**Born Evil?**Written for *The Journal Record,*December, 2012

Occasionally, someone will ask me if we are born predisposed toward good or evil. Is there something in our genes that naturally inclines us to behave honorably or shamefully? Or, do we learn these behaviors as we grow up?

Some valid questions and, until recently, difficult to answer. New research from Yale University’s Infant Cognitive Center (AKA:The Baby Lab) emerged this year and indicates that even babies seem to have a sense of morality. When tested, children as young as three months show a preference by reaching for “good” puppets who have demonstrated positive behavior such as sharing a toy with another puppet. They tend to reject puppets that have engaged in theft or stinginess. Also, about 81% of the babies tested demonstrated an innate sense of justice by wanting to see bad behavior punished.

That’s the good news. On the other hand, the Yale studies revealed some unflattering characteristics that have to be overcome. About 87% of the infants tested dislike those who are different from themselves. In an interview given to *60 Minutes,* Yale researcher Dr. Paul Bloom says that our instinctive bigotry requires societal and parental intervention.

To demonstrate the effectiveness of that type of intervention, Bloom backs up his findings with experiments involving older children. While younger children appear to be a bit greedy, they tend to start choosing the fair option as they develop. By ages 9 and 10, they even demonstrate self-sacrifice and generosity to others.

So what does all this mean for us as adults? Even though we are wired for positive traits such as heroism, kindness, justice and generosity, it’s important to remember that we’re also capable of some nastiness, too. As Bloom shared in the *60 Minutes* program, when we are under pressure, it is not unusual to regress to states of immaturity and selfishness.

Obviously, today’s workplace is very demanding and impossible to stay out from under pressure. However, we must be mindful of how those kinds of circumstances can transform us into obnoxious creatures. Self-awareness is key. If we take time to stop and analyze the situation, we’re more likely to resist destructive emotions and build on our inherent tendencies for fairness and compassion.

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