

Semester Two Final

by Dean Gladish

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An important concept that has been discussed throughout history is the question of whether people are inherently good, or bad, or both. This question, in light of its philosophical and religious significance, is important both to the way in which we govern ourselves and the way in which we perceive others. Firstly, we must ascertain its answer through analyzing it in its historical context. There have always been those who, in accordance with their belief that humans are inherently evil, have tried to restrict this inherent nature of humanity through the strict application of religion to all aspects of life. The Puritans, for example, believed that people are inherently evil and can only be saved through the grace of God. From a political perspective, the question of the inherent moral character of humans is important because its answer has a great impact on the policies and decisions that shape a nation. In my own perspective, I believe that people are neither inherently good nor bad. I believe that the moral character of people rests in between those extremes, and that this character can be changed through their own capacity. In order to support this belief, I contend that positive moral traits are developed through experience, that a person has the ability to choose whether to be good or evil, and that a person's moral disposition is not inherent but learned.

Throughout the course of history, societies have found that the development of human empathy is experiential. It is evident that children, because they are young, do not immediately understand the concept of love and empathy and must develop their sense of compassion through their own experiences. In an essay by the former New York Times columnist Barbara Ascher, she writes of her position regarding compassion in human beings. In the passage, she compares the current state of affairs in Manhattan to that of Dickensian London, writing that "ladies in

high-heeled shoes pick their way through poverty and madness” (Source B). After illustrating the dichotomy between the upper and lower classes in Manhattan, Ascher claims that “these are the conditions that finally give birth to empathy, the mother of compassion” (Source B). In making this statement, Ascher shows her belief that, in order to become empathetic, one must witness and identify with the adversity of others. She shows that people develop empathy when they are in close proximity with each other, and that the interactions that occur between them allow them to develop a sense of understanding for other people. In other words, empathy does not develop as effectively when people are isolated from and cannot identify with each other. In the article, Ascher additionally makes an allusion to ancient Greek tragedy, writing that its object was to “inspire empathy in the audience”. She supports the contention that compassion must be learned by showing that the ancient Greeks understood the importance of teaching compassion within a society. They believed that, through the viewing of a play, a person could learn to be empathetic by identifying with the downfall of its hero.

It is evident that people are capable of great moral growth or decay depending on their decisions. Every person can make the choice to be good or evil, and the decisions that they make reveal their moral constitution. In the autobiography of Frederick Douglass, he relates the remarkable change in character that took place in his mistress during the time in which he lived with his master’s family. He states that his mistress was a “kind and tenderhearted woman” in that she had commenced in teaching him how to read and write. He writes of her empathetic nature, stating that there was “no sorrow or suffering for which she had not a tear” (Source A). He then describes how her tender heart was changed into stone when she took up the office of a slaveholder. He writes that under the influence of slavery, she ceased to instruct him and “finally became even more violent in her opposition than her husband himself” (Source A). Frederick

Douglass' observation of his mistress' transformation from kindness to violence demonstrates the role to which a person can change as a result of their fulfilling their expectations. Douglass effectively shows that his mistress changed greatly, and that a person's expression of morality has the potential to change greatly.

Many philosophers and religious leaders have realized that a person can be taught to be good or evil. For example, in Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter*, which is set in seventeenth-century Puritan Boston, he describes the implications of this aspect of humanity. In the passage, he portrays the Puritans' argument regarding their decision to divest Hester of her guardianship of her illegitimate daughter, Pearl. He writes that, in the context of Pearl being of supposed demon origin, that "these good people not unreasonably argued that a Christian interest in the mother's soul required them to remove such a stumbling-block from her path" (Source D). This statement shows Hawthorne's observation that, in attempting to remove Pearl from the guardianship of Hester, the Puritans believed that they were simply aiding Hester's moral improvement. Although the Puritans believed that a person could be inherently evil based on the circumstances of their birth, they also believed that most people could be saved through the exactment of strict punishment. In pursuing this subject, Hawthorne additionally writes that if the child were "really capable of moral and religious growth, and possessed the elements of ultimate salvation, then, surely it would enjoy all the fairer prospect of these advantages by being transferred to wiser and better guardianship than Hester Prynne's" (Source D). Essentially, Hawthorne shows that the religious leadership and governance of the time wholly believed that if a person "possessed the elements of ultimate salvation" (Source D), they could be saved through wise guardianship.

I believe that the answer to the question of the moral character of human beings is that a person is typically not entirely good or evil. I contend that a person develops their character through the experiences that they have throughout their lives. People are always changing, and as such we can only assume that whatever their inherent tendencies may be, they do not remain the same. The answer to the question is that a person's moral constitution is learned. This truth, coupled with the fact that each person has some level of autonomy in making their own decisions, means that there exists a potential for improvement within every society.

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GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

94/100

PAGE 1

PAGE 2

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PAGE 4

EXPOSITION (20%)

0 / 5

The text sets up a story by introducing the event/conflict, characters and setting.

EXCEPTIONAL (5)	The text creatively engages the reader by setting out a well-developed conflict, situation, or observation. The text establishes one or multiple points of view and introduces a narrator and/or complex characters.
SKILLED (4)	The text engages and orients the reader by setting out a conflict, situation, or observation. It establishes one or multiple points of view and introduces a narrator and/or well-developed characters.
PROFICIENT (3)	The text orients the reader by setting out a conflict, situation, or observation. It establishes one point of view and introduces a narrator and/or developed characters.
DEVELOPING (2)	The text provides a setting with a vague conflict, situation, or observation with an unclear point of view. It introduces a narrator and/or underdeveloped characters.
INADEQUATE (1)	The text provides a setting that is unclear with a vague conflict, situation, or observation. It has an unclear point of view and underdeveloped narrator and/or characters.

DEVELOPMENT (20%)

0 / 5

The story is developed using dialogue, pacing, description, reflection and multiple plot lines.

EXCEPTIONAL (5)	The text demonstrates sophisticated narrative techniques, such as engaging dialogue, artistic pacing, vivid description, complex reflection, and multiple plot lines to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
SKILLED (4)	The text demonstrates deliberate use of narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
PROFICIENT (3)	The text uses narrative techniques, such as dialogue, description, reflection, that illustrate events and/or characters.
DEVELOPING (2)	The text uses some narrative techniques, such as dialogue or description that merely retells events and/or experiences.
INADEQUATE (1)	The text lacks narrative techniques and merely retells events and/or experiences.

ORGANIZATION (20%)

0 / 5

The text follows a logical sequence of events.

EXCEPTIONAL (5)	The text creates a seamless progression of experiences or events using multiple techniques--such as chronology, flashback, foreshadowing, suspense, etc.--to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.
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SKILLED (4)	The text creates a smooth progression of experiences or events using a variety of techniques--such as chronology, flashback, foreshadowing, suspense, etc.--to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.
PROFICIENT (3)	The text creates a logical progression of experiences or events using some techniques--such as chronology, flashback, foreshadowing, suspense, etc.--to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.
DEVELOPING (2)	The text creates a sequence or progression of experiences or events.
INADEQUATE (1)	The text lacks a sequence or progression of experiences or events or presents an illogical sequence of events.

STYLE (20%)

0 / 5

The text uses sensory language and details to create a vivid picture of the events, setting, and characters.

EXCEPTIONAL (5)	The text uses eloquent words and phrases, showing details and rich sensory language and mood to convey a realistic picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.
SKILLED (4)	The text uses precise words and phrases, showing details and controlled sensory language and mood to convey a realistic picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.
PROFICIENT (3)	The text uses words and phrases, telling details and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.
DEVELOPING (2)	The text uses words and phrases and telling details to convey experiences, events, settings, and/or characters.
INADEQUATE (1)	The text merely tells about experiences, events, settings, and/or characters.

CONCLUSION (20%)

0 / 5

The text provides a conclusion that follows from the course of the narrative. The conclusion provides a reflection on or resolution of the events.

EXCEPTIONAL (5)	The text moves to a conclusion that artfully follows from and thoughtfully reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.
SKILLED (4)	The text builds to a conclusion that logically follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.
PROFICIENT (3)	The text provides a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.
DEVELOPING (2)	The text provides a conclusion that follows from what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.
INADEQUATE	The text may provide a conclusion to the events of the narrative.

