

# A Crisis and an Opportunity Facing Genetics

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## Abstract

There are a number of unusual behavioral tendencies amongst humans which appear to challenge the plausibility of a DNA basis. Some of these behaviors show up in the intellectual realm; others show up in the realm of gender orientations; and still others show up in the form of apparent paranormal abilities. Together these challenges - two from the accepted literature and the other from the paranormal literature - will be touched on here. The associated challenges form a concise statement of the excessive expectations placed on DNA. These challenges resonate with the missing heritability crisis and also an associated opportunity to appreciate life's mysteries.

## Introduction

In order for biology to make materialist sense DNA has to be able to perform its wide-ranging heritability duties. Some people have questioned the evolutionary inheritance role, in particular whether it is plausible in a physics only sense. In this way some have posited the need for additional input to steer the evolutionary dynamics of DNA [1]. Others have suggested a need for informational fields to steer the output of DNA in order to form living systems, positing that DNA can deliver the requisite ingredients, but that it cannot carry out the requisite organizational tasks [2]. In both of these cases DNA is suggested to need some nonmaterial assistance.

The point of this Mini Review is to focus on the challenges associated with some particular innate human behaviors. There really are a number of extraordinary behavioral tendencies which seriously challenge the feasibility of a DNA basis. The suggested implausibility of such DNA behavioral specifications would be consistent with the larger frustrations encountered in behavioral genetics and more generally in the missing heritability problem. Some extraordinary innate behaviors could then provide their own arguments for DNA's incomplete inheritance functioning.

Previous work by the author has considered the missing heritability problem, and more particularly behavioral genetics, and suggested that the premodern reincarnation paradigm could help explain some of the DNA deficit [3,4]. A follow up effort then specifically looked at the associated challenge of explaining mental illnesses/difficulties [5].

It will be assumed herein that the reader is familiar with the big expectations associated with DNA (i.e., in particular that we are simply "DNA driven biological machines" [6]) and also the missing heritability problem. This is simply a brief look at some

remarkable behaviors and the challenges they pose for biology's vision, along with a little follow up reflection. For brevity's sake the referencing here is minimal.

## Discussion

### Behavioral Challenges

There are a number of accepted behavioral conundrums that are hard to explain within the modern vision of life [3,4]. Whether in the form of prodigies who appear to show up in adult focused and sometimes even learned ways, or in the form of transgender kids who appear to show up with the opposite sex's agenda and as observed through extensive testing, "trans girls see themselves as girls and trans boys see themselves as boys, suggesting transgender identities are held at lower levels of conscious awareness" [7]. Such behaviors appear to form neglected challenges to biology's understanding.

One example I have been struck by is the memory capacities associated with hyperthymesia syndrome. A nice presentation of that syndrome is given in a *Scientific American* article, "Remembrance of All Things Past" [8]. Therein discussions considered about 50 people who were observed in their capacities to effortlessly recall the events of their life in a dated and day-of-the-week fashion. They could also recall significant worldly events that fell on the specified date. One woman, Jill Price, during questioning for example:

correctly recalled that Bing Crosby died at a golf course in Spain on October 14, 1977. When asked how she knew, she replied that when she was 11 years old, she heard the announcement of Crosby's death over the car radio when her mother was driving her to a soccer game.

Simply the ability to recall the day of the week for a specified date is amazing.

Another DNA challenge shows up in the prodigy realm. In previous writing I have described a modern prodigy's apparently untrained inclination to play the cello and also to compose music.

Here I consider a somewhat more one-of-the-mill prodigy, a Russian pianist named Evgeny "Zhenya" Kissin [9]. Kissin's mother and father were respectively a piano teacher and an engineer, and they were living what might be characterized as Soviet Jewish Intelligentsia in Moscow. They had initially assumed that Evgeny's sister, Alla, would follow her mom and play the piano, whilst Evgeny would follow his dad and go into engineering. At eleven months, though, the boy managed to sing an entire Bach fugue after hearing Alla practice it. Thereafter Evgeny pursued singing in response to just about "everything he heard". This was so relentless that his mother became quite concerned.

Then at twenty-six months Evgeny made his appearance at the piano. He:

sat down at the piano and with one finger picked out some of the tunes he had been singing. The next day he did the same, and on the third day he played with both hands, using all of his fingers. He would listen to LPs and immediately play back the music. "Chopin's ballades, he would play with those little hands, and Beethoven sonatas, Liszt's rhapsodies," [his mom reported]. At three, he began improvising. He especially liked to make musical portraits of people [9].

He liked to quiz the family on his portraits.

Kissin demonstrated exceptional skills very early and this eventually led his reluctant mother to take him to a prominent piano teacher at the famous Gnessin State Musical College in Moscow. There at age 5, that teacher Anna Pavlovna Kantor would later report:

I saw a light in him. Without knowing how to read music or the name of notes, he played everything. I asked him to translate a story into music. I said we were coming into a dark forest, full of wild animals, very scary, and then step by step the sun rises, and the birds start singing. He began in the piano's lower register, in a dark and dangerous place, and then, lighter and lighter, the birds awaken ing, the first rays of the sun, and finally a delightful, almost ecstatic melody, his hands running along the keys. I didn't want to teach him. Such imagination can be very fragile [9].

At age 7 Evgeny Kissin began to write down his compositions. He would later state that, "[w]hen I would return from school, I would, without taking my coat off, go to the piano and play". He then added, "I made my mother understand that that this was just what I needed" [9].

Other remarkable prodigy descriptions are given in Andrew Solomon's *Far From the Tree*, as well as Darold Treffert's [10]

*Islands of Genius*. Of note here is the apparent disconnect in some cases between prodigious child's focus and their parental background. Also, of note is Treffert's [10] conclusion that some of these kids seem to know things that they never learned. On that point I introduce the seeming parallel found with some transgender kids who can sometimes demonstrate ambitions that would seem foreign to their own experience. From a New York Times Magazine article [11] a description of a 3-year-old included:

He insisted on wearing gowns even after dress up time ended. He pretended to have long flowing hair and drew pictures of girls with elaborate gowns and flowing tresses. By age 4, he sometimes sobbed when he saw himself in the mirror wearing pants, saying he felt ugly.

A number of these cases are nicely covered in Solomon's *Far from the Tree* and they leave you wondering how gender identification along with some associated ambitions are established.

I move now to briefly consider some paranormal behaviors. I do this to further consideration of life's mysteries as well as for a bit of a protest of science's prevailing lockout of such phenomena. I introduce this topic via some examples from the late Elizabeth L Mayer's [12] excellent *Extraordinary Knowing: Science, Skepticism, and the Inexplicable Powers of the Human Mind* [12]. Her book resulted from her personal paradigm breaking investigations into paranormal abilities following some remarkable experiences involving mediums. Her detour into contacting mediums (her work background was as a prominent psychoanalyst with academic connections) began with her desperation to regain her daughter's stolen harp. Following a tip from a friend she contacted a man in Arkansas who did work as a dowser. The initial response via phone with the man went as follows:

"Give me a second," he said. "I'll let you know if it is still in Oakland." He paused, then: "Well, it is still there. Send me a street map of Oakland and I'll locate the harp for you." Skeptical but what, after all, did I have to lose? I promptly overnighted him a map. Two days later, he called back. "Well I go that harp located," he said. "It's in the second house on the right on D— street, just off L—Avenue" [12].

Mayer's initial response was to find the house (neither street nor the general location were familiar to her) and then try get the police involved. The police, though, said they needed more to follow up with a search warrant. Elizabeth Mayer then decided to place rewards flyers in the two block area surrounding the house which had been identified by the dowser.

Three days later Mayer got a phone call from a stranger in the flyer posted zone claiming to have seen the harp in the possession his next-door neighbor. After a couple of weeks of frustrating phone follow up a meeting was finally arranged in which she could get back her daughter's prized harp. This

experience really rocked Mayer's "rational" perspective and she concluded it "changes everything". That conclusion is of course a stretch, but that experience fortified by some subsequent remarkable exchanges with some other mediums that she contacted provided a good introduction to some apparent paranormal abilities. It appears that at least for some individuals under some circumstances they can obtain information in physics challenging ways. As an interesting follow up note, Mayer later in her book adds some more extraordinary information provided by that Arkansas dowser.

In the larger scheme of things such abilities might not be significant, but they certainly suggest that human life can be home to some inexplicable cognitive abilities. In that regard, such abilities might overlap a little with phenomena found in the prodigious intellectual realm. I move along now to consider other phenomena considered by Mayer in *Extraordinary Knowing*, that involving the apparent ability to view scenes from afar. This phenomena, called remote viewing, conveniently found an almost academic home at Stanford Research Institute (SRI) in Menlo Park, California, not far from Mayer's residence in the San Francisco area. The work at SRI had occurred through happenstance as an inquiry into a possible grant proposal from a physicist named Harold Puthoff somehow got sidetracked into the hands of a New York based artist named Ingo Swann. That inquiry about a pending proposal into possible "implications of quantum theory for life" somehow found Ingo Swann who in turn made a suggestion that SRI instead consider parapsychological phenomena. Swann mentioned some successful psychic demonstrations that he had been involved with.

Dr. Puthoff prompted in part by curiosity then invited Swann to visit SRI to demonstrate some of his claimed abilities. Thus during a week in June of 1972 Swann visited and the subsequent events as recalled by Puthoff included as follows:

"Prior to Swann's visit I arranged for access to a well shielded magnetometer used in a quark detection experiment in the Physics Department at Stanford University. During our visit to this laboratory, sprung as a surprise to Swann, [we asked him] to perturb the operation of the magnetometer, located in a vault below the floor of the building and shielded by meatal shielding, and aluminum container, copper shielding and superconducting shield. To the astonishment of Stanford physics professor Dr. Arthur Hebard, whose experiments depended heavily on the magnetometer's much vaunted imperturbability to outside influence, Swann doubled the rate at which the magnetic field in the magnetometer was decaying. Then in response to Hebard's disbelieving subsequent request, Swann stopped the field change altogether for a period of roughly forty-five seconds. As if to add insult to injury, he then went on to "remote view" the interior of the apparatus ... by drawing a reasonable facsimile of its rather complex (and heretofore unpublished) construction. It was this latter feat that impressed me perhaps better than the former [12]."

The remote viewing of Ingo Swann sparked quite a bit of interest including ultimately the Central Intelligence Agency. With the latter's interest as well as some of their funding SRI was able to carry out a series of remote viewing experiments.

The remote viewing work was significant in at least a couple of ways. It turned out to offer not only amazing phenomena (or "anything but ordinary and just blew [the scientist's] minds" [12]) but also some practical results. One remote viewing example was national security inspired and involved a recruit from the ranks of the U.S. Army Intelligence and Security Command, Joe McMoneagle. McMoneagle had been very successful in his military career and from his answers in a series of interviews was judged to have good remote viewing potential. As it turned out McMoneagle in his new intelligence career did indeed turn out "masses of data that were really hot and totally inexplicable by ordinary means" [12].

In one demonstration McMoneagle's was given some coordinates in the Soviet Union. Those coordinates unbeknownst to McMoneagle was where an enormous building had been built and recently come to the attention of U.S. intelligence officials. McMoneagle's:

immediate response was that [the coordinates] identified a very cold wasteland with an extremely large industrial looking building that had enormous smokestacks, not far from a sea capped with thick cap of ice. Later we found out the location was Severodvinsk on the White Sea. [12].

After seeing this initial success, the investigators then gave McMoneagle a surveillance photo of the big building and asked him to try to see inside the building. Here is a retrospective excerpt from McMoneagle:

I spent some time relaxing and emptying my mind. Then with my eyes closed, I imagined myself drifting down into the building, passing downwards through its roof. What I found was mind blowing. The building was easily the size of two or three huge shopping centers, all under a single roof ...

In giant bays between the walls were what looked like cigars of different sizes, sitting in gigantic racks. ... Thick mazes of scaffolding and interlocking steel pipes were everywhere. Within these were what appeared to be two huge cylinders being welded side to side, and I had an overwhelming sense that this was a submarine, a really big one, with two hulls [12].

The US intelligence community's sense at the time was that the Soviets were building a new type of assault ship in the building. After describing some additional observations, McMoneagle added:

I did a detailed drawing of the submarine, adding dimensions, as well as noting the canted[/slanted] [ballistic missile] tubes, indicating eighteen to twenty in all [12].

Somehow McMoneagle even came up with an accurate

January launch date for the submarine. The sub roughly fit Joe's description, including the presence of twenty canted missile tubes. A look up on the internet offers corroboration on length 574 feet and also provides some insane details like the fact that each of the twenty missiles carried 10 independently targetable nuclear warheads. The name of this Soviet submarine model was Typhoon. A remarkable and seemingly sincere report of "Extraordinary Knowing" which could have had an impact in the foreign policy area.

Elizabeth Mayer goes into a number of the other SRI remote viewing cases and a recent book, *An End to Upside Down Thinking*, by Mark Gober [13] provides a few more. Gober's [13] book includes one in which the remote viewer provided details on the kidnappers of Patricia Hurst. These remotely obtained details went from the generic picking out their mugshots and their motivation (political) down to one of the kidnapper's recent crazy dental procedure involving the removal of his teeth sans anesthesia.

Of additional note here is that Gober's later book also provided statements from declassified government assessments of SRI's remote viewing investigations. In one of these documents a science panel consisting of Dr. Donald M. Kerr (Director of Los Alamos National Laboratory), Dr. Fred Zacharison (physics professor at California Institute of Technology), and W. Ross Adey (Chief of Staff, Research Division, Veterans Administration Hospital) produced a "Principal Findings" document stating (in capital letters) that:

### IMPLICATIONS ARE REVOLUTIONARY

MERITS CONTINUED FUNDING IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST

EVIDENCE TOO IMPRESSIVE TO DISMISS AS MERE COINCIDENCE

LACK OF PHYSICAL MODEL DOES NOT PRECLUDE EXISTENCE

INITIATE A FIVE-TO-TEN YEAR PROGRAM

INVOLVE ADDITIONAL LABS [13].

Other declassified assessments were provided in photocopied form. Another supportive conclusion came from the prominent physicist, Freeman Dyson, in the preface of *Extraordinary Knowing*. In it, Dyson wrote that "ESP is real but belongs to a mental universe that is too fluid and evanescent to fit within the rigid protocols of controlled scientific testing" [12].

### Conclusions

Contrary to the contemporary scientific consensus, it really isn't hard to seriously question scientific materialism. This is particularly true in the area of behavioral tendencies and also endowments. In Darold Treffert's *Islands of Genius* he suggests that "[u]ntil we can fully explain the savant, we cannot fully explain ourselves nor comprehend our full capacities" [10]. His

logic would seem to apply across quite a bit unusual behavioral phenomena. When coupled with the missing heritability problem I suggest here that argues for a need to reassess the contemporary understanding of ourselves beginning with its presumed genetic basis. One significant development might be expanding scientific horizons to incorporate challenging behaviors, including taboo ones.

For possible basic motivation I am reminded of a fine review of an E. O. Wilson book that I read in *Scientific American* several years ago. As is not uncommon in such books E. O. Wilson's forward-looking book conjured up some optimism in its conclusions with regards to humanity's unfolding sustainability and ecomanagement crises. The reviewer, though, would have none of it. That reviewer concluded humans' beings will not make significant sacrifices for future people. This reviewer presumably based their conclusion on a materialist evolutionary perspective of humans. Broader investigations of human beings, though, might find reasons for a deeper or dualistic perspective. With such a perspective, in particular one in which a soul tends to reincarnate or return, the logic of life, if you will, could be different. Somewhat consistent with this in Michale Tobias' man versus nature epic, *World War III*, the group identified for their encouraging sustainability priorities were the lay Jains.

If the missing heritability problem continues to hold, then that would undercut the modern certainty that underneath it all is simply physics. It is perhaps noteworthy that such a failure would appear to be consistent with the suggestion offered by the Nobel laureate physicist Eugene Wigner [14] about the possibility of a contradiction between the "laws of heredity and of physics" [14].

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