We are naturally averted to tools of violence, especially guns. **McDougle 12**

Humans are Nicer Than We Think Written by [SAM MCDOUGLE](http://motherboard.vice.com/author/SamMcDougle): Sam does science writing, studies the neural basis of motor learning, and makes music. March 8, 2012 // 05:23 PM EST <http://motherboard.vice.com/blog/humans-are-nicer-than-we-think> From Motherboard on Vice Accessed 4/2/16

While everyone’s always waxing like Lord Tennyson about nature being “red in tooth and claw,” neuroscience and psychology are quietly telling us that **we may be innately nicer than we think.** Sure, we’re not cuddly little bunny rabbits, but **many lines of evidence** over the past few decades **have pointed toward some distinctly physical underpinning of** basic morality and **aversion to violence**, implying that humans (and probably many other animals too) have a strong built-in “try-not-to-punch-that-dude” mechanism. A [recent study](http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/emo/12/1/2/) published in the journal *Emotion*, by psychologists Fiery Cushman, Allison Gaffey, Kurt Gray, and Wendy Mendes, provides some further evidence for the link, as the authors put it, “between the body and moral decision-making processes.” **This may be the first paper to have experimental subjects simulate murder with a real gun** (it’s certainly the first one I’ve ever read). Essentially, the experimenters wanted to show that it is **the physical act of potentially doing harm**, rather than the viewing or hearing about such acts, that really **turns your stomach**. Subjects performed three kinds of actions: simulating direct harm (i.e. pulling the trigger of an unloaded gun pointed at one of the scientist’s face), watching someone else simulate direct harm, and performing a neutral motor action (i.e. slicing bread). Subjects’ physical responses were measured via blood pressure and heart rate, which are known to have a central role in reactions of disgust, aversion, and stress. OK, I can’t help pasting this image from the paper below showing the harmful vs. non-harmful actions, if for no other reason than to give you a nice peek into the art of “baby smacking:”

This outweighs: a) Aversion to harm is consistent across all demographics. **McDougle 2**

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The implications of this seemingly obvious result are really interesting. The idea of **physically harming someone** right in front of you **is considered to be the most potent moral circumstance.** Sarah McLaughlin talking about dog adoption behind sappy music might make you change the channel, but kicking a stray dog in the face will seriously mess with your conscience. How about a better example. Take the following moral dilemma: A runaway trolley is about to run over and kill five people, but a bystander who is standing on a footbridge can shove a man in front of the train, saving the five people but killing the man. Is it permissible to [shove the man](http://ennuimag.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/trolley_2.jpg)? **Across cultures, genders, ages, and races, the result is** essentially **the same and** has been **replicated** countless times**: over 90% of respondents consider this act impermissible.** People just don’t want to have to do the pushing themselves. When a “lever” is added to the problem, and the person questioned can now drop the bystander onto the tracks without physically touching him, the result is flipped and 95% of people find it permissible.

b) Biological evidence proves it’s innate and empirically verifiable—this response is literally built into our emotional core. **McDougle 3**

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The results, as predicted, were that **the heart rates and blood pressures of subjects during and after** the performance of **harmful tasks were the highest by far**: “These simulated **harmful actions increased peripheral vasoconstriction** significantly more than did witnessing pretend harmful actions or to performing metabolically matched non-harmful actions," they wrote. "This suggests that the **aversion to harmful actions extends beyond empathic concern for victim harm.”**

c) Evolutionary analysis proves, which outweighs since evolution is what gave rise to our innate sentiments and effects all biological beings. **McDougle 4**

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It makes sense that this is how [basic human morality](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1364661307000496) evolved. **Our species didn’t evolve with any long range weapons** or fancy bystander-killing levers. Decisions about violence were always made face to face. And **because our species thrived from cooperation,** it’s no wonder that **we’re programmed to avoid** directly **harming others.** We’re less “red in tooth and claw,” and more “soft in hands and face.” Of course, humans commit violence all of the time and it is a central part of society. But **the fact that we take it so seriously shows how much of a psychological transgression we find it to be. Violence is, and always will be, extreme.**

This means a ban is uniquely key—handguns do not belong in our society at all.

d) This sentiment occurs even if we’re not the one with the gun, which proves that it’s a moral sentiment since it isn’t reliant on self-interest. **Cushman et al 11**

“Simulating Murder: The Aversion to Harmful Action” Fiery Cushman Harvard University Kurt Gray The University of Maryland Allison Gaffey University of Notre Dame Wendy Berry Mendes University of California, San Francisco Emotion 2012, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2–7 © 2011 American Psychological Association Page 3. Accessed 4/2/16

In Study 2, we tested for action aversion by examining partic- ipants’ physiological responses while either performing or wit- nessing harmful actions (stabbing an experimenter with a rubber knife, **shooting** him with **a** disabled **handgun**, etc.) or performing similar but harmless actions (e.g., slicing a pretend loaf of bread with a knife). Our use of simulated actions follows past research demonstrating that pretend stimuli **can be sufficient to elicit strong psychological responses** (Rozin, Millman, & Nemeroff, 1986). Action aversion predicts a robust aversive response to pretend actions with motoric and perceptual properties of actual harmful behaviors although the “perpetrator” knows that no harm will occur, whereas outcome aversion does not. Additionally, action aversion predicts a greater aversive response to performing harm than **witnessing it** (because only the former involves an action), whereas outcome aversion **predicts an equal aversive response** in both cases (because they yield the same outcome).

This takes out Kant—the intrinsic nature of guns is to harm others. **LaFollette 2k**

Gun Control\* Hugh LaFollette *Ethics*, vol, 110 (2000), pp. 263-81 <http://philosophy.wisc.edu/hunt/GUNCONT2.htm>

**Guns**, unlike autos, **are inherently dangerous. Guns were** invented for the military; they were **designed to cause** (and threaten) **harm** (Singer, C., Holmyard, E. J., Hall, A. R., & Williams, T. 1956: 367). The same aims determine the ways in which guns are redesigned: **they are changed to make them more efficient at causing harm. I**n contrast, a significant aim of **redesigning automobiles** is to **make them less dangerous.** To some extent these efforts have succeeded. Although the absolute number of annual traffic fatalities has not noticeably declined, the number of fatalities per mile traveled has declined 75% since the 50s (Hemenway, D. 1995: 52.) We have enhanced the auto's original aim of efficient transportation while lessening harmful side effects. That is why we can sensibly say that the automobile is not inherently dangerousdespite the fact that it causes harm. **We cannot say the same for guns.** The literature of gun advocates supports my contention that guns are inherently dangerous. **They advocate** the **private ownership of guns to prevent crime and to arm the militia**. Guns can serve these purposes only **because they are effective means of inflicting and threatening harm.** Even guns normally not used to harm humans have purposes that ride piggy-back on this fundamental purpose. Shotguns are used to kill animals, and target guns are designed to be especially accurate. Taken together, this evidence supports the common view that guns are inherently dangerous. That is why we have special reasons to regulate them. Although inherently dangerous, guns are far less dangerous than weapons of mass destruction, and they do have seemingly legitimate uses. That is why we must show just how risky they are before we can legitimately abolish or seriously restrict them. We must also determine if they have sufficient benefits so that we should permit them, even if risky.