



## AP European History 2000 Student Samples

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Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud refuted the Enlightenment concepts of the perfectability of human behavior (human nature) and of the Enlightenment idea that reason drives man's every decision by proposing that humans are not perfect and that reason is not the main force behind man's decision-making process. The Enlightenment philosophes glorified man and pronounced his perfectability due to his possession of reason. Philosophes such as Rousseau taught that man's behavior and nature is perfectable, but that outside forces corrupt man so that his behavior becomes less than ideal. ~~Rousseau's Emile~~  
In Rousseau's Emile, he writes of an experiment to raise a child completely apart from corruptive forces in an effort to prove the perfectability of human behavior if only one was separated from outside influence. Clearly, then, the philosophes taught and believed that man was perfectable. The philosophes also justified man's perfectability by claiming him as the sole possessor of reason. They claimed that reason, <sup>and reason alone</sup> decided man's actions.

Charles Darwin refuted both of these assumptions in his On the Origin of Species. In this book, Darwin proposed the theory of evolution. He thus painted a picture of humans as the product of evolution and of human behavior as the result of the survival of the fittest.

Darwin's ideas challenged those of the Enlightenment by proposing that human behavior is not perfectable because it is still constantly evolving. Darwin, by comparing humans to all other organisms, also challenged the enlightenment glorification of humanity.

Darwin's theory of evolution proposed that a desire for survival was the force behind man's choices, as opposed to reason. Darwin viewed man as a creature driven by the need to survive and reproduce, not as a being governed by the lofty ideals of reason.

Sigmund Freud's ideas of the man's subconscious and its effect upon his actions also refuted the ~~previous~~ assumptions of the philosophes. ~~By proposing that~~ By theorizing that the childlike "Id" and the "Ego" governed man's behavior, Freud challenged the assumption that human behavior is perfectable. Freud believed that man's every desire was controlled by the sexual and child-like empirical needs of the Id. Thus, because human behavior was governed by sexual and childlike desires, it was not perfectable in Freud's eyes.

Freud also supplanted enlightenment assumptions about reason with the idea that reason does not govern man, that reason plays no role in his decisions. As previously

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stated, Freud ascertained that the Id and the Ego ~~governs~~ controlled man instead.

In this way, Darwin and Freud challenged the idealistic views of human nature which were entertained by the enlightenment philosophes.

Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud severely challenged Enlightenment assumptions about human behavior and the role of reason. Darwin's theory of evolution and natural selection challenged the Enlightenment view of humans as divinely created beings endowed with unique powers to reason from their observations and thoughts of the world. Similarly, Freud's development of psychiatry and the study of the workings of the mind challenged the ~~notion~~ Enlightenment notion that the conscious mind and rational thinking were the essence of man. Instead, Freud proposed that the ~~unconscious~~ subconscious mind played a significant role in human thought and action.

Enlightenment thinkers placed humans on a pedestal above the rest of nature with divine abilities to reason and empirically deduce the mysteries of their surroundings with scientific methods and observation. Darwin challenged the divine specialness of man with his theory of evolution and natural selection. Darwin's theory equated the development of man as a trial-and-error, mechanistic process of survival of the fittest and evolution from lesser beings. In this view, human

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behavior was ~~kept~~<sup>not</sup> driven by reason. Instead the instincts and actions of men, like all animals, ~~was~~<sup>is</sup> the result of millions of years of evolution. The behaviors that permitted our ancestors to competitively survive, remained within us as behavioral instincts, driving our actions.

Similarly, Freud with his theories about the significant role that the subconscious plays in human behavior, attacked the enlightenment view that only conscious reason drove the actions of men. Freud showed that human behavior could be dominated by unconscious thoughts and surpass conscious reason.