

Augustine's view of human nature is deeply pessimistic – discuss

It can be seen that Augustine's view of human nature is deeply pessimistic for a number of reasons, firstly and most significantly through his belief that original sin has been passed down the generations of humanity and that we are born with it within us. This view condemns all humanity from birth to be sinful and provides no room for development. Secondly Augustine asserts we are intrinsically evil and have no control over our life and existence as there is singular pre-destination, this alongside the argument that we are driven by concupiscence contributes to the conclusion that Augustine's view is indeed deeply pessimistic. Despite this it could be argued that aspects of Augustine's theory such as undeserved Grace and the existence of heaven, insert optimistic undertones into his theory making it not completely pessimistic. Overall it can be seen that Augustine's view on human nature is deeply pessimistic the majority of the time.

The most significant reason Augustine's view of human nature can be seen as deeply pessimistic is because of the assertion that original sin is passed down through the generations. Augustine's interpretation of Genesis 3:15 argues that the original sin of Adam and Eve is passed down through the generations and that all humans inherit original sin when they are born. This is deeply pessimistic as Augustine's argument suggests that all new born babies and young children are sinful. Although it is hard to accept that all humanity is sinful regardless of action it is particularly pessimistic to assert that new born babies and young children who arguably do not have the mental capacity to understand wrong and right or have autonomy over themselves, are sinful. Not only is it pessimistic to assert the sinfulness of humanity in their most innocent stage, it is also unfair to say the humans start life with a 'negative score'. If we accept Augustine's view we accept that before we have even taken our first breath we are sinful and open to temptation, this must be questioned as a reasonable argument and is doubtlessly pessimistic. More over if we accept this theory there is no hope for humanity to develop and improve furthering the pessimism of the theory as it asserts we cannot improve ourselves. All of these reasons that stem from Augustine's teachings on original sin make it clear that his view on human nature is deeply pessimistic and relatively unfair to humanity.

Another feature of Augustine's theory on human nature that can be seen as pessimistic is his argument that we are intrinsically evil. Augustine says we will always sin no matter what. Augustine's teachings stem from his aforementioned interpretation of Genesis, setting up his teachings to be pessimistic as well. Augustine asserts that we are intrinsically evil and submissive to temptation because Adam and Eve rejected God's grace in the garden of Eden. This rejection means humans are separated from God and are therefore able to and always will be sinful 'your desire will be for your husband' Genesis 3:16. However, some may argue that making mistakes does not make you sinful and that to go as far as to say humanity are intrinsically evil is extremely pessimistic. The view held by Augustine would be strongly refuted by Jean Paul Sartre an existentialist thinker who argued we have no set human nature and that human action can better or worsen are experience of life. This view in contrast to Augustine's can be seen as much more optimistic as it places no value on the nature of humanity, which we have no control over, and asserts that human action determines us. Here Augustine belief in original sin and the teaching that humans are intrinsically evil can be seen to be deeply pessimistic in it's belief in humans especially when compared to theories such as those put forward by Sartre.

One reason that may contribute to the view that Augustine has a pessimistic view of human nature is that he argues we are driven by concupiscence. Concupiscence is to be driven by desire rather than reason which is a consequence of Adam and Eve's betrayal in the garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating from the tree of knowledge in Eden, as described across Genesis 1 and 2, they fell from Gods Grace. Augustine interprets this in such a way that he argued that when we fell from Grace our motives and desires change. He argues that in Eden we where driven by