

Case 1 - Rebutting the Materialist Vision

I start by taking a quote from Sam Harris' *Free Will*. On page 41 Harris pointed out that:

And now your brain is making choices on the basis of preferences and beliefs that have been hammered into it over a lifetime - by your genes, your physical development since the moment you were conceived, and the interactions you had with other people, events, and ideas.

Now compare this to the following description of a musical prodigy found in Darold Treffert's remarkable *Islands of Genius* (pages 55-56):

By age five Jay had composed five symphonies. His fifth symphony, which was 190 pages and 1328 bars in length, was professionally recorded by the London Symphony Orchestra for Sony Records. On a *60 Minutes* program in 2006 Jay's parents stated that Jay spontaneously began to draw little cellos on paper at age two. Neither parent was particularly musically inclined, and there were never any musical instruments, including a cello, in the home. At age three Jay asked if he could have a cello of his own. The parents took him to a music store and to their astonishment Jay picked up a miniature cello and began to play it. He had never seen a real cello before that day. After that he began to draw miniature cellos and placed them on music lines. That was the beginning of his composing.

Jay says that the music just streams into his head at lightning speed, sometimes several symphonies running simultaneously. "My unconscious directs my conscious mind at a mile a minute," he told the correspondent on that program.

Treffert's book contained many other examples supporting his conclusion that prodigal (including prodigious savant) behavior typically involves "know[ing] things [that were] never learned". It also considered the phenomena of acquired savant syndrome in which savant behaviors appear in the wake of a central nervous system setback. Whatever their origins, such behaviors challenge Harris' materialist point and more generally the bio-robotic vision. With regards to acquired savant syndrome, machines should not acquire skills as a result of physical damage.

Sam Harris' message naturally flows from the scientifically-unquestioned materialist vision. You are lucky to be alive given that your DNA definition won the conception lottery and of course as Richard Dawkins put it, that DNA "created [you], body and mind". That is your "nature" component and the ongoing "nurture" component furthers your programming. Thus you and your behavior (and lack of free will). Arguably he could have reduced his short book down

to a paragraph with a simple gist like 'Life - including psyche life - is simply an expression of molecular interactions'. His secondary point that the existence of a soul would not change the arguments against free will is a superficial assertion and is considered in my book.

The immediate problem with this scientific vision is that there have always been rebuttals available with unusual behavioral phenomena and also DNA replicas (monozygotic twins) are far too different. For example, with unimaginably similar environments and duplicate DNA blueprints, the monozygotic concurrence on being gay (male exclusive homosexuality) is 20-30% (ironically found in Francis Collin's *The Language of Life*).

Still the larger or general picture really comes down to confirming the Nature/DNA plus Nurture vision of life. In September 2008, Duke University's geneticist David B. Goldstein was quoted on the outcome of thorough comparisons between the million or so common genetic (or DNA) variations and the apparent inheritance patterns associated with the occurrences of common complex diseases (NYT, N. Wade, 9/16/2008) It had naturally been assumed that these common variations in DNA blueprints would be connected to or correlated with the patterns of susceptibility to common diseases (and of course to other inborn differences amongst individuals). But Goldstein pointed out that:

After doing comprehensive studies for common diseases, we can explain only a few percent of the genetic component of most of these traits. For schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, we get almost nothing; for Type 2 diabetes, 20 variants, but they explain only 2 to 3 percent of familial clustering, and so on.

Goldstein then added:

It's an astounding thing that we have cracked open the human genome and can look at the entire complement of common genetic variants, and what do we find? Almost nothing. That is absolutely beyond belief.

Confident news may continue - such as with the junk DNA headlines of September 2012 - but significant findings are still missing (the junk DNA news bonanza was characterized by researcher A. Andreas as a big "orchestrated PR campaign"). Thus, in a 2012 blog contribution, researcher K. A. Mitchell acknowledged that a "debate is raging in human genetics" over this missing heritability problem. In a DNA nutshell this is the big case against the materialist vision, a vision which could have been questioned via considerations for some behavioral enigmas.