reflect a good outcome for human nature. Regardless of these thoughts, however, humans can find redemption in the form of facts from schools of thought beyond the scientific world.

Religious Evidence

While scientific evidence of the human psyche offers quite a pessimistic perspective on the current state of the world, it appears that religious doctrine provides an alternative take on nature that is exponentially more positive than the former. Almost every single recognized religion across the world has one idea that is common amongst all of their beliefs: the golden rule, in that you “treat others as you would like others to treat you” (Flew, 1979). In addition to the golden rule, almost every religion recognizes that the human population is riddled with shortcomings, but each of them express their solutions in slightly different ways in relation to one another.

In the monotheistic Abrahamic religions, that is Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, the idea of humans being born as imperfect, mortal entities is widely translated. The book of Genesis in the Bible and the Torah documents the doctrine of the “fall of man,” in which humanity sins for the first time in the form of Adam and Eve eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden:

⁶When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some

to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves (Genesis 3:6-7, New International Version).

While the Quran is a little more vague with its “fall of man” anecdote, it still highlights the shortcomings of humans in chapter 70, stating that man was created very impatient and becomes grieved with the infliction of evil (University of Alberta, n.d.).

Some Christian authors, such as Wallace, will go through great lengths to argue that mankind will never have the willpower to become righteous enough. Wallace cites Isaiah 64:6 of the Old Testament, which says:

⁶ All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away (New International Version).

Wallace basically states that mankind is ultimately driven by desires for personal gain of wealth and that good deeds are not actually good enough, even going as far as to say that “we are slaves to our inclinations” (Wallace, 2020).

Although these faiths acknowledge that humans are not inherently perfect, they do proclaim that mankind itself is redeemable in the long run. Christians believe that everyone is created equal in the image of God and are therefore equally able to receive salvation in Jesus Christ if they choose to; since people technically have free will in Christianity, some may choose not to undertake obeying God’s will and live according to one’s own desires, in which Christians and some Jews argue this is what led to the “fall of man” in the first place (Human Nature Christianity, n.d.). When it comes to Islam, Muslims similarly acknowledge the fact that everyone is born with natural morality and has the ability to differentiate the good from the bad

(University of Alberta, n.d.). Furthermore, as part of the Five Pillars of Islam, Muslims are tasked in practicing “zakat,” which is the act of giving part of your wealth to the needy and less fortunate (Islam, 2009).

Besides the Abrahamic religions, there are other belief systems, either polytheistic or even nontheistic, that have a closely adjacent perspective on humanity. Within the realm of Hinduism, followers learn to practice a specific set of philosophies in order to fulfill their lives. According to the idea of the “atman,” every creature in the world is born with a soul and is all a part of one “supreme” soul; this is why Hindus may view cows as sacred and choose not to eat beef, pork, or any meat at all. The doctrine of “samsara” states that all living creatures are locked in a vicious cycle of life, death, and rebirth, and for those who have not experienced the release of “samsara” yet, the balance of “karma” must be achieved first; “karma” is basically the universal law of cause and effect and is the Hindu perspective on the golden rule. Once a creature creates a balance with their “karma,” they will be able to break the cycle of “samsara” and achieve “moksha,” which is the most divine level of enlightenment and liberation for anyone to achieve (Hinduism, 2017). Buddhism, which was born out of Hinduism via Siddhartha Gautama, follows a similar structure to Hinduism in general. Followers of the Buddha seek to obtain liberation from the “dukkha,” or perpetual pain and suffering, through the “Middle Way,” which is the avoidance of self-indulgences and extremes while living a largely modest lifestyle. In this lifestyle, Buddhists must live by five moral rules that does not allow:

1. Using any drugs and/or alcohol, as these are examples of self-indulgences.
2. Killing any living creature, just like the saying “wouldn’t harm a fly” (similarly to Hinduism).
3. Stealing, or taking anything that does not belong to you.

4. Being clouded in sexual immorality, another example of self-indulgence.
5. Not telling the truth.

By choosing to live through the “Middle Way,” Buddhists hope to achieve “nirvana,” a version of “moksha” that encompasses a state of inner peace and wisdom (Buddhism, 2017). Additionally, there are other offshoots of Hinduism, such as Sikhism and Jainism, that are virtually similar in nature to the former and Buddhism (Hinduism, 2017).

In researching how religion is studied, Nazerian writes about the utilization of Platonic Idealism in understanding where belief systems are actually coming from. One of the most famous examples of Platonic/Socratic thought is the “Allegory of the Cave”: a handful of prisoners have been chained to a wall in a cave for most, if not all of their lives. A lit fire then casts shadows on the cave walls directly in front of them, to which the prisoners come up with their own realities for what the shadows could be, despite not ever being able to see what the shadows really are. If a prisoner is able to break free of the chains and become face to face with true reality, then they are able to perceive the world through a clearer lens, but at the same time, they are now tasked with convincing the prisoners that are still chained up that their realities are only an illusion compared to what is outside of the cave (Nazerian, 2021). This allegory can be used to explain the rationale behind monotheistic religion, in which the cave represents the “darkness of sin” and the prisoners’ reality is shaped by the darkness, with the “light” coming from breaking free of the darkness and walking out of the cave (The Good Life, 2020), but it can also be utilized to describe the creation of Buddhism in itself. Born into a wealthy family, Siddhartha Gautama realized that pretty much every aspect of his life, from his riches to his very existence, was all temporary, and he became dissatisfied with living a relatively easy life with wealth. Gautama subsequently relinquished his possessions and decided to live a new life of

self-discipline, traveling to gain new disciples of his ideology (Buddhism, 2017). This corresponds to the prisoner that is able to leave the cave to discover the reality of the world and is now tasked with enlightening the prisoners still in the cave (as in those who are still blinded by self-indulgence and the extremes of the world).

In essence, most of the world's religions paint human nature in a more favorable light than scientific inquiries may suggest. It does not matter whether or not a belief system believes that there is one god, two gods, several gods, or no gods at all, almost every religion acknowledges the imperfections of humans and, in turn, provides a set of varying guidelines for people to follow in order to live fulfilling lives and quell the demands of the world.

Philosophical Evidence

One of Plato's well-known students was Aristotle, who is considered to be the one of the most influential philosophers with a sizable impact on global philosophy. When referring to human nature, Aristotle expressed the notion that all humans are innately inclined to work towards contributing to "eudaimonia," which is essentially a state of happiness that could be compared to the Hindu state of "moksha" or the Buddhist state of "nirvana" (Asselin, 1987). Furthermore, Duignan talks about how Aristotle asserted in *Nicomachean Ethics* that because humans are born with an ability to reason, people should be fully able to uphold a standard of excellence as a virtue:

If the function of man is an activity of soul which follows or implies a rational principle, and if the human good is the good performance of that function, then the human good turns out to be [rational] activity of soul in accordance with virtue, or rational activity performed virtuously or excellently (Duignan, 1998).

Despite Aristotle's influence, not every philosopher succeeding him held a similar perspective. Thomas Hobbes, an English philosopher from the 17th Century, famously argued that mankind is locked in a rat race with each other, with the human condition being best defined as "solitary, poore, nasty brutish, and short." To be clearer, Hobbes claimed that humans are not the type of animals to organize themselves politically and willingly collectivize, unlike the structures and pecking orders that are curated by ants or bees; fostering a fierce sense of individualism amongst citizens is why most wars and civil disagreements break out, according to Hobbes' logic. On the other hand, during the same time period, Genevan philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau promoted the opposite of Hobbes' ideas, essentially directly reinforcing the thesis of this paper by stating that human nature is in fact benevolent. And while Rousseau did acknowledge that humans do indeed have individualistic tendencies, the philosopher made it clear that such judgements did not prevent people from serving and supporting one another (Douglass, 2019).

Moving forward a couple hundred years to the 20th Century, French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre would shock the world with his controversial views on sex, religion, and life overall. Sartre's philosophy of existentialism argued that human nature is neither inherently good or bad, as there is not a pre-created purpose for anyone's life; people have the free will to shape their lives however they want to. Existentialist thought was not supposed to be pessimistic, however, as Sartre noted that the philosophy was mainly designed to provide humans with a slew of experiences in order to find and fully appreciate the meaning of life, and not all of these experiences will be pleasant (Bhandari, n.d.). Despite speaking on the true nature of existentialism, Sartre himself was constantly involved in activism, as he supported Algeria in their war for independence against France (Bakewell, 2016). Clearly, Sartre was not afraid to stand up for certain causes and make a difference in comparison to those around him.

While not usually renowned as a philosopher, one of famed psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud's most significant works was his book called *Civilization and Its Discontents*, which largely highlighted the "primal" nature of mankind. In a similar fashion to Hobbes, Freud proclaims that living as individuals in a collective civilization is bound to create tension amongst citizens, which generates aggression between people (Freud, 1930). However, in utilizing psychological principles, Freud acknowledges that individuals have basic instincts that can be divided into three main categories:

1. Sexual instinct (eros). Eros represents the tendency toward survival through means of sexual intercourse and reproduction.
2. Death instinct (thanatos). The opposite of eros, which represents the "primal" aggression and sense of destruction that mankind holds that is mentioned in *Civilization and Its Discontents*.
3. Self-preservation instinct, which complements eros and prevents humans and animals from intentionally harming themselves (Jones, 2019).

These instincts can be coupled with the elements of Freud's psyche model (the id, ego, and superego), in which the ego acts as a realistic agent to maintain a balance between the instinctual desires of the id and hyper judgmental tendencies of the superego (Freud, 1953). It is only when the ego fails to create the balance in which Thanatos may prevail over eros and self-preservation.

Similarly to religion, philosophy seems to recognize that humanity has its hiccups, as seen with Hobbes' pessimistic perspective on individuality and Freud's analysis on Thanatos, but it also has its brighter moments, as noted with the championing of human nature by Rousseau and Sartre's existentialist views on free choice. Furthermore, with Freud's findings on the basic instincts of humans and the human psyche, it directly refutes conclusions drawn by scientific

evidence that humans are a suicidal species by acknowledging that people are driven by their own instincts to survive and procreate, ultimately prolonging the supposed end of the world further into the future.

Conclusion

In short, based on the scientific, religious, and philosophical evidence that was collected and provided in this research paper, the true nature of mankind is absolutely benign, which will result in the human race lasting for many more years to come. In terms of what the future holds for the world's human population, it may very well involve an improved understanding of one another that is levels above what it is today; immense progress has been made between the beginning of the 20th Century and the present, in terms of gender equality, standards of living, and political stability abroad, and it shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon.

In early 2020, when the Covid-19 first broke out in Wuhan, China, the world was able to see firsthand the warm-hearted nature of its people coming together in the face of adversity. According to the School of Public Health, just by staying at home and reducing driving, humans cut ultrafine particle concentration by almost 50%, which meant that the air quality around the world was the best it had been in years (McKoy, 2022). Additionally, millions of people around the United States and abroad took to the streets to protest the unjust killing of George Floyd, standing in racial solidarity with African Americans and other people of color. And despite pushback from people who were hesitant to put on a mask and/or take the Covid-19 vaccination, the world was eventually able to get back on its feet after going toe-to-toe with the virus for three years, which took the wit and dedication of millions of scientists, doctors, and hospital workers around the globe. It just goes to show that even in difficult times, humans will still find a way to get past them and continue living.

Currently, there is an on-going war happening between Russia and Ukraine, as well as conflict between Israel and Palestine. As fighting intensifies and protests grow, these conflicts have turned into humanity's next big problem to solve.

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