

Nature vs. nurture: a biblical perspective essay



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The Nature versus Nurture debate has been ongoing for centuries. People have tried to gain power through knowledge in determining what causes the human “ mind to tick. ” For centuries leaders and scientists have performed unethical and immoral studies to determine why two people with similar genetic composition can come from similar backgrounds and turn out so differently. I have witnessed a person raised in a poor home by parents with drug addictions become a thriving contributable member of society.

Unfortunately, I have also witnessed a person raised in a Christian home with a Father as a minister who ended up in prison.

As we learn about the psychological and biological composition of human beings and the affecting environment, I am compelled to ask the following questions: 1. What is the history of Nature vs. Nurture? 2. What are the most essential characteristics of this issue? 3. What does the Bible say about Nature vs. Nurture? This review of the literature on Nature vs. Nurture focuses on these three questions. What is the history of Nature vs. Nurture? As I mentioned in my opening, government leaders and scientists have been conducting experiments through the centuries trying to determine why people turn out the way they do.

We learned in school how Hitler conducted experiments on the Jews throughout the war in an attempt to create the ultimate “ super race”. Frederick the Eleventh, King of Germany tried to conduct an experiment on children by taking babies from their mothers and placing them with foster mothers. He directed the foster mothers to suckle the children, bathe and wash them, but not to speak to the children. King Frederick intended to determine if a child’s surroundings determined the language they would

eventually speak. He felt that they may speak Hebrew, Greek, or Latin because he thought they were the first ancient languages.

Unfortunately, he did not receive results from his experiment because all the children died. The babies could not thrive without affection. (Kimble, 1993) In another incident, a descendent of Genghis Kahn, the Mogul emperor Akbar, wanted to know how a child determined their natural religion. He raised children in isolation and waited to discover if they would be Hindu or Christian. He only discovered deaf mutes. (Kimble, 1993) Although the experiments and studies have become more humane over the years, the debate remains the same: Is a person born the way they are, or does the way they are raised shape their future?

A European psychologist says it best: “ Because of the basic gene/environment interaction in the development of behavior, there can neither be a ‘ genetic determinism’ nor an ‘ environmental determinism,’ and therefore, the attempt to divide behavior into an ‘ innate’ and ‘ acquired’ component is automatically condemned to failure. No living organism responds to all aspects of its environment. ” (Volland, 2000). What are the most essential characteristics of this issue? Humans are individually made with common behavioral tendencies. Our “ brain rchitecture predisposes us to the senses of the world, develop language, and feel hunger through identical mechanisms. ” (Myers, 2008).

We also have certain social behaviors that define our human nature. The debate comes into play when the question is asked, “ How much are human differences shaped by our genes, and how much is affected by external

influences in our environment? ” Behavior geneticists have studied human behavior for years trying to determine whether genetics or environment shape a human’s individuality, emotional stability and life choices.

Through the studies of identical twins and biological versus adoptive relatives, scientists have yet to come to a common conclusion or agreement. Each study contradicts the other and fuels this ongoing debate. The only common ground that has been agreed upon is the following: “ Genes and environment – nature and nurture – work together like two hands clapping. ” (Myers, 2008). Our psychology text book gives the example of identical twins that have identical genes, but have similar, not identical, minds.

Evolutionary psychologists have focused on Darwin’s principle of natural selection to explain the fact that genes interact and adapt to their surroundings. Their theory shows that in order to protect and promote the species’ survival, the genes interact resulting in individual personality traits, such as impulsivity and aggression. They further attempt to expand on this theory by saying that our genetics predetermine our mate selection and gender differences in sexuality. This fuels the debate concerning why we choose our mate, and whether or not the way we are raised will determine if will be heterosexual or homosexual.

What does the Bible say about Nature vs. Nurture? The Bible tells us that we are perfectly made: “ So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them. ” (Genesis 1: 27)

However, Scripture also teaches us that our environment and parent’s influence play a crucial role in the person we are to become. Proverbs 22: 6

says “ Train up a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old he will not depart from it. ” Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, told us fathers “ provoke not your children to wrath: but nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6: 4).

Scripture also says that the Lord teaches the way we should go, and He will counsel us and watch over us. (Psalm 32: 8-10). Even though God teaches, sometimes we choose not to learn. We, as individuals, have the power of choice. We have “ free will”. This is illustrated in Genesis when Eve chose to eat the fruit. It is possible for a child to be raised correctly and then turn from their teachings and pursue a life totally different.

God trained the nation of Israel, but the people still abandoned His teachings. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for Jehovah has spoken: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. ” (Isaiah 1: 2) We read and learn about studies and experiments. We argue and debate one another which has more influence: genetics or environment? The Bible even says we are perfectly made, however we are still influenced by our surroundings and other people. The bottom line is that we have a choice. We can choose to follow God and let His will be done in our lives, or we can choose to let the environment determine our outcome.

Paul said it best: “ Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals. ” (1Corinth. 14: 13) My mother was an admitted alcoholic when I was a child and loved to party. She abandoned me and my Grandmother took me into her home to raise. My Grandfather was an alcoholic and was verbally abusive to our entire family. My older cousin was also abandoned by his

mother and came to live with my grandparents. We grew up in the same home and experienced the same type of abuse. We were not taught about God and were not raised in a Christian environment. My cousin began to drink and experiment with drugs.

He frequently had brushes with the law. I, too, began the partying lifestyle. Today, I have been married for 15 years and have 3 children. We attend church regularly and I have heard God's call to minister to those in need through counseling. My cousin has been in jail numerous times, still dabbles in drugs, has 4 children by two different mothers and lives in squalor. What changed? Why did we turn out so differently? As I pondered this question, the only thing that comes to mind that changed is that I was removed from our environment. I married a Law Enforcement Officer and moved away from the dysfunctional way of life.

My cousin moved away from home, however his surroundings were similar to those we experienced growing up: alcohol, drugs and verbal abuse. We are both predisposed to suffer depression, as most of our family. However, I choose not to be "swallowed up by darkness." I choose to live in "light". My choice was affirmed when I accepted Christ as my Savior. That was my choice. Not my genes. Not my environment. My free will. I choose for my will to be God's will and that is why we turned out differently. That is the answer to this debate. Not nature versus nurture, but God versus free will.