

Nature versus nurture



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Nature versus Nurture The debate over which has the greater influence, nature or nurture, is as old as science and as irreconcilable as whether the chicken or the egg came first. The discussion has far reaching implications as it effects everything from religion, to behavior, to whether or not we are responsible for our own actions. Those that advocate nature as the ruling force believe that genetic predisposition takes priority over environment, upbringing, discipline, and free will. Advocates of the nurture argument contend that we are a product of our learning and the environment that we grow in, which is merely influenced by opportunistic genetics. Clearly, genetics are at work in heredity, predisposition to disease, and physical characteristics. Yet, environment can also reduce the possibility of disease or bad behavior. Genetics and environment both contribute to our overall being in much the same way that both height and width contribute to the area of a rectangle.

Genetics are certainly a powerful force of nature that rules outcomes above and beyond our conscious control. We cannot control our eye color or the number of fingers we grew as children. Still, " to concede that some people are genetically encoded to have shorter fuses than others or are more likely to gain weight if granted unlimited access to Oreos is hardly to embrace a view of humans as lumbering robots ruled by genes" (Shea). However, the question does linger as to how much of our behavior is really outside our control. Our belief in free will may be little more than the rationalization for the actions that we are destined to take.

There is a sensible limit to the power of genetics as expressed in nature. According to Lamm and Jablonka, " an organism with the same genotype can develop along different trajectories, depending on the inputs it receives"

(Lamm and Jablonka 309). This leads to evolutionary changes, as well as identical twins with markedly different abilities and attitudes. Our genetics are there for the environment to mold.

Genetics cannot be the ruling force behind our attitudes and behaviors. Without the potential for free will and the ability to do the right thing, life loses all its meaning. I would like to believe that I am the product of good parenting and not simply biology. Jones calls this "the acquired associations between the arousal response and specific stimuli" (Jones 355). I have learned the values of society and respect the traditions and mores that our culture has.

In conclusion, this debate will rage on into the future, as we gather more knowledge about the meaning and limitations of human genetics. We will confirm, as Moore states, "all of our traits - bar none - emerge from the mutually dependent activity of both genetic and environmental factors" (Moore 4). We are simply a product of everything we begin with and every experience we embrace. Biology alone cannot explain our yearning for spirituality, and environment alone does not explain our blue eyes. While the debate rages, the calm and serene middle, unencumbered by dogma and fear, is where the truth will be found.

Works Cited

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