**Example Persuasive Essay**

**Prompt: What is human nature?**

Is mankind essentially good or evil? In today’s conflicted world this can be a rather difficult question to answer. First off though, what is good and evil? Good is easy to describe, good is helping someone in need and doing so just because it is the right thing to do. Evil is where things get more complicated. Is it evil to steal something or hurt someone? That depends upon a person’s motivation, which means these are bad decisions and mistakes that all humans are capable of making. Sure there are a few bad people out there who do truly horrible things, but this the minority and not all of mankind should be judged for the acts of the few. Therefore mankind is essentially good at heart. If we look all across history and all around the world as well as in literature we can see examples of people doing good things just out of natural kindness. Other may disagree and call mankind evil just because of all the bad things that go on in the world today, but they are missing the point. All of mankind is essentially born with good human nature, but we do suffer moments of weakness when we make bad decisions. This does not make mankind evil though. It makes us human.

Some people argue that mankind is evil because we must be taught to be good in order to do the right thing. However if we look through history we can see examples of people doing the right thing despite having already been taught other values. For example, during the Civil Right Movement in America blacks were tired of being treated as inferior to white people and had started protesting and going on marches. It was the general mindset of the time among white people that all blacks were beneath them. Legislation supported these beliefs; public facilities were segregated by Jim Crow Laws and Plessy v. Ferguson ruled that is was constitutional to segregated public schools. Despite all these horrible values being taught and constantly thrown in people’s faces, there were white people who protested with the blacks. For example, in 1961, thirteen civil rights activists boarded busses and traveled the South to protest segregation. Of those thirteen, seven were African American and six were white. These Freedom Riders went against society’s beliefs because they knew it was the right thing to do. Every day in America, society would have been “teaching” them that whites were superior, yet they saw through those messages and were able to realize that people need to be treated equally. Going back a little further in history, there is another example of people going against their taught values to do the right thing, and the risk this time was even greater for these people. Back during WWII in Nazi Germany there were Germans who opposed Hitler. An example of this opposition would be the White Rose, which was a group of German college students who secretly spread dissent and encouraged Germans to take back Germany from the destructive Nazis. Hans and Sophie Scholl, the leaders of the group, were actually part of Hitler Youth as children! Hitler Youth taught children that they were a superior race of people who should hate Jews and support Hitler unconditionally. Despite this, though, the college students of The White Rose knew the right thing to do and went against Hitler’s ideas. If people like the Freedom Riders and the White Rose are willing to go against their society’s values without being told to, simply because they know it is the right thing to do, then mankind must be good. Some people want to argue that man is evil because there were people who didn’t oppose racism and prejudice like The White Rose or The Freedom Riders. However, most people were just afraid of the violent consequences and being afraid doesn’t make us evil. It’s just another one of those things that makes us human.

Since fear is a thing that makes us all human, it is only natural that sometimes we act out of fear in difficult situations. However, there have been brave people who in times of great danger and mass hysteria have been willing to give their lives for the well being of others. For example, during the 9/11 terrorist attacks when the World Trade Center was crumbling, firefighters had to make a difficult choice at a moment’s notice. Fire fighters outside the buildings were told that going in to rescue people was a lost cause because the buildings could fall at any moment, killing both survivors and rescuers. However, these brave firefighters still made the choice then and there to enter the buildings in search of survivors. This wasn’t a decision they had a lot of time to make because, as they said, the towers could fall at any moment. They wouldn’t make such a difficult decision in such a short amount of time unless they knew it was the right thing to do. Many of these firefighters did lose their lives to save others, and their self sacrifice is the ultimate example of the capacity humans have for goodness. Another time people had to make a difficult decision in a short amount of time was during the sinking of the Titanic. The Titanic was a cruise ship that sank in the Atlantic after hitting an iceberg in 1912. There weren’t enough lifeboats for all the passengers, so there was a mad rush to escape the ship. There isn’t a more chaotic and hysterical time than when you have a large group of people running around for their lives. However there were people who stood out amongst all the chaos and showed true human nature. These are the people who got out of their lifeboats to let others take their places. These people knew that stepping out of their boats meant certain death, but, even in that moment of mass hysteria, people were putting the well being of others before their own. These people didn’t exactly have a lifetime to make this decision; they were on a sinking ship after all! In almost a split second, these people chose to sacrifice themselves and do the right thing. If people can make these decisions in moments of mass hysteria and chaos and put other before themselves, then mankind must be good.

In addition to taking incredible risks or making the ultimate sacrifice to help people, mankind is also capable of little acts of kindness even when it may not be convenient for them. In the book The Devil’s Arithmetic by Jane Yolen, a Jewish girl named Hannah goes back in time to a concentration camp and lives there for a few weeks. These camps were terrible places, so it would seem impossible to find any evidence of goodness there. People might even argue that the very existence of these camps is evidence that people are evil. However, the fact that people were able to be kind in the middle of such cruelty and suffering just proves that people are by nature good. When Hannah first arrived at the camp, another prisoner stole her hair ribbons. A few weeks later, her aunt Gitl, who was also in the camps, stole a blue scarf from the sorting house and gave it to Hannah for her birthday and to replace the ribbons. There was more to that gift though. It was an act of compassion to bring just a little happiness to Hannah in what was a nightmarish situation. Gitl could have gotten in a lot of trouble for taking the blue scarf. Holocaust survivor Kitty Hart worked in a sorting house at Auschwitz, and she said that the Nazis told the Jews working there they would be killed if caught taking anything. However, Gitl believed her niece’s happiness was worth such a risk. There was also a time in the camps when one of the guards gave Hannah a sausage to eat instead of the usual stale bread and watery soup. The guards in these camps were usually very cruel to the prisoners because the Nazis were so prejudiced against the Jews. However, this guard decided to do a nice thing for a poor little girl despite the fact that she was Jewish. This little act of kindness not only gave Hannah something good to eat, but it also gave her hope that there is still goodness in the world if even the guards can find some kindness in their hearts. If mankind will do these small acts of kindness despite it being inconvenient for them at the time, then mankind must be born with good intentions.

It is important to remember that mistakes do not make all of mankind evil. These mistakes are made because we are human. Despite some bad decisions and instances of cruelty, mankind is capable of doing some truly noble acts of kindness ranging from simply helping someone in need to even putting our very lives on the line to help others. If people can be kind even in the face of other’s cruelty, then man must truly be good. Even though today’s world might encourage people to forget their kindness and even though it might be tempting to believe the world is a horrible place, knowing that people can do great things and treat others with compassion should give us hope in a bright future.