

Name: _____
Period: _____

THE NATURE OF MAN

Purpose: The purpose of this assignment is to introduce a key moral question to class discussion.

Method: You will achieve this purpose by considering the Nature of Man and the philosophies of St. Augustine of Hippo and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Details: This assignment is due at the beginning of the next class and is worth a total of 25-points.

EVIL: Inherent or Learned?

Most philosophers agree that ours is a universe comprised of good and evil; most philosophers also agree that humankind, though not entirely evil, is not entirely good. Furthermore, whatever your religious preference might be, we must consider the idea of sin as a part of what makes us evil. Therefore, a persistent question throughout human history has been:

At what point do humans first become evil or encounter sin?

This question has come to be known as that of the Nature of Man, and the debate it inspires persists in art, literature, philosophy, and even science and mathematics. The works we read this year will encourage you to draw your own conclusions as to the Nature of Man, to make connections to the modern world, and to consider your own place in society.

Below are excerpts from two of the most influential philosophers of the Western world: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and St. Augustine of Hippo. Read them carefully and thoughtfully.

ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

"The Doctrine of Original Sin"

St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) was an early leader of the Christian church in Northern Africa, and is considered the first great Christian philosopher. He applied the reasoning of the Greek philosophers to questions raised by Christianity. He sought to reconcile Platonic thought and Christian dogma: reason and faith.

St. Augustine proposed the "Doctrine of Original Sin," which states that sin literally passes from a parent to a child like any other inherited trait. He argued that sin passed to all humankind directly from Adam and Eve, the first humans to sin; thus every human being is born with evil tendencies and desires. If you disagree with his history, consider the idea of being born tainted due to biological traits.

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU
"The Noble Savage"

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was a French philosopher during the Enlightenment, a time in which European thinkers were rediscovering the ideas of the Classical Age. These philosophers applied reason to questions of faith, truth, justice, and equality.

Rousseau addressed the Nature of Man in his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality Among Men* (1755): "Man in his natural state was born essentially good and free of all prejudices (i.e. sin)..." He theorized that individuals become evil and sin during their lifetimes chiefly through the influence of social institutions such as private property, commerce, science, and agriculture. These institutions restrain and corrupt humans' natural tendency toward goodness.

REACTION

After reading and considering these ideas, write a thorough **paragraph** expressing your reaction below. With whom do you most agree? Why? Be sure to discuss each philosopher by name. Also, use a real-life example—from your observations and experiences—to support your reaction.