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## Beliefs About Human Nature as Good Versus Evil Influence Intergroup Attitudes and Values

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Beliefs About Human Nature as Good Versus Evil Influence Intergroup Attitudes and Values

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In 4 studies ( $N_s = 392, 199, 138, \text{ and } 308$ ), we address whether priming people with the idea that human nature is good (vs. evil or neither good nor evil) can lead them to see outgroups more positively. The first 3 experiments showed that priming a positive spin on human nature influenced people to see others more positively and to endorse more prosocial values. Across all 4 studies, results demonstrated that the more participants believed that human nature is good, the more they viewed a specific outgroup's nature as good, and the more they saw all people as sharing a common human identity. These studies support the idea that a positive view of human nature can aid in rehumanizing outgroup members as well as supporting general altruism (i.e. prosocial values) and cultural diversity.

**Public Significance Statement**

This study suggests that framing human nature as good leads to more positive views of human nature, which then predicts more positive intergroup attitudes. Across four studies conducted in Indonesia and the U.S., the results demonstrated that believing human nature is good can aid in rehumanizing outgroup members, as well as supporting general altruism (i.e. prosocial values) and support for cultural diversity.

**Keywords:** human nature, rehumanization, common identity, prosocial values

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IDHAMSyah EKA PUTRA conceptualized and developed the idea and design of the present research. Maggie Campbell-Obaid contributed to the development and data collection of study 2. Idhamsyah Eka Putra collected the data for study 1 and 4. Christiany Suwartono collected the data and contributed to the statistical analysis for study 3. Idhamsyah Eka Putra and Maggie Campbell-Obaid contributed to the finalization of the manuscript. All the authors approved the final manuscript for submission. The authors acknowledge no potential conflicts of interest. Study 2 was funded by the Framingham State University Psychology and Philosophy Department to Maggie Campbell-Obaid. All data are available from the authors upon request.

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No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.

—Nelson Mandela, Peace activist and political leader, 1918–2013

Nelson Mandela was incarcerated for 27 years due to his struggle to end the apartheid system in South Africa, a segregation policy between the White minority and Black majority that gave more privilege to Whites. He was released in 1990 following the end of the apartheid system in South Africa. Notably, instead of retaliating against White people, Mandela became one of the significant figures who worked for reconciliation between Whites and Blacks (Mandela, 1994; Morselli & Passini, 2010). Despite escalating tensions between Blacks and Whites (as well as among Black communities), Mandela's movement was presumably substantial in preventing mass killings of Whites in South Africa and preventing Whites from leaving South Africa (Campbell, 2013). Along with other factors, Mandela's work may have been influenced by his seemingly optimistic view of human nature, for example, his expressed belief that humans can be taught to love each other. While Mandela's legacy may be more complicated<sup>1</sup>, this remains one message he is widely known for.

Despite scientific studies showing that humanizing outgroup members is essential in building intergroup harmony (see Batson & Ahmad, 2009; Gubler, Halperin, & Hirschberger, 2015) and reducing prejudice (Putra, Holtz, Pitaloka, Kronberger, & Arbiyah, 2018), not everyone holds beliefs that lend themselves to such humanization. Thus, how can we guide people to humanizing beliefs, such as seeing others as good and kind? Unfortunately, it seems that demonizing others and supporting war is easier than seeing goodness in others and creating peace (Bilewicz & Bilewicz, 2012; Conway, Suedfeld, & Tetlock, 2001). In this paper, we explore whether or not priming the belief that human nature is good can influence more positive perceptions about outgroups and intergroup relations.

### Debates About Human Nature and How They May Impact Intergroup Relations

Halperin, Russel, Trzesniewski, Gross, and Dweck (2011) found that when participants were primed to believe that people are malleable (i.e. their behaviors are influenced by context and group leader), they were more likely to be open to reconciliation with the "enemy." However, despite this evidence that believing people are malleable may increase positive attitudes toward outgroup members, this may be a problematic approach because the malleability can once again work in the opposite direction, particularly when there is conflict.

To investigate another approach, our starting assumption is that humanizing all people in general (i.e. accepting all individuals as humans who have a common nature and characteristics) can be the first step in people being able to humanize a specific outgroup, thus promoting positive intergroup attitudes and relations. However, applying this idea may be challenging as there are many philosophical debates about human nature (see Russell, 1945).

For example, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) believed that it is human nature to be good, although this goodness can be contaminated through outside forces. We assume that promoting this idea may lead to seeing others in more positive ways. It is

reasonable to expect that a belief that humans are good and kind in general may be associated with widespread feelings of goodwill and kinship with the whole of humanity. Studies conducted by McFarland and colleagues (e.g., McFarland & Brown, 2008; McFarland, Brown, & Webb, 2013; McFarland, Webb, & Brown, 2012) have shed light on the importance of such global human identity as it relates to positive intergroup relations. For example, they show that global humanitarian concerns and international altruism are related to identification with all of humanity. When people have a sense of belonging to one human family, they tend to display "a deep caring for all human beings regardless of their race, religion, or nationality" (McFarland et al., 2013, p. 194). There is empirical evidence that when a common identity (i.e. being human) is highlighted, intergroup bias can be reduced, or intergroup boundaries can be made less salient (e.g., Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Maoz, 2004; Rosenthal & Crisp, 2006). With this in mind, Moghaddam (2012) pointed out that in order to build intergroup harmony, it is necessary to first and foremost acknowledge human similarities. Recognizing humans in general as inherently good may be one pathway to seeing people as similar.

In contrast to Rousseau's idea, Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) stated that human nature is evil because man's natural desire is to acquire power. Starting with this idea may lead to seeing others in more negative ways. Supporting this, studies have shown that people tend to dehumanize (and demonize) outgroup members, often in order to claim ingroup superiority (e.g., feeling their group is smarter, greater, kinder, more civilized, etc.; see Bilewicz & Bilewicz, 2012; Tajfel, 1982). Part of this effect is that the values of the dehumanized/demonized group are considered incompatible with ingroup values (Putra, Mashuri, & Zaduqisti, 2015; Sindic & Reicher, 2009). For example, Aryan people have seen themselves as superior and more human and viewed other groups as inferior and less human (e.g., Jewish people as rats). In addition, the belief that some people are solely evil can lead to increased support for violence and less support for nonviolence and diplomatic action (Campbell & Vollhardt, 2014). In extreme cases, dehumanizing and demonizing others may result in mass killing and genocide (e.g., Haslam, 2006; Staub, 2003).

Another philosopher, John Locke (1632–1704) argued that human nature is neither good nor evil. Locke believed that every human baby is born a "blank slate" with the potential to be good or bad. Related to this belief is the idea that there will always be both people who are viewed as primarily good, such as Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, or Mother Theresa, and people who

<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that the characterization of Mandela as a peace activist is controversial and is not without flaw (Campbell, 2013). During his struggle to end apartheid, in 1961 he co-founded Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of paramilitary members of African National Congress (ANC)—the organization that originally used nonviolence to fight for the human rights of Black and mixed-race people. During the South African transition of Apartheid, Mandela was not wholly able to control aggressive actions of ANC members (ANC was the ruling political party post-apartheid) or eliminate the frictions between ANC and the other "Black" political party IFP (Inkhata Freedom Party). There were also mass killings during the transition (for further info, see Guelke, 1993). However, many people credit Mandela with South Africa becoming a "Rainbow Nation" (the unity of multiculturalism in South Africa) and applying racial equality. Importantly, there are many critiques of this process, and racial issues remain a problem in South Africa, but this complicated discussion is beyond the scope of this paper.



are viewed as primarily bad, like Adolf Hitler, Slobodan Milosevic, or Joseph Stalin.

### Overview of the Present Studies

Based on previous research, it is likely that priming beliefs about human nature as being good, evil, or neither good nor evil may influence different intergroup attitudes. Thus, these four studies addressed one main research question: whether priming people with the idea that human nature is good can influence their views about people, specifically, seeing an outgroup in a more positive light. The first two experiments investigated whether priming the notion of human nature as a) good, b) evil, or c) neither good nor evil would affect people's views about human nature, their identification with all humanity, and how they see members of an outgroup. These experiments were conducted in Indonesia (Study 1) and in the United States (Study 2). In Study 3 (in Indonesia), we used a pre-post experiment to test whether there was a difference between before and after the participants were given the condition that human nature is good, evil, or neither strictly good nor evil. Finally in Study 4, we conducted a survey among Indonesian Muslims (i.e. majority group) to examine the relationship between beliefs about human nature, beliefs about the nature of an outgroup, and support for unity in diversity.

### Study 1: Beliefs About Human Nature as Good and Its Relationship to Human Identity, Prosocial Values, and Dehumanization

Social identity perspective (Tajfel, 1982) states that, among other things, ingroups give us a guide on how to live our lives, understand who we are, and feel we are living meaningful lives. Accordingly, people often tend to favor their ingroup and derogate outgroup members. Outgroup members may be considered as less human than the ingroup members. Such dehumanization of outgroup members is even more likely to occur in the context of intergroup conflict (Gubler et al., 2015).

A number of studies have focused on how to address this ingroup favoritism–outgroup derogation problem and the issue of dehumanization. For example, a study from Pinel et al. (2017) found that when participants saw an outgroup member as having the same subjective reactions as themselves to a given stimulus, they subsequently expressed less dehumanization of outgroup members. Another study from Gubler, Halperin, and Hirschberger (2015) focused on increasing empathy toward outgroup members by having participants read about outgroup suffering (in a context unrelated to the intergroup conflict). They found that this increased empathy facilitated willingness of ingroup members to humanize outgroup members (i.e. dehumanize them less).

In the area of preventing dehumanization and other forms of outgroup derogation, one popular approach has been to frame the ingroup and the outgroup as both belonging to a shared superordinate group. Sherif and Sherif's (1956) classic study suggested that one way to form a superordinate group is to make opposing groups work together to achieve a superordinate goal that "required the combined efforts and resources of both groups" (Sherif & Sherif, 1956, p. 318). However, the problem is that this approach has often involved the new superordinate group being created by their shared stance against a new common "enemy." So

the question becomes what kind of superordinate group can we create that does not necessitate or lend itself to the creation of another (human) enemy group? According to McFarland and colleagues (e.g., McFarland & Brown, 2008; McFarland et al., 2012), one reasonable option is to lead people to accept that all humanity is a familial superordinate group. This, then, leads to the question: Since there is evidence that identification with all humanity can help shape positive perceptions of others, what psychological factors can lead people to identify all of humanity as family? Here we propose that beliefs that human nature is good can make people more likely to view others as part of a common human family, regardless of their background.

Extending findings from McFarland (McFarland et al., 2012, 2013), Study 1 investigated the relationship between belief in human nature and identification with all humanity, and how both may predict prosocial values and outgroup dehumanization. We expected that: a) when participants were primed that human nature is good and kind (vs. evil or neither solely good nor evil), they would be more likely to view human nature as good; b) the more the participants viewed human nature as good, the more they would identify with all humanity (mediator), and the more they would endorse prosocial values (dependent variable 1/DV1) and the less they would dehumanize out group members (DV2). In Indonesia, intergroup conflicts tend to be triggered by religious differences (Putra & Wagner, 2017), so the outgroup targets were based on religious groups (Muslims and Christians).

### Method

**Participants.** Three hundred ninety-eight Muslim and Christian students from HKBP Nommensen University and University of North Sumatra in Medan, Indonesia participated in the study. Six were excluded for not responding to the dependent variable(s), with a final sample of  $n = 392$  participants (Muslims = 221, Christians = 171; Male = 209, Female = 317, and 6 did not report their gender), with ages between 16 and 25 years old ( $M = 18.95$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ).

**Procedures and measures.** Muslim and Christian participants were approached by a research assistant asking them to participate in a study. The participants were informed that the study was about human nature and society. After reading the purpose of the study, participants were asked to sign an informed form before moving to the next page. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: priming of human nature as good (i.e. Good condition;  $n = 132$ ), priming of human nature as bad/evil (i.e. Evil condition;  $n = 130$ ), or priming of human nature as neither solely good nor evil (i.e. Good/Evil condition;  $n = 130$ ) and asked to read a corresponding vignette. In the Good condition, the participants were given a Nelson Mandela quote about human nature being good and kind. In the Evil condition, the participants read about the ideas of Thomas Hobbes regarding human nature being bad/evil. In the Good/Evil condition, participants read about the ideas of John Locke regarding human nature being neither solely good nor evil. Because religion is considered as an important factor in Indonesia (Putra, 2016), we also included arguments from the text in each of the vignettes. (Vignettes and measure items can be found in the online supplemental materials.)

After the participants read the human nature vignette, they were asked to respond to a series of measures<sup>2</sup>, each item assessed on a 9-point scale. To test the effectiveness of the manipulation, 4 bipolar adjective items assessing views of human nature were developed. Here, participants were asked about their beliefs about human nature along the spectrums of Evil–Good, Negative–Positive, Hateful–Loving, and Destructive–Constructive ( $\alpha = .89$ , corrected item-total correlations ranged between .67 and .82). Following the views of human nature measure, we assessed dehumanization of outgroup members (i.e. Muslim participants responded to these items about Christians; Christians participants responded to these items about Muslims) with 10 items adapted from Haslam (2006; i.e. “You see [outgroup] as Immature, Indecent, Impolite, Uncivilized, Childish, Having no feelings, Cold, Open minded, Responsive, and Superficial”;  $\alpha = .90$ , corrected item-total correlations ranged between .30 and .82).

Adapted from McFarland et al. (2013), participants were asked about their identification with all humanity with eight items ( $\alpha = .84$ , corrected item-total correlations ranged between .45 and .70). The last measure given to participants consisted of 3 items assessing prosocial values adapted from Brambilla, Manzi, Regalia, and Verkuyten (2013). The items included “when you think about your life and your future, how important is: doing something in order to build a better society, helping those who are less fortunate, and making a contribution to your country” ( $\alpha = .83$ , corrected item-total correlations ranged between .66 and .70). Finally, participants were asked to provide some demographic information including religion (i.e. what is your religion), gender, age, education, and institution. Upon finishing, participants were debriefed and thanked.

## Results

**Preliminary analyses.** The results of independent-sample *t* tests revealed no significant gender differences on the dependent variables. Correlations between participants’ age and the dependent variables were found to be significant for age and prosocial values,  $r = -.15$ ,  $p = .003$  and for age and dehumanization,  $r = .22$ ,  $p < .001$  (see correlations between key variables in online supplemental materials for tables and figures).

**Analysis of the means.** Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showed differences among experimental conditions for views of human nature,  $F(2) = 15.70$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .08$ , Power = 1.00. Tukey post hoc tests revealed a statistically significant difference for Good versus Evil ( $M_{\text{Good}} = 7.36$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ;  $M_{\text{Evil}} = 6.40$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and Good/Evil versus Evil ( $M_{\text{Good/Evil}} = 7.05$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ,  $p = .001$ ). This indicates that participants in both the Good and Good/Evil conditions reported more positive views of human nature than did the participants in the Evil condition.

**Mediation analysis.** To assess the relationships between participant positive views of human nature, identification with all humanity, prosocial values, and dehumanization of outgroup members, mediated regression was conducted. We expected that the more people endorsed positive views of human nature (IV), the more they would identify with all humanity (Mediator), the more they would endorse prosocial values (DV1), and the less they would dehumanize out group members (DV2). In this analysis, to get a good standard error and confidence intervals (95%) of indirect effect, we decided to use the bootstrapping technique of

5,000 times resampling data (Hayes, 2013). The total effect of positive views of human nature was found to be significant and positive on prosocial values ( $b = .12$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.06, .19]) and significant and negative on dehumanization ( $b = -.09$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p = .038$ , 95% CI [-.18, -.01]). However, the effect of positive views of human nature was decreased on prosocial values ( $b = .07$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $p = .03$ , 95% CI [.01, .12]) and found to be nonsignificant on dehumanization ( $b = -.07$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p = .14$ , 95% CI [-.15, .02]) after identification with all humanity was included as a predictor ( $R_{\text{prosocial values}}^2 = .24$ ,  $< .001$ , Power = 1.00;  $R_{\text{dehumanization}}^2 = .033$ ,  $p = .001$ , Power = .98). The analysis showed that the indirect effect of positive views of human nature on prosocial values ( $b = .06$ , Boot  $SE = .02$ ,  $z = 3.59$ ,  $p < .001$ , Boot 95% CI [.03, .10]) and dehumanization ( $b = -.02$ , Boot  $SE = .01$ ,  $z = -2.31$ ,  $p = .02$ , Boot 95% CI [-.06, -.01]) through identification with all humanity was significant (see Figure 1). The findings indicate a partial indirect effect of positive views of human nature on prosocial values through identification with all humanity and a full indirect effect of positive views of human nature on dehumanization through identification with all humanity.

## Discussion

Information about human nature as good or neither good nor evil led the participants’ to report more positive views about humans. While there was no difference found between the Good and Good/Evil conditions on views of human nature, findings from mediated regression demonstrated that the more participants believed that human nature is good, the more they viewed others as part of one human family, and the more they endorsed prosocial values and humanized outgroup members.

### Study 2: The Opposite Paths of Beliefs About Human Nature as Good vs. Evil on Outgroup Members

Study 2 was designed to test a similar effect as Study 1 but in a different context. The United States was chosen for the context, as it is intended to be a secularized nation in which the state does not base its regulations and policies on religious beliefs. Despite this, there has been an increase in Islamophobia in the United States (Awan, 2010), making it a context in which to study intergroup attitudes. We focus here on how beliefs about human nature in general might impact non-Muslim U.S. citizens’ views of Muslims. Importantly, while Muslims should not be considered an “outgroup” for U.S. citizens (as these groups of course overlap), they were included as the target “outgroup” in this study as there has been much discussion about the tension between American (and, more broadly, Western in general) values and lifestyle and Muslim values and lifestyle over the past decades, as well as a linking of Muslim values with radical Islamic extremism in the minds of many Americans (e.g., see discussions in Cimino, 2005; Guterman, 2013; Rodriguez Mosquera, Khan, & Selya, 2017; Trevino, Kanso, & Nelson, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> In order to include all available data in the analysis, we used the expectation-maximization technique for data imputation on each psychological scale with missing items. Missing Completely at Random (MCAR) was performed for information for which missing data were completely random. We applied this technique in all studies except in Study 3.



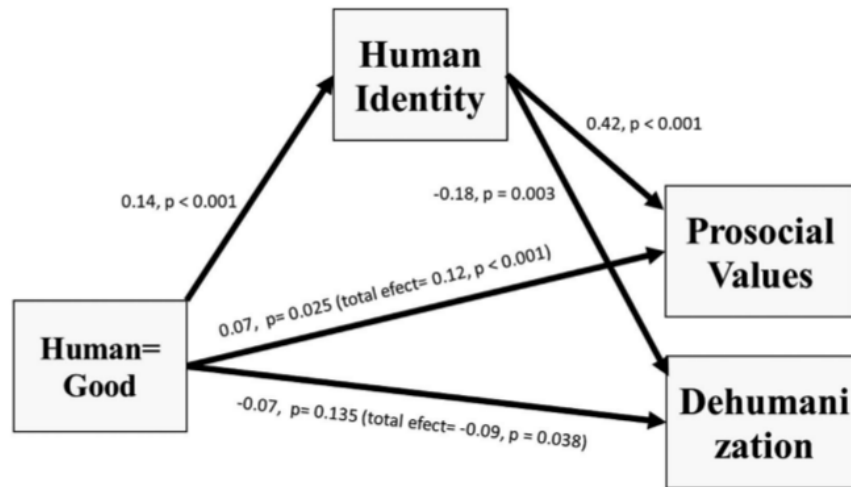


Figure 1. Findings of Mediated Regression Analysis of Study 1.

Further, in Study 2 we extended our analysis by adding additional psychological factors that may relate to beliefs about human nature and identification with all humanity. Belief in evil was included as a counterpoint to the positive views of human nature with the specification that this concept included the belief that some people are solely evil. This belief tends to be associated with more aggressive and violent attitudes toward outgroups and offenders (Campbell & Vollhardt, 2014; Webster & Saucier, 2015), so it was expected to have an opposite effect of positive views of human nature on incompatibility of U.S. and Muslim values through common human identity and the nature of Muslims as good. Thus, Study 2 examined how people's views of human nature (IV1), beliefs in evil (IV2), views about the nature of Muslims specifically (Mediator 1), and identification with all humanity (Mediator 2) act together to predict beliefs about the (in)compatibility of U.S. and Muslim values and lifestyles (DV). We predicted there would be opposite effects among IV1 compared to IV2 on other key variables.

## Method

**Participants.** A sample of 203 adults from the United States were recruited for this online study through Prolific Academic. Three participants were removed from the dataset because they identified as Muslim (and Muslims are an "outgroup" in the study measures), and one participant was removed due to not responding to a dependent variable, leaving a final sample of  $N = 199$  (Christian = 62, Agnostic = 53, Atheist = 40, No religion = 21, Muslim = 15, Other = 8; Female = 106, Male = 90). Ages of participants ranged from 18 to 71 years old ( $M = 31.88$ ,  $SD = 11.02$ , and 23 participants did not report their age).

**Procedures and measures.** Participants were all recruited online through the Prolific Academic website. Potential participants were told that they would be asked questions about their views on human nature and intergroup relations, as well as some basic information about themselves, and that they would be compensated \$1.70 for their participation. After going through an

informed consent procedure, participants were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions described in Study 1 (reading about human nature as a) Good [ $n = 68$ ], b) Evil [ $n = 69$ ], or c) both Good and Evil [ $n = 62$ ]).

Following the prime about human nature, participants responded to a series of measures in the following order. All of the items were responded to on a 1–7 scale.

Positive views of human nature were assessed with the same four items as Study 1 ( $\alpha = .90$ , corrected item-total correlations ranged between .71 and .85). Participants then responded to the same four items, this time about the nature of Muslims specifically ( $\alpha = .95$ , corrected item-total correlations ranged between .83 and .94). In both of these measures, higher scores indicated more positive views (e.g., good, positive, loving, constructive).

Participants then responded to five items assessing the belief that some people are solely evil (Campbell & Vollhardt, 2014;  $\alpha = .83$ , corrected item-total correlations ranged between .47 and .72). Next, participants responded to 15 items assessing their identification with all humanity ( $\alpha = .88$ , corrected item-total correlations ranged between 0.56 and 0.73). Adapted from Sindic and Reicher (2009), six items were used to assess incompatibility between Americans and Muslims ( $\alpha = .90$ , corrected item-total correlations ranged between .67 and .81). A sample item is "The American way of life is basically out of tune with the Muslim way of life." A sample reverse-coded item is "American and Muslim people are like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. They may differ, but they fit together well."

Finally, participants were asked to provide demographic information and were then debriefed and given a completion code to ensure they received their payment through Prolific Academic.

## Results

**Preliminary analyses.** Results of independent-samples  $t$  tests revealed no significant differences between men and women on the dependent variables of positive views of human nature, positive views of the nature of Muslims, beliefs that some people are

solely evil, or identification with all humanity. However, men ( $M = 3.34, SD = 1.32$ ) scored significantly higher on the incompatibility between Americans and Muslims measure than did women ( $M = 2.79, SD = 1.30$ ),  $t(192) = 2.95, p = .004$ . Correlations between age and the dependent variables were all nonsignificant, with the exception of age and positive views of human nature, which was a weak significant positive correlation,  $r = .20, p = .01$ .

**Analysis of the means.** ANOVA showed differences among experimental conditions on positive views of human nature,  $F(2, 196) = 4.19, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .04, \text{Power} = .74^3$ . Tukey post hoc tests revealed a significant difference for Good versus Good/Evil ( $M_{\text{Good}} = 4.84, SD = 1.18; M_{\text{Good/Evil}} = 4.25, SD = 1.08, p = .01$ ). This indicates that participants who read about the nature of humans as being good reported more positive views of human nature than those who read about the nature of humans including both good and evil. There were no significant differences between either of those conditions and the human nature as evil condition.

**Mediation analysis.** In this section we set positive views of human nature (IV1) and beliefs in evil (IV2) as predictors, Muslims' nature (M1) and identification with all humanity (M2) as mediators, and incompatibility between Americans and Muslims as the outcome (DV). Despite the correlation between positive views of human nature and incompatibility between Americans and Muslim being (marginally) significant,  $r = -.12, p = .084$  (see online supplemental materials for tables and figures), the fit indices of the model we proposed inspected through JASP (JASP Team, 2019) were saturated (please see other alternative models in online supplemental material for an alternative model), which is considered as perfect model (RMSEA = 0.00, CFI = 1.00, GFI = 1.00). Compared to two other alternative models, our proposed path model described above is considered more superior and logical (AIC = 1727.35). Here, we aimed to test views of human nature and beliefs in evil as antecedents of incompatibility between Americans and Muslims through identification with all humanity and Muslims' nature but with opposite effects, that is, positive for views of human nature but negative for beliefs in evil. In the following, we report the analysis from JASP (see Figure 2).

**Human nature as IV.** A total effect of positive views of human nature (controlled by beliefs in evil) on incompatibility between Americans and Muslims was negatively not significant ( $b = -.09, SE = .08, p = .255, 95\% \text{ CI} [-.24, .06]$ ). Interestingly, when the effect of positive views of human nature was controlled by positive views of the nature of Muslims and identification with all humanity, the effect of positive views of human nature on incompatibility between Americans and Muslims turned out to be positive and significant ( $b = .30, SE = .06, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} [.15, .44]$ ). Furthermore, the calculation of 5,000 resampling data for standard error and (95%) confidence intervals of indirect effects revealed a significant indirect effect of positive views of human nature on incompatibility between Americans and Muslims via positive views of the nature of Muslims ( $b = -.33, \text{Boot SE} = .05, 95\% \text{ Boot CI} [-.46, -.22], z = -5.92, p < .001$ ) and identification with all humanity ( $b = -.06, \text{Boot SE} = .02, 95\% \text{ Boot CI} [-.12, -.02], z = -2.61, p = .009$ ), with a total indirect effect to be significant ( $b = -.38, \text{Boot SE} = .06, 95\% \text{ Boot CI} [-.53, -.25], z = -6.29, p < .001$ ).

**Beliefs in evil as IV.** A total effect of beliefs in evil (controlled by views of human nature) on incompatibility between Americans

and Muslims (see Figure 2) was significant ( $b = .26, SE = .08, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} [.10, .41]$ ). When the effect of beliefs in evil was controlled by positive views of the nature of Muslims and identification with all humanity, the effect of beliefs in evil on incompatibility between Americans and Muslims was also significant ( $b = .13, SE = .06, p = .02, 95\% \text{ CI} [.02, .24]$ ). Furthermore, the calculation of 5,000 resampling data for standard error and (95%) confidence intervals of indirect effects revealed a marginally significant indirect effect of beliefs in evil on incompatibility between Americans and Muslims via positive views of the nature of Muslims ( $b = .09, \text{Boot SE} = .05, 95\% \text{ Boot CI} [-.01, .21], z = 1.83, p = .067$ ) and a significant indirect effect via identification with all humanity ( $b = .04, \text{Boot SE} = .02, 95\% \text{ Boot CI} [.01, .09], z = 1.98, p = .048$ ), with a total indirect effect to be significant ( $b = .13, \text{Boot SE} = .06, 95\% \text{ Boot CI} [.02, .26], z = 2.29, p = .022$ ).

## Discussion

Largely consistent with the results of Study 1, priming the notion that human nature is good once again led to more positive views about human nature. However, in this case, the participants who received the positive human nature prime were only significantly more optimistic about human nature than those who read the argument that human nature includes both good and evil. There was no difference between those who read the positive and negative human nature primes — one interpretation is that some participants who read the negative human nature prime may have had some reactance to the idea that human nature is fundamentally evil and been motivated to reaffirm a more positive view.

In general, the findings of Study 2 suggest that, compared to belief in evil, positive views of human nature may contribute as an antecedent of seeing outgroup members in a positive light and being more optimistic about the compatibility between what are often viewed as disparate cultural groups.

### Study 3: Changes in Beliefs About Human Nature Influence How Outgroup Members Are Perceived

The findings of Studies 1 and 2 showed that priming the belief in human nature as good, evil, or neither good nor evil affected people's views about human nature, which then affected their identification with a common human family and how they see outgroup members. Study 3 extended these findings by investigating changes in participant beliefs about human nature as a function of the primes through a pre-post experiment conducted in Indonesia. Further, in order to test the effect of the priming of human nature along with other psychological factors, we examined the participants' views of "human dehumanization" (whether they see all humans as less human/degraded). We expected that the manipulation would have opposite effects on views of human nature as good and views of human dehumanization: That is, in the Good condition, a positive view of human nature would be increased after the manipulation, however the level of human dehumanization would be decreased. We also investigated whether the prime would affect participants' prejudice against outgroup members and

<sup>3</sup> When we only tested the difference between the Good and Good/Evil conditions, the result was found to be significant  $F(1) = 8.71, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .06, \text{Power} = .83$ .



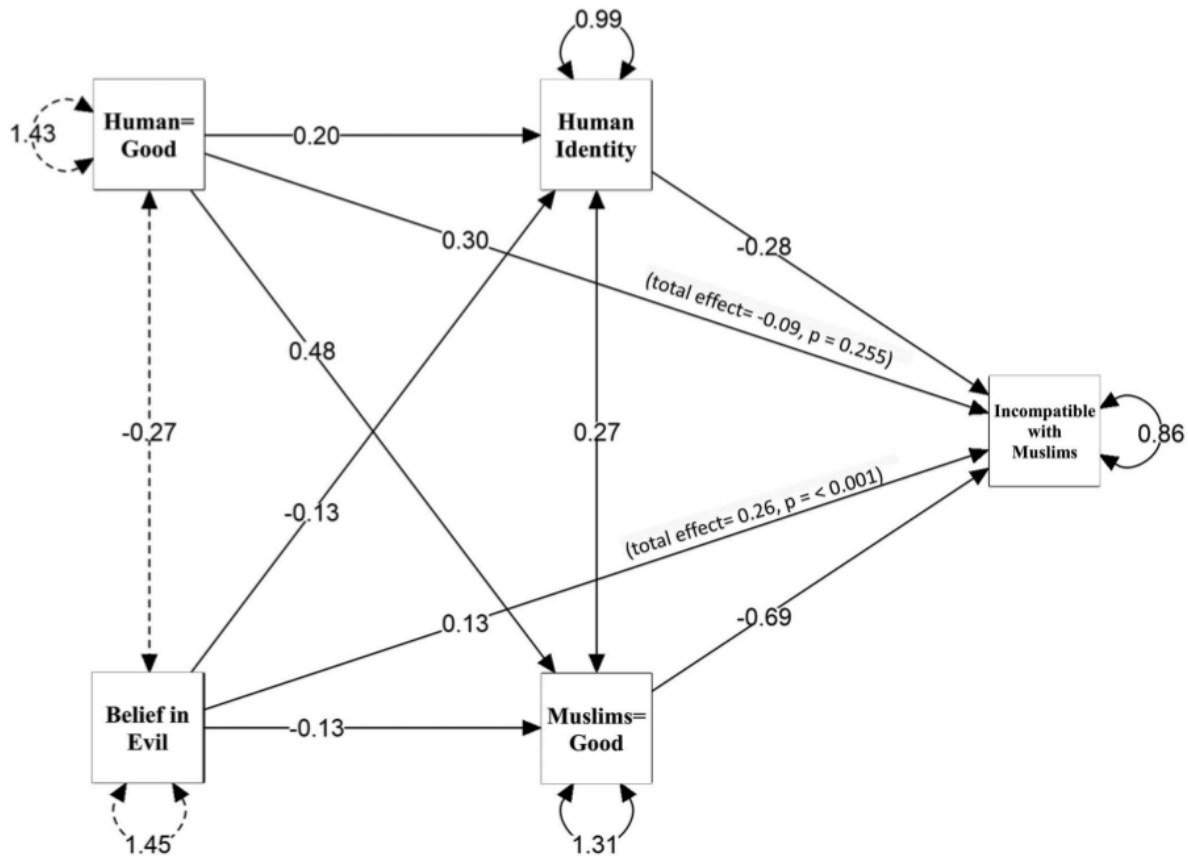


Figure 2. Path Model Analysis of Study 2. Dotted path indicates non-significant effects.

beliefs about the nature of outgroup members. Because Jewish people have been found to be a target of prejudice in Indonesia by religious people (Reid, 2010), Jewish people were set as the target outgroup.

## Method

**Participants.** One hundred ninety-one bachelor program students from Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia participated in this study. Fifty-three were excluded due to either missing dependent variables (36 participants) or responding with the wrong answer for an attention check item (17 participants). It left us with 138 participants who had completed all dependent variables (Muslims = 30, Christians = 99, Buddhists = 7, and 2) did not report their religious identification; (Female = 123, Male = 15), with ages ranging from 18 to 26 years old ( $M = 19.45$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ).

**Procedure and measures.** A research assistant visited classrooms and asked potential participants to participate in a study about human nature and other perceptions. After reading the purpose of the study, participants were asked to sign a consent form. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three previously described conditions: Good condition;  $n = 49$ , Evil condition;  $n = 45$ , or Good/Evil condition;  $n = 44$ . They were

first asked to respond to two measures on 6-point scales: four items of positive views of human nature ( $\alpha = .85$ , corrected item-total correlations ranged between .65 and .75) and nine items on "human dehumanization" (You see humans as immature, indecent, impolite, uncivilized, childish, having no feeling, cold, open minded, and superficial<sup>4</sup>;  $\alpha = .76$ , corrected item-total correlations ranged between .27 and .57). Participants were then asked to read a vignette about human nature (varied based on their condition), similar to those in Study 1.

After the participants read their assigned human nature vignette, they were asked to again respond to two items assessing positive views of human nature ( $\alpha = .92$ , corrected item-total correlations range between .76 and .84) and human dehumanization ( $\alpha = .81$ , corrected item-total correlations ranged between .31 and .66). They then responded to four items assessing their views of the nature of Jewish people, either Evil-Good, Negative-Positive, Caring-Loving, or Destructive-Constructive ( $\alpha = .91$ , corrected item-total correlations ranged between .74 and .86) and four bipolar adjective items of prej-

<sup>4</sup> One item, Responsive, was excluded as the corrected item-total correlation is less than 0.20.

udice against Jewish people (Putra, 2014;  $\alpha = .91$ , corrected item-total correlations ranged between .70 and .83). Finally, participants were asked to provide some demographic information including religion (i.e. what is your religion), gender, age, education, and institution. Participants were then debriefed and thanked.

**Preliminary analysis.** There were no correlations found between ages and all key variables, as well as no differences found between genders on all key variables.

**Analysis of the means.** To assess whether positive views of human nature, human dehumanization, and either prejudice or views of outgroup nature as good varied across the three groups, two separated split-plot ANOVAs (i.e. mixed-design ANOVAs) for positive views of human nature and human dehumanization were computed using the group conditions (Good, Evil, and Good/Evil) as a between-subjects factor and either positive views of human nature or human dehumanization (i.e. change in beliefs from Time 1 to Time 2; repeated) and by including prejudice or views of outgroup nature set in Time 3<sup>5</sup>.

Regarding positive views of human nature (see Figure 3), the results demonstrated a significant main effect of time,  $F(2, 134) = 86.03, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .56, \text{Power} = 1.00$ , as well as an interaction between time and group condition,  $F(4, 134) = 13.13, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .16, \text{power} = 1.00$ . Prejudice against Jewish people was lower in the Good condition than other conditions as there was an increase in participants' positive views of human nature ( $M_{\text{Time}1} = 4.62, SD = .81, SE = .13; M_{\text{Time}2} = 4.99, SD = .82, SE = .14; M_{\text{Prejudice}} = 2.77, SD = .67, SE = .11$ ). Again, putting positive views of the nature of Jewish people as Time 3, the results yielded a significant main effect of time,  $F(2, 134) = 10.47, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .13, \text{Power} = .99$ , as well as an interaction between time and group condition,  $F(4, 134) = 10.24, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .13, \text{Power} = .99$ . Positive views of the nature of Jewish people were higher in the Good condition than other conditions as there was an increase in participants' positive views of human nature ( $M_{\text{Time}1} = 4.62, SD = .81, SE = .13; M_{\text{Time}2} = 4.99, SD = .82, SE = .14; M_{\text{Nature of Jewish people}} = 4.44, SD = .92, SE = .13$ ).

Focusing on human dehumanization with including a prejudice set in Time 3, the results demonstrated a significant main effect of time,  $F(2, 134) = 4.26, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .06, \text{Power} = .75$ , as well as an interaction between time and group condition,  $F(4, 134) = 9.36, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .12, \text{Power} = .98$ . Prejudice against Jewish people was lower in the Good condition than other conditions as there was a decrease in participants' human dehumanization ( $M_{\text{Time}1} = 2.83, SD = 0.63, SE = .09; M_{\text{Time}2} = 2.67, SD = .72, SE = .10; M_{\text{Prejudice}} = 2.77, SD = .67, SE = .11$ ). Again, by putting positive views of the nature of Jewish people in Time 3, the results showed a significant main effect of time,  $F(2, 134) = 2.15, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .52, \text{Power} = 1.00$ , as well as an interaction between time and group condition,  $F(4, 134) = 10.44, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .51, \text{Power} = .99$ . Positive views of the nature of Jewish people was higher in the Good condition than other conditions as there was a decrease in participants' human dehumanization ( $M_{\text{Time}1} = 2.83, SD = .63, SE = .09; M_{\text{Time}2} = 2.67, SD = .72, SE = .10; M_{\text{Nature of Jewish people}} = 4.44, SD = .92, SE = .13$ ).

## Discussion

Studies 1 and 2 showed differences among group conditions of Good, Good/Evil, and Evil on participants own views of human nature as good. Study 3 strengthens these findings by showing evidence that the human nature prime influenced participants to alter their views about human nature. The findings of Study 3 also indicated that an increase versus a decrease in positive views of human nature might influence how much people perceive other groups as human.

### Study 4: The Relationships Between Beliefs About Human Nature, Humanizing Outgroup Members, and Support for Cultural Diversity

To check the consistency of these findings, Study 4 was conducted through a survey of Indonesian (indigenous) Muslims to examine the relationship between positive views of human nature, positive views of the outgroup, and support for unity in diversity. Indonesia, which consists of five large islands (i.e. Sumatera, Kalimantan, West Papua, Sulawesi, and Java) and thousands of smaller islands, has natives representing majority of the population. People who recognize other ethnicities, cultures, and religions as part of Indonesia are considered to support unity in diversity. This is similar to how Europeans or Americans see others as part of their common identity (i.e. as Europeans or Americans), despite other cultural differences in these groups. We sampled majority Muslims and included non-Muslim Chinese people as the target outgroup, as they have frequently been targets of prejudice and labeled as the "other" (Putra, 2016). Given the rationale above, we expected that the more participants believed that human nature is good, the more they would see the nature of outgroup members as good, and the more they would endorse unity in diversity.

## Method

**Participants.** Three hundred sixteen Muslims living in Jakarta, Indonesia, participated in the study. Eight were excluded for missing dependent variable data, leaving 308 participants (Male = 92 and Female = 216), with ages between 17 and 56 years old ( $M = 22.70, SD = 7.45$ ).

**Procedures and measures.** Muslims living in the greater Jakarta area were approached by a research assistant asking them

<sup>5</sup> Previously we also assess only Time 1 and Time 2 with two separated split-plot ANOVAs. We found a significant main effect of time on positive views of human nature ( $F(1, 135) = 4.94, p = .028, \eta_p^2 = 0.03$ ) as well as a significant interaction between the group conditions and the repeated participants' positive views of human nature ( $F(2, 135) = 22.05, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.25$ ). A Tukey post hoc test revealed a statistically significant difference for the Good vs. Evil Condition ( $p < .001$ ), marginally significant for Good vs. Good/Evil ( $p = .054$ ) but not Good/Evil vs. Evil ( $p = .22$ ). When an dehumanization was included as the repeated factor, we also found that the main effect of Dehumanization was significant ( $F(1, 135) = 6.87, p = .010, \eta_p^2 = .05$ ), as well as a significant interaction of Group Condition vs. repeated factor ( $F(2, 135) = 19.63, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .22$ ). However, a Tukey post hoc test showed only a statistically marginally significant difference for the Good vs. Evil condition, ( $p = .06$ ), whereas others were non-significant (i.e. Evil vs. Good/Evil Condition ( $p = .47$ ) and Good vs. Good/Evil ( $p = .52$ )).

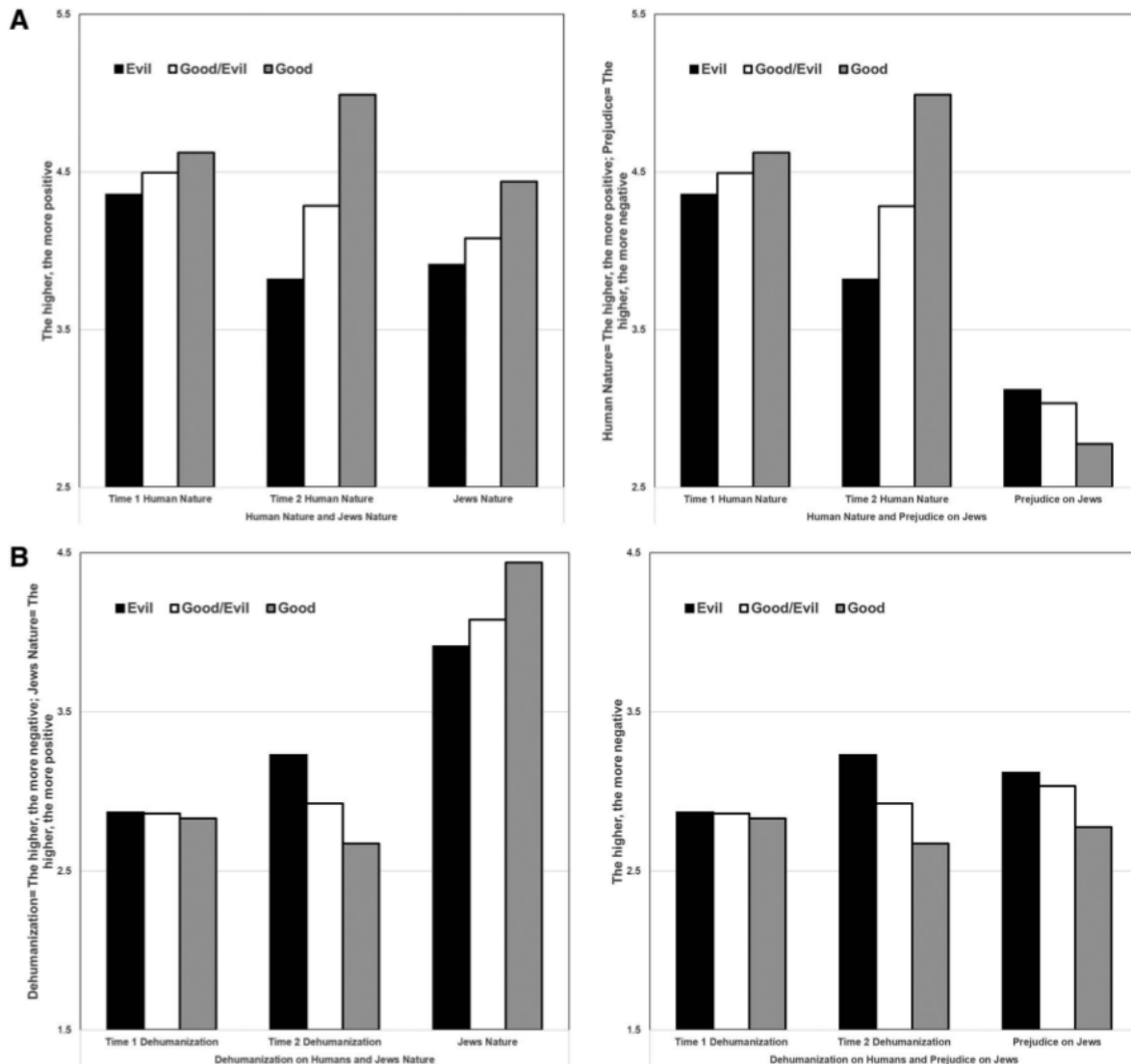


Figure 3. Comparisons of Pre-post test on Views of Humans with Prejudice on Jews and the Nature of Jews (A) and Dehumanization on Humans with Prejudice on Jews and the Nature of Jews (B).

to participate (30) study about cognitive styles, humanity, and (19) al identity. After reading the purpose of the study, participants were asked to sign a consent form before moving to the next page. They then responded (24) to four items assessing positive views of human nature ( $\alpha = .88$ , corrected item-total correlations ranged between .70 and .79), positive views of the nature of non-Muslim Indonesian Chinese people (i.e. Indonesian Chinese;  $\alpha = .90$ , corrected item-total correlations ranged between .73 and .82), and five items assessing endorsement of unity in diversity adapted from Meinarno (2018) and Moghaddam's (2012) idea of omniculturalism (see details (15) items in the online supplemental materials for all measures;  $\alpha = .87$ , corrected item-total correlations ranged between .58 and .79). Finally, partici-

(2) nts were asked to provide some demographic information including religion, gender, age, education, and institution. Upon finishing, participants were debriefed and thanked.

## Results

**Preliminary analysis.** The results of independent-sample *t* tests revealed no significant gender differences on the outcome variables. Moreover, correlations between participants' age and the outcome variables were all nonsignificant, except for a weak positive correlation between age and positive views of human nature,  $r = .29, p < .001$ .



**Mediation analysis.** To assess effects of positive views of human nature on unity in diversity through positive views of the nature of Chinese people, we ran a mediated regression analysis. We expected that the more people endorsed positive views of human nature (IV), the more positive their views of the nature of Chinese people would be, and the more they would endorse unity in diversity. In this analysis, to get good standard error and confidence intervals (95%) of indirect effect, we decided to use bootstrapping technique of 5,000 times resampling data. As seen in Figure 4, the total effect of positive views of human nature was found to be positively significant on unity in diversity ( $b = .16$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.08, .23]). However, the direct effect of positive views of human nature was not significant on unity in diversity ( $b = .07$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p = .096$ , 95% CI [-.01, .16]) after including positive views of the nature of Chinese people as a predictor ( $R^2 = .09$ ;  $p < .001$ , Power = 1.00.). The analysis showed that the indirect effect of positive views of human nature on unity in diversity through views of the nature of Chinese people was significant ( $b = .08$ , Boot  $SE = .04$ ,  $z = 3.36$ ,  $p = .001$ , Boot 95% CI [.04, .15]).

## Discussion

As expected, the findings of Study 4 showed that the more Muslim participants believed that human nature is good, the more they viewed the nature of outgroup members (non-Muslim Chinese people) as good, and then the more they supported unity in diversity. This finding is in line with the previous studies.

### General Discussion

To summarize the findings, in the first two experiments, participants tended to view human nature as more positive (i.e. naturally good) when they were exposed to the argument that human nature is good than when they were exposed to the other conditions. The results also showed that the more participants believed that human nature is good, the more they identified with all humanity, the more they saw outgroup members as human (i.e. less outgroup dehumanization in Study 1), and the more they considered outgroup values as compatible with ingroup values (Study 2). In Study 2, the effects were found to be in opposite directions when

participants viewed (some) humans as solely evil. Study 3 supported the findings of Studies 1 and 2 by showing that priming ideas about human nature influenced views about human nature; specifically, participants in the Good condition subsequently expressed an increase in viewing human nature as good. The findings of Study 3 also indicated that an increase in viewing human nature as good led people to see an outgroup more positively. Study 4 demonstrated that the more Muslim participants believed that human nature is good, the more they saw outgroup members as good, and the more they supported cultural diversity as part of unity.

The findings of the present studies may provide insight on how to tackle outgroup derogation (Tajfel, 1982), dehumanization (Haslam, 2006), and prejudice (Putra & Wagner, 2017). In order to rehumanize outgroup members (Gubler, Halperin, & Hirschberger, 2015; Putra et al., 2018), we might first try to rehumanize humanity itself, that is, by accepting all individuals as humans who have a common nature of good characteristics. In our studies, just briefly highlighting arguments for human nature being good (from philosophers and/or sacred texts) and showing evidence there are always good people (like Mandela, Gandhi, and Mother Theresa) influenced participants to see humans in general more positively, which can result in seeing members of specific, often adversarial, outgroups more positively as well.

Further, despite the differences in views of human nature scores among three experimental groups (i.e. evil, good, and good/evil), overall, participants indicated fairly positive views of human nature (i.e. higher than the midpoint). This finding is promising evidence that guiding people to accept that all individuals have similar inborn characteristics may not be that difficult, at least in some contexts. The findings also suggest that to develop intergroup harmony, it is better to start with human commonalities (Moghaddam, 2012) instead of intergroup relations/differences. Starting with intergroup differences it may lead to ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation.

A study conducted by Keller and Pfattheicher (2013) showed that the same person may engage with compassion and hostility at the same time. For example, ingroup members usually will care a great deal about what happens their fellow ingroup members (e.g., if they are in need, they will try to help them), whereas at the same

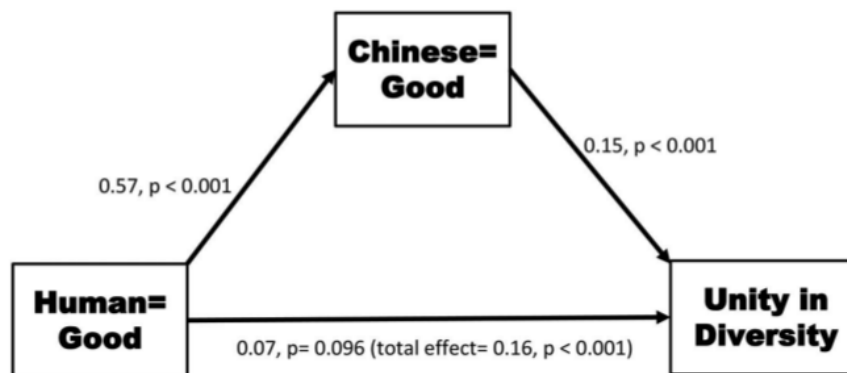


Figure 4. Findings of Mediated Regression Analysis of Study 4.

time they may express contempt toward others who are considered a threat (taken to an extreme, an outgroup member viewed as dangerous could even be killed). Other examples of the compassion–hostility paradox can be found with religious people (Allport, 1954), who may sometimes love one another but at the same time may also express hate toward certain groups (e.g., Muslims or Christians toward Jews). It is very likely that such compassion–hostility engagement in a person is an effect of how ingroup favoritism versus outgroup derogation can socialize people to relate to ingroup and outgroup members in specific ways. We argue that it may be possible to mitigate some of the effects by explaining that all individuals are born the same, that is, good and kind. The findings of the present studies showed that people who believe that human nature is good tend to support (general) prosocial values, appreciation of differences (i.e. unity in diversity), and being less prejudiced toward outgroup members. However, further study is needed to justify our argument by testing compassion, hostility, and views of human nature toward outgroups in the same study. Further, our studies only examined support of prosocial values in general way (i.e. to make a contribution in society), so future research should test whether having views of human nature as good can influence people in helping specific others, including outgroup members.

Further, the experimental manipulations were not included in the full explanatory models in Studies 1 and 2, and Study 4 was strictly a survey study. Although these findings are correlational, both Study 3 and the impact of the experimental manipulations on views of human nature in Studies 1 and 2 still point to framing human nature as good as a viable pathway for improving intergroup attitudes. Additionally, because the manipulations were only brief exposures to these ideas and still had an impact, more long term interventions focused on positive human nature may be even more helpful. In regard to the priming we developed, we acknowledge that the figures we used as examples of “good” or “bad” people may not be equally relevant for all contexts, thus choosing prominent figures within a certain societal context is suggested for future research. For instance, China has its distinct philosophical views about human nature expressed by Chinese philosophers, so it would be more appropriate to use Chinese prominent figures to support the human nature manipulation.

In sum, these studies suggest that there are pathways to rehumanizing outgroup members supporting general altruism (i.e. prosocial values) and supporting cultural diversity. One promising pathway is to help people see human nature as good and accept all individuals as humans who have a common nature of good characteristics. Of course, there may be limits to this argument (e.g., pointing out the evils humanity is responsible for, arguments that certain traits are biologically inherited or have evolved in humans, etc.), and injustices should not be ignored simply to paint a rosy view of humanity. However, we hope that this set of studies shows that focusing on the positive aspects of human nature can help to build intergroup harmony.

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