GOODNESS AND WICKEDNESS: INBORN?

Before Rousseau people thought that humans are born good or wicked. Rousseau held on the other hand that all humans are born good: that civilization makes some of us wicked.

Actually we are born neither good nor wicked: at birth we are impotent to do either good or evil. It is only the home, the school, and our earliest experiences in society that mould us morally. To be sure there are probably genomes that predispose to meekness and others to violence; there may well be inborn propensties to cooperation in some respects and to competition in others, and so on. However, society is in a position to stimulate or inhibit the actualization of hereditary potentialities. Thus, in the end Rousseau was closer to the truth than the pessimistic theologians: society is to be

<u>credited for goodness or blamed for wickedness.</u>

But if this is so, how can we recognize wickedness and, once identified, what can we do about it: how can we hope to improve society if we have already been distorted by it?