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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BELIEFS IN HUMAN NATURE AND POLITICAL
IDEOLOGY

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A capstone project submitted for graduation with University Honors

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ABSTRACT

This emerging research study seeks to discover a relationship between an individual's political ideology and their belief in human nature. The way in which humans communicate depends upon the individual's belief of human nature. If one is more inclined to believe humans are good, then that individual is more open to connecting with the world. Understanding that political ideology can affect one's beliefs on human nature, and potentially their interactions with the world, is a significant reason to investigate the possibility. There has always been an assumption in policy development that certain political ideologies prefer certain policies; this study aims to answer why that is from the moral philosophical perspective. Human nature in this study will primarily refer to the moral compass of humans and whether a human is born with that tool. The study will also utilize the liberal versus conservative scale as a comparison of political ideologies. I designed and distributed a survey targeting the public's beliefs on human nature and their political views. I predict that those who are liberal will tend to believe humans are more inherently good and those who identify with conservatism tend to believe humans are inherently bad. It closely fits with the definition of liberalism and conservatism that human nature is inherently good and bad, respectively. It is my belief that the generated research results should be more specific to policy analysis and development. If the hypothesis is found to be true, the study can be applied to future voting patterns and political marketing.

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INTRODUCTION

Are humans good or bad? This question was first posed to me while studying in a moral philosophy course for the first time. After reviewing various works from Mengzi, Xunzi, Goldhagen and Staub, and more philosophers, by the end of the course, I was more convinced that humans were bad. However, hearing my mother's reply is truly what sparked an interesting debate. She had told me 'Of course humans were good, there cannot be another way. Society would fall if humans were bad'. Although she has since changed her mind, at the time, I wondered why we had come to different conclusions. Some of the more obvious differences between us was age, experience and political ideology; my mother is what would be described as a conservative thinker, while I am more liberal.

The more I thought of our contrasting views, the more curious I became on human nature and what it could lead to. Are we able to determine behavior or attitudes based on our beliefs of human nature? What if such a relationship exists between the beliefs of human nature and political ideology? I felt more and more compelled to discover if this link existed after my conversation with my mother because our political ideologies clashed with our beliefs on human nature. I also became curious whether ordinary people in our culture are more inclined toward one view or the other. As it will later be discussed, those who lean to liberalism, such as myself, should feel more inclined to say that human nature is good because of the human ability to change. On the other hand, those who are more conservative would be more inclined to say human nature is bad and in need of punishment or an overarching authority.

A significant portion of the paper is first dedicated to describing different theories of human nature from philosophers, followed by a discovery into modern political ideology, and lastly, a discussion of any overlapping factors that may affect either of these beliefs. As far as I

am aware, there has not been a research paper on this topic before and as such, there lacks previous journals and data that could have shone light on this topic. Due to the lack of research, this question must first be thoroughly investigated through historical and philosophical literature. If the relationship between political ideology and human nature is found to be real (that is to say, if it does exist), the study holds potential significance in the realms of voting and marketing. The results can be applied to predict or suggest future voting patterns or help in political marketing, such as promoting a local proposition or candidate. Additionally, this paper seeks to expand research into the realm of moral philosophy, as well as discovering more study on the attitudes of human nature.

LITERATURE & BACKGROUND

Theories of Human Nature

The ancient Chinese philosopher Mengzi believes that human nature is what makes humans distinctly human¹. However, as it is discussed, Mengzi does not explicitly state that humans are born good or bad; simply that we have been born with the tools to be good. For one thing, the human ability to feel sympathy is one reason humans are good. For example, one who walks by a child about to fall in the well would be “filled with alarm, distress, pity and compassion”². Our ability to feel for others is what makes us capable of good deeds and what prevents us from enduring the suffering of others.

Additionally, Mengzi says that since humans have the capacity to feel, there are several emotions and states of mind that serve particular significance. They are: pity, compassion, shame, aversion, modesty, compliance, and the right and wrong states of mind. These emotions

¹ Mäkelä, “*Mencius’ Theory of Human Nature*”, 10.

² Theodore & Bloom, “*Sources of Chinese tradition*” 2

combined create the beginnings of the natural human virtues. Pity and compassion create benevolence; Shame and aversion give rise to righteousness; Modesty and compliance create propriety; And finally, right and wrong mark the beginning of wisdom. Thus, “benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom are not welded to [humans] externally; we inherently have them”³. Mengzi’s emphasis on these virtues relates to the state of human nature because they are innate. The problem, he claims, is that humans need to learn to focus, reflect, and think upon these virtues in order to make the right decisions. Learning to do this, Mengzi says, shows that human nature is good. Moreover, with proper reflection and thought, humans ought to extend their virtues to similar cases in life. For example, we must feel compassion not only for our own children, but for the children of others as well. This idea of reflection also melds into another idea of human nature: goodness is within reach for all. No human is limited by any means to reach the full ‘goodness’ potential, other than their own effort to be good.

In addition, Mengzi says that cultivating virtue, rather than hate or malice, comes more naturally to humans and this is a second reason why humans are good. Mengzi’s popular sprouting-plant analogy explains this well. Like a sprouting plant, humans can grow fruitfully and gracefully, if placed in the right environment. The sprout that grows in good weather, good soil, plenty of room and is regularly weeded will grow brilliantly and reach its full potential. On the other hand, the sprout that is neglected and dying of thirst will wilt and crumble.

But what about the bad that does happen in the world and the humans that cause such chaos? How can they be good? Mengzi explains that such people “were born with good nature” but due to an unstable or even bad environment, they were not able to reflect on the natural virtues⁴.

³ Mengzi, & Van, *Mengzi*, 152

⁴ Mengzi, & Van, *Mengzi*, 152

A second ancient Chinese philosopher, Xunzi, believes human nature is what is given by Heaven, and it cannot be learned. In other words, human nature is something humans are born with. As Mengzi's counterpart, Xunzi, argues quite frequently against Mengzi's beliefs on human nature and provides his own justifications on the natural state of humans. In crude summary, Xunzi says that humans must derive good from "conscious activity"⁵. Otherwise, human nature is evil.

While Mengzi's focus was the belief that humans possess healthy virtues, Xunzi argues that humans are born with natural feelings of envy, hate, greed, and desire. By following these virtues, Xunzi says, human nature "inevitably leads to contention and strife"⁶. Xunzi also argues that the ability to learn is not sufficient to say that human nature is good because nature is what is given from "Heaven" or what humans are born with. To learn a new skill, for example, through hard practice overtime is not natural; it is a learned ability. Therefore, if humans need to learn how to be good through reflection as Mengzi says, then humans cannot be good. Xunzi expresses this idea through the ability to see or hear: you cannot teach someone to see clearly or can you teach them to hear clearly; these are natural abilities, and cannot be learned. If they could be learned, then they would not be natural.

Although humans may be born with evil intentions, Xunzi offers a path to goodness and redemption. He says that humans must seek help from a sage, a teacher or a proper model to guide them how to reject bad temptations. A teacher, Xunzi claims, can straighten out humans, just as a warped wooden board must be straightened externally as well. The board is "laid against a straightening board, steamed, and bent into shape before it can become straight"⁷. Thus,

⁵ Theodore & Bloom, "*Sources of Chinese tradition*" 2

⁶ Theodore & Bloom, "*Sources of Chinese tradition*" 2

⁷ Theodore & Bloom, "*Sources of Chinese tradition*" 2

humans possess the potential to be good, but it is not innate to us. Furthermore, Xunzi claims any human can be good. With strict practice and study, “anyone on the streets” can be good⁸.

Similarly, for humans to be good, their teacher must guide or mentor their natural intentions towards good through conscious activity, that is through awareness of their actions. Additionally, Xunzi goes further to say human nature necessitates the teacher. In other words, if humans were good, there would be no need for the wise sages and teachers. Humans would be able to be good without guidance. However, Xunzi states, this is not the case. Without the proper model, humans will be “deviant, dangerous and not correct”⁹.

In an argument against Xunzi, one may ask: what about all the good of the world and the kindness we see in strangers? Xunzi says this capacity of goodness is created through the conscious activity of the sages. In other words, the good “is not created by human nature”¹⁰. Goodness is attainable when we stop our true nature inside and look externally for help. This idea is central to Xunzi’s philosophy because humans are not capable of reaching goodness on their own; they must seek help from a teacher. In contrast, Mengzi believes that humans can become good by themselves; their own efforts to reflect inside is what can help them.

In contrast to the last two philosophers, we shall move to 18th century Europe. Jean Jacques Rousseau’s philosophical career was during the Enlightenment era, in which European thinkers dominated global influence with their theories. In his *Treatise on Education* (commonly known as *Emile*), Rousseau says that “God makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become bad...[man] will have nothing as nature made it, not even man himself”¹¹. In

⁸ Xunzi, & Hutton, *Xunzi*, 254

⁹ Xunzi, & Hutton, *Xunzi*, 258

¹⁰ Theodore & Bloom, “*Sources of Chinese tradition*” 4

¹¹ Rousseau in Lee, *Treatise on the Human Nature*, 24

comparison to his European counterpart Hobbes, Rousseau consistently claims that humans are good by nature, but society corrupts the good. Whatever has been granted to society by God, then, also becomes corrupt. This theory is often what is called the myth of the good savage¹².

Rousseau's take on human nature, however, is historically interesting because later in his life he partially alters what he initially believed. In his earlier work, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men*, Rousseau states that the natural state of humans is the uncivil state, or a state in which the savage man lives and "at first glance" the concepts of good or bad does not apply (these terms only apply in the civil state)¹³. Moral relationships do not exist in the natural state of man, but vices and virtues do; therefore, the savage man is neither good nor bad, but the savage man that resists nature the least is the most virtuous. He also continues that to reach the civil state, man is to use reason. However, Rousseau says, the civil state is what degenerates humans, and reason is to blame. Consequently, if the savage man were to enter society, he would become a degenerate. Thus, nature is good and society degenerates the good.

In his later work, *The Social Contract*, Rousseau re-evaluates his previous opinion. Now, Rousseau says the civil man is not a degenerate and the savage man is actually an animal. Furthermore, if humans were to use reason properly, then humans can be better. In his words, "by using reason properly, we can achieve the social contract"¹⁴. Unfortunately, this version of civil society can only occur within Rousseau's political theory and since our society is not based on his theory, our civil state will continue to degenerate humans. In response to his change of mind, one can argue that Rousseau may have changed to bring himself peace, to live with his own misdeeds and to "shelter himself in a comfortable myth"¹⁵.

¹² Bertram, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

¹³ Rousseau in Lee, *Treatise on the Human Nature*, 28

¹⁴ Lee, *Treatise on the Human Nature*, 31

¹⁵ George Sabine in Lee, *Treatise on the Human Nature*, 32

The last philosopher that will be investigated, Thomas Hobbes, believes humans are what we now call ‘psychological egoists’, which are individuals motivated solely by self-interest¹⁶. Whatever serves our circumstances best or whatever brings us comfort is what we prefer. Even if we show acts of altruism, they can be broken down into self-interest. Hobbes also notes that people are more than capable of making evaluative and in-depth judgements of others but commonly use impersonal terms like ‘good’ and ‘bad’ to describe their own personal preferences or states of being¹⁷. It is part of the natural human self-interest to describe ourselves in relatively neutral terms, while describing others’ in great detail because we do not want to give an incomplete or bad impression of ourselves. In this way, Hobbes’s theory of self preservation manifests itself even in everyday introductions.

Additionally, Hobbes says self-preservation and craving invites competition and divisive struggle between humans, especially if resources are scarce and highly desired. In addition to having no common authority, Hobbes’s assumed state of nature then turns to a state of war¹⁸. Despite the material needs and the desire to satisfy our cravings, interestingly, Hobbes says that although humans may be born bad, we are still able to live in a peaceful political society. This is only possible, however, through effective laws enforced by an authority, typically a government.

How should we enter and agree to have a government then? This is where Hobbes’s well known ‘social contract theory’ comes into play. The self-interested individual would give up their freedom for the protection and safety under a powerful political authority, which is better than the alternative: the chaotic state of humans. Hobbes believes that without such a power or government to watch over humans, society would collapse. The basic securities and comforts

¹⁶ Tan, *Taming Human Nature*, 21

¹⁷ Lloyd and Sreedhar, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

¹⁸ Lloyd and Sreedhar, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

that we expect in a society would disappear. However, a common argument that is brought up against Hobbes's theory of human nature is that if humans are bad, then how can a government, that is run by those bad humans, be good?

It is important to note that the difference between Hobbes and the ancient Chinese philosophers is not to change our human nature, but to change our environment; Hobbes's suggestion is to change the political environment. Altering the external conditions can also redirect the natural state to preferences that are mutually beneficial to society¹⁹. Humans' competitive nature, then, can also safely be practiced in such a society. For example, take Adam Smith's beliefs in economics: the free market is the place where any and everyone can compete.

With an introduction of the four philosophers, I will now explain why in this project the only terms to describe human nature to participants will either be 'good' or 'bad'. This is partially due to simplicity. To open up the various types of attitudes on human nature, as they are described above, would make data harder to understand and that analysis would take much longer than the given timeline for this project. Thus, there must be a sacrifice of specificity to meet the requirements of this paper.

Ideas on Political Ideology

As we move away from the beliefs on human nature, I will now briefly investigate modern ideas of political ideology. While there are many definitions to attach to liberalism, this paper will use the description and definition outlined in *The Future of Liberalism* by Alan Wolfe. Wolfe outlines the basic framework of liberalism, that its underlying philosophy is meant to emphasize individualism and centers on the individual's improvements. There is a "respect for both individualism and equality...that offers us the surest path toward both individual freedom

¹⁹ Tan, *Taming Human Nature*, 23

and a collective sense of purpose²⁰. With individualism and equality comes openness and acceptance; acceptance for change, including change within human nature, as it will later be discussed.

In addition to what liberalism implies, Wolfe also provides a broken down definition of liberalism, specifically into five parts: (1) the disposition to grow (2) sympathy for equality (3) a commitment to tolerance (4) an appreciation for openness and (5) a taste for governance²¹. The first four components can be compared to Mengzi's philosophy of human nature. For the first, Mengzi's analogy of the growing sprout can be applied: humans need a nourishing environment to grow and cultivate. The second, third and fourth components are similar to Mengzi's teachings on our capacity to sympathize with others and extend such virtues to others.

Similar to liberalism, conservatism has countless definitions. There are subcategories of conservatism, divided regionally or nationally, that also have their own slight differences. Often referred to as the father of modern conservatism, Edmund Burke's theories of conservatism first developed during the turbulent Revolutionary period in Europe, notably marked by the second French Revolution, which eventually ended in Napoleon's grab for power. In his work, *Reflections on the Revolutions in France*, Burke warned that revolutions did not function to benefit the people, but rather "devour their own children"²². Violence, Burke claimed, would always be followed by more violence in an attempt to achieve any social reform. This is not to say that Burke was not against change, however. He instead advocated for restoration of powers rather than radical reformation, and often disagreed with the philosophical thinking that came out of the Enlightenment era.

²⁰ Wolfe, *The Future of Liberalism*, 4

²¹ Wolfe, *The Future of Liberalism*, 25

²² Hitchens in Hamilton, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

This paper will use the traditional form of conservatism, typically associated with a resistance to change. A person who identifies as a conservative can be described as someone who conserves values and institutions, a “defender of the status quo”²³. Indeed, many writers still use conservatism to represent a basic attitude toward change. In the event that conservatives do promote a form of change or progress, it is usually to benefit the whole of society, in comparison to liberalism, which focuses more so on the individual. This traditional definition is most beneficial to the purposes of this paper because it clearly separates itself from liberalism and is easier to identify.

As with the terms used to describe human nature, this project will use the terms ‘liberal’ and ‘conservative’, as opposed to Democrat and Republican, or other terms. Liberal and conservative, although more broad in definition, do show a clear line between the two modes of thinking. Additionally, due to the current state of political polarization, I wanted to use terms that would elicit as little of a bias as possible. For example, right-wing/left-wing or Democrat/Republican are stronger descriptions that provoke divisiveness, albeit, ‘liberal’ and ‘conservative’ might have a similar response but weaker. Moreover, I am primarily interested in political philosophy, rather than political party identification.

Additional Background

In relation to any crossover discovered between the beliefs of human nature and political ideology, we can turn to historian James Oakes. He states that liberalism views humans as above all other social beings, but they are still subjected to social construction. Humans “were born *tabula rasa* [Latin for clean slate] and were thus the products of their upbringing”²⁴. This liberal idea is similar to what Rousseau proposes of human nature, but perhaps not nearly as detailed.

²³ Allen, "Modern Conservatism", 583

²⁴ Oakes in Wolfe, *The Future of Liberalism*, 12

Nonetheless, liberalism, according to Oakes, believes humans are shaped by their environment. Wolfe also includes his own analysis as to how liberalism views human nature. He admits that even liberals can see evil in some beings and indeed that evil has sometimes manifested itself into our political systems. However, liberals still believe that the “existence of the bad does not make it impossible to realize the good”²⁵. Clearly, because of liberalism’s standard of change, humans are open to being, even if they have done some misdeeds.

Between conservatism and human nature, conservatives often “see human nature as fixed”²⁶. Many conservatives believe that humans cannot change and cannot be reformed. Therefore, if someone has committed something bad, for example a horrible crime, they will always be lawless and consequently should be restrained, either through a form of authority or preventative policy. This also explains the conservative standard to keep the death penalty: this policy and other extreme forms of punishment, conservatives believe, is sure to deter future crimes.

In addition to discovering a relationship between the beliefs of human nature and political ideology, there are theorized factors that affect either of these attitudes; some of which were discussed in the previous sections. I believe that the factors that affect our political ideology and our beliefs on human nature are closely related. These factors are mainly dependent on two things: our current environment (or circumstances) and our childhood. This is also in line with the previously discussed philosophy theories; the environmental components of our close surroundings affect our social and political beliefs. Some of these factors include but are not limited to: religiosity, age, identifying gender, marital status, education level, etc. I believe these factors are quite relevant because they place us in a state of transformation; one could also argue

²⁵ Wolfe, *The Future of Liberalism*, 19

²⁶ Thorne in Jacobs and Carmichael, "The Political Sociology", 113

that it transforms our identity. When our identity changes or we have an addition of circumstance, humans want to benefit that change we have undergone or we want to benefit the addition of circumstance. One may ask ‘*Why should we try to benefit from the change?*’. Perhaps this is an answer Hobbes would give, but humans want to be comfortable and secure, which is why we are willing to change our opinions and beliefs; if it benefits us, we are more likely to follow through. One factor of particular interest is whether an individual is in a position to be a caregiver/guardian; specifically, motherhood. In her book *The Political Consequences of Motherhood*, author Jill Greenelee explains how motherhood can affect women’s attitudes towards policies but also affects their own self-interest²⁷. After all, a mother would vote for policies that favor her and her children. Additionally, it is well known that in relation to political ideology, the home or family life, schooling, and a social community, such as friendships, greatly influence our political beliefs. This is what is known as political socialization, how we learn about politics and develop our own opinions²⁸. Political socialization is also affected by our media consumption, but this is not a factor that has been included in the project.

Study Implications & Hypothesis

As previously stated, if the relationship between political ideology and human nature is found to be real (that is to say, if it does exist), the study holds potential significance in the realms of voting and marketing. The results can be applied to predict or suggest future voting patterns or help in political marketing, such as promoting a local proposition or candidate. Additionally, this paper seeks to expand research into the field of moral philosophy, as well as discovering more studies on the attitudes of human nature.

²⁷ Greenlee, *The Political Consequences*, 120

²⁸ Clawson and Oxley, *Public Opinion*, 69

I will also use this section to outline my hypothesis: I predict that those who are more left leaning, or what we call liberal would believe that human nature is good because liberal's definition clearly states the human capacity to achieve goodness, not to mention that it also claims humans are born from a clean slate, which underscores their innocence and purity. Contrastingly, those who are more conservative will believe that human nature is bad because conservatism does not allow room for social reform nor does it believe that human nature can change; it is fixed from when we are born.

METHODOLOGY

The methods of this project were relatively simple. A survey questionnaire was crafted on Qualtrics and the questions were based on how I might gauge the participants beliefs and attitudes on human nature and political ideology (*See Appendix*). To do so, the questionnaire was divided into three sections: A human nature block of questions, a political ideology block, and demographics.

Under the human nature block, simple questions using the Likert scale were used and had different short scenarios that could depict how the participant felt about human nature. Within the political ideology block, a majority of the questions were taken from the 2020 Annual National Elections Survey (ANES) and aimed at including a wider range of political issues from inequality to gun safety. At the end of both of the respective blocks, participants were asked on their beliefs of human nature and how they would describe their political ideology. Under human nature, for simplicity's sake, participants were only able to choose between 'inherently good' and 'inherently bad'. Similarly, with political ideology, the scale that participants could choose from was listed as liberal, leaning liberal, leaning conservative, and conservative; this was on purpose to force participants to choose a political ideology that they most resonated with. Some of the

questions within both of the blocks later had to be edited after a sample batch indicated there may be a liberal bias. After a finalized survey had determined the results could be promising, the final questionnaire from Qualtrics was distributed on Prolific, a secure research survey platform. The 200 participants were also screened to reflect that they knew English fluently, that they were located in the United States and were between the ages of 18 to 99. Prolific was chosen because the screening system on Prolific for participants was most accurate and there was a higher likelihood that their participants were of quality.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

The preliminary results suggest there is no relationship between human nature and political ideology. As displayed in Table 1.1, an overwhelming majority of people within each political ideological identity (liberal, leaning liberal, leaning conservative and conservative) believed that human nature is good. In addition, there does not seem to be any relationship between demographics and the attitudes on human nature either. For example, a majority of those that were guardians or caretakers believed that human nature is good; in fact, when comparing the demographics against the belief on human nature, all the data reported that human nature is good regardless of the demographic factors.

Moreover, there seems to be a liberal bias. There is a greater number of people that identified with answers that correlate with a liberal ideology and there was overall a greater number of people identifying themselves as liberals. Even by combining conservative leaning and conservative peoples, they make up 25% of participants. For example, in a question that asked ‘Do you favor or oppose increasing income taxes on people making one million dollars per year?’ (Table 1.2), the traditional conservative answer would be to oppose. However, even

those that identified as conservatives did not show a strong support to oppose this policy. The same trend stands with a question on background checks for gun sales (Table 1.3).

	Q32: Where...cal scale?				
	Total	Liberal	Leaning Liberal	Leaning Conservative	Conservative
Human nature is inherently bad.	45.0	15.0	17.0	9.0	4.0
Human nature is inherently good.	155.0	74.0	44.0	24.0	13.0

Table 1.1. All values are total numbers.

	Q32: Where...cal scale?				
	Total	Liberal	Leaning Liberal	Leaning Conservative	Conservative
Favor	157.0	85.0	54.0	14.0	4.0
Neither favor nor oppose	24.0	3.0	5.0	12.0	4.0
Oppose	19.0	1.0	2.0	7.0	9.0

Table 1.2. All values are total numbers.

	Q32: Where...cal scale?				
	Total	Liberal	Leaning Liberal	Leaning Conservative	Conservative
Favor	179.0	84.0	55.0	28.0	12.0
Neither favor nor oppose	13.0	5.0	5.0	2.0	1.0
Oppose	8.0	0.0	1.0	3.0	4.0

Table 1.3. All values are total numbers.

CONCLUSION

For future analysis, it would be beneficial to investigate the comparisons between the attitudes on human nature and political ideology. The results presented here are merely a first glance understanding of what the data produced. However, one reason that may explain these results is possibly due to the strongly worded question under the human nature block. As

previously stated, participants were only given two choices to closely align their beliefs on human nature: inherently good or inherently bad. It is possible that some believe that human nature is good, only until a certain point or entering a certain environment, as Rousseau states. However, since this option on human nature was missing in the survey, the attitude that they most related to was ‘inherently good’; hence, the overwhelming result that most believe human nature is good. Similarly, it would be just as important to compare the demographics collected versus the attitudes on human nature to confirm if there are certain environmental or circumstantial factors that affect our beliefs on human nature.

In relation to the items that this project lacks, there is a missing section of data analysis and the implications of this analysis. Due to the short timeline, there simply was not enough time to dedicate to analysis. Additionally, under the political ideology block of questions, there was no independent confirmation that liberals or conservatives would answer these questions in a systematically different manner. In other words, there was no measurement available to tell if the questions would be more likely to be answered as ‘liberal’ versus ‘conservative’. Not having this confirmation possibly also led to skewed results.

If this project were to be repeated, there are quite a few elements that need attention and adjustments. A larger representative sample should be taken into consideration; this project featured 200 participants, but a future project with up to 500 participants would provide more accurate and representative data. Adequately testing the questionnaire to avoid a bias would also significantly provide more accurate results. A new project should also feature more options on the beliefs of human nature to participants, so that more specific results can be collected and there might not be such a large portion of participants sacrificing what they actually believe for an option that is not available. Additionally, I believe adding a few questions on the participants’

parental upbringing could be another factor to investigate in relation to one's beliefs on human nature; an example of such a factor could be the parenting habits that were used or exhibited towards the participant as a child, such as having strict mother and lax father, or whether an authoritative versus authoritarian parenting took place. It would also be interesting to investigate a new question in relation to this topic: can our beliefs on human nature predict attitudes or behaviors, unrelated to political ideology? It is this author's hope that in the future this project can be given the proper time to fully understand the implications that the data suggest.

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Appendix: Prolific Survey Questionnaire

HUMAN NATURE BLOCK

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

1. Most people would return a lost wallet.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Somewhat agree
 - d. Somewhat disagree
 - e. Disagree
 - f. Strongly disagree
2. Most people would lie if they could gain from it.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Somewhat agree
 - d. Somewhat disagree
 - e. Disagree
 - f. Strongly disagree
3. Most people will not hesitate to help someone if they are in trouble.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Somewhat agree
 - d. Somewhat disagree
 - e. Disagree
 - f. Strongly disagree
4. Most people don't feel bad about passing by people in the street who need money.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Somewhat agree
 - d. Somewhat disagree
 - e. Disagree
 - f. Strongly disagree
5. Most people follow the standard 'forgive and forget'.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Somewhat agree
 - d. Somewhat disagree
 - e. Disagree
 - f. Strongly disagree
6. Most people behave with integrity.

- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Somewhat agree
 - d. Somewhat disagree
 - e. Disagree
 - f. Strongly disagree
7. For most people it is easier to do evil than good.
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Somewhat agree
 - d. Somewhat disagree
 - e. Disagree
 - f. Strongly disagree
8. Most people would give rather than receive.
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Somewhat agree
 - d. Somewhat disagree
 - e. Disagree
 - f. Strongly disagree
9. Most people place their own needs above others.
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Somewhat agree
 - d. Somewhat disagree
 - e. Disagree
 - f. Strongly disagree
10. Children need to be taught right from wrong through strict rules and harsh punishments.
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Somewhat agree
 - d. Somewhat disagree
 - e. Disagree
 - f. Strongly disagree
11. Most people are willing to take unfair advantage of others to make money, if they think they can get away with it.
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Somewhat agree
 - d. Somewhat disagree

- e. Disagree
- f. Strongly disagree

[Page Break]

Read each scenario and choose the option that best describes how you would act in the situation.

12. Your child has purposefully disobeyed the rules you set for them. You:
 - a. Let them live with the natural consequences that they have made.
 - b. Opt for hands-on punishment by grounding them (taking their phone/technology away and not leaving the house).
13. As you are leaving your house, your neighbor's car breaks down in their driveway as they are about to drive their child to school. You:
 - a. Let them work it out as a family.
 - b. Offer to drive your neighbor's child to school.
14. While walking in a park, you notice someone struggling to carry a box of water bottles. You:
 - a. Continue walking your path.
 - b. Help them carry their box.
15. Inside the grocery store, you wait for the person in front of you to finish their transaction. This person is \$10 short of their total. You:
 - a. Ignore it.
 - b. Pay for their groceries.
16. On your way to work, you decide to take public transportation. Once at the bus stop you see a child crying. You:
 - a. Get on the bus and do not intervene.
 - b. Miss the bus and talk to the child.

[Page Break]

17. Human nature can be defined in terms of what is characteristic or normal for most human beings. It describes the way humans are inclined to be if they mature and develop normally from when they are first born. Based on the definition given, which of the following two statements better represents your view?
 - a. Human nature is inherently bad.
 - b. Human nature is inherently good.

[Page Break]

POLITICAL IDEOLOGY BLOCK

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

18. The federal government should make sure everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
19. This country would have fewer problems if there were more emphasis on traditional family ties.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
20. More women should be elected into office.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
21. People like me don't have any say about what the government does.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
22. An increase in immigration is likely to take jobs away from people already living in America.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
23. If you are persistent and work hard, then you are sure to be successful in this country.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree

- c. Somewhat agree
- d. Somewhat disagree
- e. Disagree
- f. Strongly disagree

[Page Break]

Select if you favor or oppose the following:

- 24. Do you favor or oppose increasing income taxes on people making one million dollars per year?
 - a. Favor
 - b. Oppose
 - c. Neither favor nor oppose
- 25. Do you favor or oppose requiring background checks for gun purchases at gun shows or other private sales?
 - a. Favor
 - b. Oppose
 - c. Neither favor nor oppose
- 26. Do you favor or oppose raising the federal minimum wage?
 - a. Favor
 - b. Oppose
 - c. Neither favor nor oppose

[Page Break]

- 27. Some people believe that we should spend much less money for defense. Others feel that defense spending should be greatly increased. Where would you place yourself on this scale or haven't you thought much about this?
 - a. Greatly Increase
 - b. Increase
 - c. Decrease
 - d. Greatly Decrease
 - e. I haven't thought about it.
- 28. Do you think that people in the government waste a lot of money we pay in taxes, waste some of it, or don't waste very much of it?
 - a. The government wastes a lot.
 - b. The government wastes some.
 - c. The government wastes not very much.
- 29. Would you say that over the past year the nation's economy has gotten worse, stayed about the same, or gotten better?

- a. The economy has stayed the same.
 - b. The economy has gotten worse.
30. Which statement closely fits your view of keeping peace?
- a. Good diplomacy is the best way to ensure peace.
 - b. Military strength is the best way to ensure peace.
31. Which statement closely fits your view of the current state of the U.S economy?
- a. The economic system unfairly favors powerful interests.
 - b. The economic system is generally fair to most Americans.

[Page Break]

32. Where would you place yourself on this political scale?
- a. Liberal
 - b. Leaning Liberal
 - c. Leaning Conservative
 - d. Conservative

[Page Break]

DEMOGRAPHIC

33. Do you have any dependents?
- a. Y or N
34. Are any of the dependents children?
- a. Y or N
35. What is your marital status?
- a. Single
 - b. Married
 - c. Divorced
 - d. Widowed
36. Which of the following do you identify as:
- a. Atheist
 - b. Buddhist
 - c. Christian
 - d. Hindu
 - e. Jewish
 - f. Muslim
 - g. Other
37. How often do you engage in religious activity? Religious activity can include, but is not limited to: reading religious material, attending services, engaging in prayer, belonging to a congregation, etc.

- a. More than once a week
 - b. Once a week
 - c. Once a month
 - d. Only during major religious holidays
 - e. Never
38. What is your level of education?
- a. Less than high school diploma
 - b. High school diploma
 - c. Some college
 - d. Bachelor's
 - e. Advanced degree (Masters, PhD, MD, etc)
39. Which of the following describes your current annual household income?
- a. \$0-\$30,000
 - b. \$30,000-\$60,000
 - c. \$60,000-\$90,000
 - d. \$90,000-\$120,000
 - e. \$120,000+
40. What is your age?
- a. [Enter a numerical value]
41. What is your nationality?
- a. [Drop down menu of countries]
42. What is your race/ethnicity? (Check all that apply.)
- a. Black
 - b. White
 - c. Native American/Alaskan
 - d. East Asian/South Asian/Southeast Asian
 - e. SWANA (Southwest Asian/North African)
 - f. Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
 - g. Hispanic/Latinx
43. What is your sexual orientation?
- a. Heterosexual (straight)
 - b. Lesbian
 - c. Gay
 - d. Bisexual
 - e. Other
44. What is your gender?
- a. Man
 - b. Woman
 - c. Other: [optional specify box]