



English Discussion Topic  
Online and in-person

Is Human  
nature  
Natural?

**Warm up:**

This week's "topic promo" picture included a "Fire Department dog." Name some of the good things that dogs are now trained to do.

**Idioms & terms related to the article:** \*\*sth = something; sb = somebody.

1. aches and pains = minor discomfort in arms/legs/etc., often resulting from injury or the aging process
2. criticism = opinions that point out problems, often without caring about other people's feelings
3. resentment = a feeling of anger or bitter regret you can't let go of because you think sth was unfair
4. get rid of = to throw sth away (like trash) or otherwise eliminate it
5. human nature = a psychological idea that refers to basic ways of thinking, feeling and acting that define what it means to be *human* (vs other forms of life that act or respond within a group)
6. characteristics: typical and easy-to-recognize qualities or features (e.g., of a person, such as *talkative* and *friendly*)
7. Sb has a good heart. = Sb is a kind-hearted person
8. Sb is rotten to the core. = Sb is evil; sb doesn't have any good character qualities
9. put up a good front; put on a good front = pretend to be good, happy, successful, peaceful, calm, honest, etc. **He's angry with her, but she doesn't know it because he puts up a good front.**

**Is Human Nature Natural?**

(Hint: read this once without stopping to explain things, then read it again with explanations)

- If he can start the day without caffeine,  
If he can always be cheerful, ignoring his aches and pains,  
If he doesn't complain about his problems,  
If he can eat the same food every day and be grateful for it,  
If he can understand when his loved ones are too busy to spend time with him,  
If he can take criticism and blame without resentment,  
If he can get rid of tension without medical help,  
If he can relax without alcohol,  
If he can sleep without sleeping pills, ...  
**... then he is probably somebody's pet dog, not a human being!**

This article imagines that a *pet's* attitude (nature) is the way we want *people* to act. Unfortunately, we don't really know what a dog is thinking or how he feels. But today we'll talk about what is "natural" to people, and what "human nature" is really like.

**Questions:** (Are there any terms you want the teacher to explain?)

1. Just for fun, talk about 1-2 main differences between a pet dog's nature and a human being's nature.

2. Classmates should take turns naming characteristics of “good people” or “bad people.”
3. When we look at the world of nature (dogs fighting over food, lightning causing fire, animals killing each other...) it is easy to see that bad things are “natural”, but where do “good” things (love, compassion, honesty, joy, sacrifice) come from? You listed characteristics a moment ago; explain how/why you know if a characteristic is good or bad.
4. Do you think that human nature is mostly *good* or mostly *bad*? If people are basically *good* and have a good heart, why do we see so many protests, murders, political fights, wars, etc.? If people are mostly *bad*, or even rotten to the core, why aren't *more* people taking part in the protests/riots and/or more countries fighting each other? (Can anyone talk about “human nature” in terms of US race relations or the Russia/Ukraine conflict?)
5. The Bible indicates that people were originally created *good*, then rebelled against God and became *bad*; then Jesus came to give our natures a chance to be *good* again if we submit to God. Comment on this way of looking at the world, especially if people in your country have a different point of view.
6. When is putting up a good front a *good* thing (e.g., acting pleasant when suffering), and when is putting on a good front a *bad* thing? Explain.
7. How does watching the news influence you to think that people are basically good or basically bad? Why do you think the news media focus on the (generally bad) things they choose to report? Why don't news organizations focus on good news, such as people helping each other, volunteers, rescues, medical breakthroughs, etc.?
8. In what 1-2 areas would you like to improve your own character, and **how** can you do that? Ex: Be more patient, kind, peaceful, confident, diligent, responsible, loyal, friendly, self-controlled, loving, etc.

If time remains, discuss these quotations:

~<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” (Bible: Galatians 5:22-23)

~What pet owner, spouse or father would say “I love you but don't care how evil you are, as long as you are happy”? Some people say they want God to leave us alone, but then we are asking for *less* love, not *more*. We were not created to love God, though we can; we were created so that God could love us. (paraphrase of CS Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*)

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#### =====Lower level English exercises/questions=====

##### Respond to the article

- a. What is caffeine, and what drinks contain it?
  - b. Name something that makes you cheerful. Name sth that causes a minor pain.
  - c. What are some common things that people complain about?
  - d. Tell us sth you are grateful for? Who are you grateful to?
1. Just for fun, talk about 1-2 main differences between a pet dog's nature and a human being's nature.
  2. Classmates should take turns naming characteristics of “good people” or “bad people.” Can anyone explain why you think of those characteristics as “good” or “bad”?
  3. When we look at the world of nature (dogs fighting over food, lightning causing fire, animals killing each other...) it is easy to see that bad things are “natural”, but where do “good” things (love, compassion, honesty, joy, sacrifice) come from?
  4. The Bible indicates that people were originally created *good*, then rebelled against God and became *bad*; then Jesus came to give our natures a chance to be *good* again if we submit to God. Comment on this way of looking at the world, especially if people in your country have a different point of view.

5. Take turns giving synonyms for these character traits: patient, kind, peaceful, confident, responsible, loyal, friendly, self-controlled, loving. In what 1-2 areas would you like to improve your own character, and **how** can you do that?