

## The Creature - More Human than Monster

### **Introduction**

No dictionary definition of humanity would be sufficient to define Shelley's monster in Frankenstein. He looks inhuman, despite being made of human body parts, and he's not awarded opportunities to become a functioning member of society. The creature's story begs the question if he has human thoughts and behaviors, but no one is there to see them, is he still human? Although not easily categorized, I believe that by looking at his development and examining the effects of nature vs nurture, we can track patterns and behaviors that are reserved for the human race. Using Victor as a direct comparison of human behavior and also as the baseline for the creature's nature elements, this paper will aim to showcase that the creature can indeed be defined as human.

### **Conception and Early Characteristics**

The creature was not born, he was created, but birth alone cannot be the defining factor of humanness. Babies born from a c-section or grown from eggs in a lab were not "birthed" in a typical way but their humanness is not questioned any more than a baby pushed from a womb. Other opponents will point out that the creature was also not a baby when he obtained life. However, there is no expectation that life is human only if that life is obtained in infancy. Besides, even if there was this requirement, who is to say that the creature was not a "baby" when he was first animated? He had no preconceived understanding or knowledge. He was just as oblivious to the world and its rules as any other newborn. Because of this, we will examine what it means to be human by the factors and events that happen after birth or creation.

One of the most basic ways to understand humans is by understanding our primal needs: food, water, shelter, etc. When the creature first escapes from Victor's lab he is

catapulted into the outside world with no understanding of its rules nor an understanding of himself. He reveals “This was the forest near Ingolstadt; and here I lay by the side of a brook resting from my fatigue, until I felt tormented by hunger and thirst” (page 121). The creature manages to feel these sensations and understands what will satiate them, despite never dealing with these needs before. Much like a baby first exiting the womb, the creature’s first moments were spent making sense of the world. He was seized by the intense lights, sounds, smells, and noises around him, and as such, it took time for him to become adjusted.

These early moments could be described as a crash course in infancy and prepubescent childhood. Some significant characteristics of humans, and especially toddlers, are curiosity, adaptability, and the ability to internalize and learn from experiences. The creature’s encounter with fire during its early weeks highlights these traits:

One day, when I was oppressed by cold, I found a fire which had been left by some wandering beggars and was overcome with delight at the warmth I experienced from it. In my joy I thrust my hand into the live embers, but quickly drew it out again with a cry of pain. (page 122)

This moment is reflective of a universal experience amongst humans. We learn at a young age that certain actions have negative consequences. As an example, a parent will tell their child not to put their hand on a hot stove unless they want to get burned. The child could take this in stride and listen to their parents or they can ignore them, but it is not till that child experiences the pain of being burned themselves that they can fully comprehend what it means. From there you can be certain that the child will stay from the burning stove. It’s important to note that this moment also reveals that the creature can be harmed just as humans can and more importantly that he processes pain the same way as humans.

The creature's experience with fire introduces him to more complex ideas and thoughts about the world. Prior to this moment, the creature may have seen the world in a

black-and-white way. He comments “How strange, I thought, that the same cause should produce such opposite effects!” (page 122). Acute reasoning and rational thoughts are other characteristics often used to differentiate humans from other animals, and in this case, the creature is able to take his experience with fire and redevelop his understanding of it.

### **Nurture**

Nurture is often attributed to external factors that play a role in the foundations of who someone is and how they behave. Socialization is a major factor in this and it is through this process that humans learn how to become effective members of society. Through observation and reinforcement, humans begin the process of socialization at birth and continue to expand their understanding of it for the rest of their life. Interestingly, these initial forms of socialization stem from humans' primary groups: family, early education, religious organizations, etc, but although the creature has no familiar ties that introduce him to society or start him along this process, he manages to find ways of socialization anyways:

Every conversation with the cottagers now opened new wonders to me. While I listened to the instructions which Felix bestowed upon the Arabian, the strange system of human society was explained to me. I heard of the division of property, of immense wealth and squalid poverty; of rank, descent, and noble blood. (page 135)

By observing the cottagers, the creature is able to form an understanding of how society functions. He gains an understanding of what is valued amongst humans and therefore the moral standards that society upholds. The creature's time with the cottagers also increased his abstract reasoning abilities. He is able to observe something about the human condition that most humans don't even realize: people are greatly shaped by those around them. He comments “[...] perhaps, if my first introduction to humanity had been made by a young soldier, burning for glory and slaughter, I should have been imbued with different sensations”

(page 143). The cottagers were peaceful, caring, and valued family and knowledge, as such much of what the creature wants to be is reflective of this. But even he realizes that if he has been watching anyone else he would think very differently. This is known as “taking the role of the other” or imitation. Like a child who watches their parents get dressed and then copies their outfit choices, the creature mimics the actions of the cottagers. This becomes the foundation of how the creature functions and behaves.

Unfortunately, these factors of socialization and the creature's ability towards abstract reasoning culminate in his experience with self-consciousness: “An individual’s awareness of how others see her or him” (Sociology in Action, page 79). That awareness often stems from the reactions of others, which in the creature’s experience have been highly negative. This paired with other connections that the creature has made, specifically about his creator and his figure, leads him to question if he is indeed a monster and results in him wishing he had not “known or felt beyond the sensations of hunger, thirst, and heat!” Self-consciousness is often uniquely tied to the human experience. The creature is aware of how others view him and uses that to form an understanding of himself. Beyond this, the creature is reaffirming that he has feelings that go beyond basic animalistic instinct. In fact, this self-deprecating, doubting inner monologue is also chiefly characteristic of humans. It is my experience that humans are often preoccupied with themselves and can spiral with thoughts and questions of who they are, their origin, and how others see them. Although the creature’s life story is unlike a standard human's, the methods and results of how he acclimated to the world are highly familiar.

## **Nature**

If nurture constitutes the exterior factors that go into who a person is, nature is reflective of the interior, or biological factors. It is considerably more difficult to understand

the creature's nature elements because so much is left unanswered concerning his creation and genetic makeup. The closest tie the creature has to a relative is Victor, and although the two are not blood-related, the creature does have qualities representative of his creator. In Victor's early life he read the works of Cornelius Agrippa which would go on to shape his interest and focus for the rest of his life. Similarly, the creature reads three books, *Paradise Lost*, *Plutarch's Lives*, and the *Sorrows of Werter*, which he studied and read as though history. Both the creature and Victor have this naivety when it comes to books that allows them to read something and take it as fact. They then use it to shape the way they exist. Victor and the creature are also similar in the way actual nature or the surrounding world has effects on them. Beautiful weather has the ability to soothe or placate while bad weather can exasperate negative feelings. Most importantly isolation in nature has the same effect on Victor and the creature. It makes them cruel, obsessive, and most distinctly vengeful. In isolation both the creature and Victor think about death but as Victor reveals "revenge kept me alive; I dare not die and have my adversary in being" (page 203). The creature makes a similar statement "[...] but revenge remains - revenge henceforth dearer than light or food! I may die; but first you my tyrant and tormentor [...]" (page 176). When alone the two's thoughts always turn to one another and it ignites within them a fury that blinds them from their other possible needs or wants.

We can also examine the effect of nature through his feelings and instincts. One of the qualities that make the creature well-liked amongst readers is that he is inherently empathetic and kind. The creature states "I had been accustomed, during the night, to steal a part of their store for my own consumption; but when I found that in doing this I inflicted pain on the cottagers, I obtained [...]" (page 128). Upon learning about the cottagers' struggle with poverty and nourishment he quickly stops his habit of stealing, even though it meant less food for himself. This demonstrates his capacity for love and care.

This sweet disposition is actually extremely common among children. An article titled “Are you nicer than a child?” discussed a study that found that “children as young as 14 months will spontaneously help a person who is struggling or looks worried, even if they have to stop doing something they enjoy to do it” The article argues this attitude often diminishes as the child ages because begin to weigh the pros and cons of specific actions. Survival instinct begins to develop and people are less likely to offer help or intervene if it might have a negative effect on them. The creature is an example of this shift in a more apparent and necessary way. In one scene, the creature rushes to help a young girl who had fallen into a stream. He expels himself trying to save her life only to be shot at by someone else because of his appearance. This a recurring problem for the creature, he attempts to enter society, socialize, or even just help someone only to be deemed a monster because of his looks. As a result “the feelings of kindness and gentleness, which [he] had entertained but a few moments before, gave place to hellish rage and gnashing of teeth” (page 153). Like the children in the study, the creature does not lose his desire to connect or to help but instead has learned to think rationally and through prior experiences understands what the consequences are if he does try.

## **Conclusion**

The creature is an anomaly. Entirely singular in his creation, looks, and life, but this does not mean inhuman. Often when humans are discussed in comparison to other animals the defining difference between us and everything else is how complicated we are. Our ability towards abstract thinking, language, and feelings is what separates us from other animals. The creature is the same as us in these differences; more than that, he learns and experiences the world the same way humans do. He is a combination of the person who created him, his inherent characteristics, and the way society views him. Like humans, his

personality was not formed from a single experience but is a mixture of all the moments in his life.

### Works Cited

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