

Opinion Article

Genetic failures, mental disorders, and the reincarnation alternative

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ABSTRACT

There are serious behavioral challenges to science's understanding of life and its DNA-basis. The general problem facing the DNA model, though, has been the inability to identify the genetic origins of many heritable characteristics, including those behind a number of mental difficulties. This unfolding combination of behavioral conundrums and genetic failures suggest science could be wrong about life, and with this the basis for our mental challenges. As an alternative vehicle for

understanding these mysteries this paper introduces some explanations from the common premodern reincarnation perspective. Special focus is placed on three mental health-debilitating conditions - transgender orientations, autism, and schizophrenia. The reincarnation perspective and its potential will be considered for those three scenarios.

Keywords: autism, schizophrenia, transgender orientations

Introduction

It is difficult to overstate the expectations associated with DNA. For example, the pioneering geneticist Craig Venter succinctly answered the question "What is life?" with the expression, "DNA-driven biological machines" [1]. The biologist Richard Dawkins characterized our genomic orientation with "DNA neither cares nor knows. DNA just is. And we dance to its music" [2]. Also Craig Venter in his 2007 book, *A Life Decoded: My Genome: My Life*, wrote that the Human Genome Project: has charted a landscape in which we will discover the most intricate workings of our species, the particularities of our own individual genetic makeup, and the promise of novel approaches to health and medicine that will mark a new stage in human development, one in which inherited biology is no longer destiny [3].

The follow-up to the human genome project, though, has arguably been an "absolutely beyond belief" failure, beginning with respect to the ambitions of personal genomics [4-6].

Readers' can further get a sense of this situation via some statements offered by the Nobel laureate James D. Watson. In an interview with him, *Scientific American* asked [7]:

In a century, we went from rediscovering Mendel's laws and identifying chromosomes as agents of heredity to having the human genome largely worked out. Finding the double helix drops neatly in the middle of that span. How much, with respect to DNA, is left for us to do? Are there still great discoveries to be made, or is it just filling in details?

After some speculation about the possible significance of epigenetic phenomena (secondary factors beyond the actual sequence of DNA elements) Watson replied:

Relevant research seems to moving pretty fast. You don't really want to make a guess, but I'd guess that over these next 10 years, the field will be pretty played out. A lot of very good people are working on it. We have the tools. At some stage, the basic principles of genetics will have be known be in terms of gene functioning, and then we'll be able to apply that more to more difficult problems such as how the brain works.

Next *Scientific American* asked Watson, "If you were starting out as researcher now". Watson interjected, "I'd be working on something about connections between genes and behavior. You can find genes for behaviors...". The "field" predicted to "play" itself out most likely included the vital topics of personal genomics and behavioral genetics.

Fourteen years later James Watson in his 2017 book, *DNA: The Story of the Genetic Revolution*, broke from his earlier optimism and acknowledged in particular the lack of genetic insight into the occurrences of mental illnesses. Watson pointed out that 'the history of this research is full of high hopes brought low' [8]. He also provided a fitting quote on the situation from the geneticists Neil Rich and David Botstein:

The recent history of genetic linkage studies for manic depression is rivaled only by the course of the illness itself. The euphoria of linkage findings being replaced by the dysphoria of non-replication in other populations has become a regular pattern, creating a roller coaster-type existence for many psychiatric genetics practitioners as well as interested observers [9].

Watson, though, still upholds the faith as reflected in his statement, "that said, I am extremely hopeful that we are entering an era of genetic analysis that will soon take us beyond this irritating game of 'now we have it, now we don't' [10].

Additional recent sober assessments showed up in a May 2017 *Scientific American* article, “Schizophrenia’s Unyielding Mysteries: Gene Studies Were Supposed to Reveal the Disorder’s Roots. That Didn’t Happen. Now Scientists Are Broadening the Search” [11]. After enormous efforts to track down the expected DNA basis for the susceptibility to the very difficult condition, schizophrenia, insiders provided some frank appraisals. These included the geneticist David Goldstein’s comment that “people working in the schizophrenia genetics field have greatly over-interpreted their results” and further that they should utilize “a whole lot more humility”. Additionally, the behavioral geneticist Eric Turkheimer offered the questionable, “GWAS [Genome Wide Assessment Studies] shows that schizophrenia is so highly, radically polygenic [i.e., with many DNA contributors] that there may well be nothing to find, just a general unspecifiable genetic background”. Is that how genetics is supposed to work?

The failures facing behavioral genetics and personal genomics are general and very significant. If as expected for example, schizophrenia, reflects “faulty circuits” established by faulty genetics [12] then these ought to be identifiable. If they are - beginning with the DNA blueprints - then perhaps science can find a way to help alleviate the condition. If faulty circuits could be identified then that might help diagnostically. If faulty DNA could be identified then that could help with diagnosis, as well as potentially in the long run with enormously welcome treatment.

The failures facing genetics might have been suspected. The inexplicable differences observed between monozygotic twins - where environmental differentiation appears to offer quite limited traction - suggest basic mysteries beginning with limits on the influence of DNA. If monozygotic concurrence on male exclusive homosexuality is about 20 to 30 percent [13] then perhaps talk of “dancing to DNA’s music” is inappropriate.

Some earlier work has suggested that the DNA model is considerably more limited than currently assumed, and furthermore that the premodern reincarnation paradigm for life could offer a number of alternative explanations and also some general coherence [14,15]. Herein, I will first attempt to show some existing paranormal challenges to scientific materialism. These include some impressive examples from Elizabeth L. Mayer’s fine *Extraordinary Knowing* [16]. Here presented are a few accepted, but under-appreciated, behavioral challenges to materialism. These opening examples are designed to undercut the widely held belief that behaviors simply reflect brain activity, which of course should have an underlying DNA recipe. These contrary examples can then perhaps introduce the possibility of non-material factors expressed in the case of mental illnesses.

Next, the premodern reincarnation perspective will be briefly introduced. That simple explanation can provide some alternative traction for the general problem facing heredity and also a number of unexpected behaviors. Next, the paper will introduce the difficult scenarios associated with transgender

phenomena, autism, and also schizophrenia. Finally, those conditions and some possible reincarnation explanations will be discussed.

Some paranormal challenges to materialism

Considering a few striking examples from the paranormal realm. For the most part some material from Elizabeth Mayer’s *Extraordinary Knowing* are utilized. Mayer’s regular work had included positions in the psychiatry department at the University of California Medical Center, San Francisco, and also as an associate clinical professor of psychology at the University of California at Berkeley. Mayer’s book resulted from her investigation into paranormal phenomena after an initial experience involving some help she received in retrieving her daughter’s stolen harp.

In my earlier book [15] the aid she had obtained in locating the stolen harp and also some of the amazing phenomena reported from the remote viewing experiments held at Stanford Research Institute in Menlo Park, California was considered. Here I will begin with some of Mayer’s experiences with psychics (or intuitives). After her over-the-phone success in locating her daughter’s harp, Mayer then wanted to check out other individuals with purported psychic abilities. Consequently, she phoned a woman in Cape Cod, Deb Mangelus. After giving Mangelus her first name Mayer then held back any additional information. Mangelus, though, after a brief pause started into some commentary: “you’re in the middle of a decision. There are two woman involved. They’re very different. One is fiery, playful, someone you can always have fun with. She has trouble with words. Maybe she’s not always reliable. Fire is a big part of the image; I see the two of you holding hands around a campfire.” She pauses. “The other woman is different - really different. She’s very responsible. Dutiful. Orderly. The funniest thing is happening. ... I keep seeing her hands and they’re clasped in her lap. I simply can’t get her to unclasp her hands” [17].

This commentary really jolted Elizabeth Mayer. She had in fact been struggling with a hiring decision. It came down to two female candidates for a managing director position in an arts organization. Here is some of Mayer’s reflective followup:

Mangelus’s description of each woman struck me as unbelievably accurate. I’d liked the first woman a lot. She seemed like she would be enormous fun to work with, though her writing samples were terrible and I wondered how she’d handle details. I’d been less drawn to the other woman. She seemed great on details, but I doubted if she ever got excited about what she was doing. She struck me as boring. Even more to the point was this: The second woman had managed to sit through our entire two-hour interview holding her hands firmly clasped in her lap. At the time I had repeatedly wondered to myself, “How can anyone possibly keep her hands so solidly clasped for so long?” [18].

Additionally, Mayer pointed out that the first woman (the enthusiast) had such fiery red hair that as she exited the

interview Mayer had joked to her, “*Now I know what fiery red hair really means!*”.

These kind of experiences were amazing for Mayer and she repeatedly concludes in her book that “this changes everything”. It certainly strains any conceivable molecular-based explanation that I can think of, but I have a problem with “*everything*” beginning with the possibility that it may not have helped her with the hiring decision. Nonetheless, Mayer went on to conclude that through her usage of the intuitive Mangelus, and despite telling her “nothing or as close to nothing as I could consciously manage”, this woman would reveal insight into her life: that made me feel that she saw my life with a clarity my closest friends couldn’t match, things I knew but hadn’t yet recognized that I knew. They rang extraordinarily true and were also extraordinarily important. She pinpointed the central dilemmas, choices, situations, and desires in my life. She was somehow breaking every mold I recognized about how people achieve insight about themselves. She *knew* me. And I couldn’t begin to explain how [19].

Her subsequent experiences with another psychic, Ellen Todd, were also reported on. Here again Mayer offered no verbal introduction even though this interaction was done in person. One notable intuition was offered with regards to the very serious nature of one of Mayer’s daughters. The psychic offered an explanation for this girl’s demeanor based on a very difficult experience that occurred in a previous life. Mayer was not willing to accept that explanation, but the awareness of this unusually serious demeanor and the challenge it established really impressed her. She concluded the session by explicitly giving the psychic five names and asking her for any insight into those five individuals (amongst whom Mayer was considering work collaboration). The psychic went on to comment on 4 of them but was stymied on one. Todd commented that it happens sometimes that I “simply couldn’t find them”. Mayer later went on to check on that person and it turned out they had unexpectedly died two weeks earlier.

In a final look at the work of psychics, I consider Mayer’s account of her interaction with John Huddleston. Huddleston offered Mayer some of his sense of her family. Mayer wrote about his commentary, “I told John that he had been right on a lot of things, but was totally off the mark about one person”. Of that person Mayer wrote, “it was simply impossible for that person would do what John told me he’d been doing”. Huddleston, though, responded in a “relaxed and easy fashion” that “he could sometimes be wrong”, but, “he’d stick to his guns on this one”. Mayer went on to write: twelve days later, I received the news. Everything that John had told me turned out to be accurate. I was as stunned as the rest of the family - but they didn’t have to contend with the fact that someone had told me all about it twelve days earlier [20].

Another remarkable insight that suggests that at least for some people (perhaps a very small minority), under certain specific circumstances, they can intuit information in ways that

defy scientific explanations.

Another interesting aspect in Elizabeth Mayer’s coverage is her inclusion of psychics’ explanations for their abilities. They appeared humble and matter of fact about the subtle state they feel facilitates their intuitive insights. Inaccuracies were acknowledged as possible. Huddleston’s explanation stood out in part for its optimism. He said his mind state during a reading was: “relaxed focus, that is the best way to describe it. There’s calm, clarity, and a receptive quality. There’s also a physical component, and by that I mean I’m physically centered and grounded within myself, not drift and incorporate. I’m in communication with the client, the barriers are down, and they are very easy to see, but I don’t merge with them in order to read them. This is not an out-of-body experience, in fact my state of mind is surprisingly down to earth and ordinary [21].

Huddleston went on to second the claim that such psychic readings are “surprisingly ordinary” and “in fact most people use aspects of this state of mind in their daily lives without realizing it”. I disagree with this point and in response would simply point out that if this were true it should be self-evident (like our sense of humor). These really do appear to be rare and remarkable occurrences.

I change over here to a different type of phenomenon also presented in *Extraordinary Knowing*. This one shows up in Mayer’s chapter on remote viewing research. The remote viewing work considered here was done at Stanford Research Institute (SRI) and it had been initiated via some fallout from a visit to SRI by an artist and psychic, Ingo Swann. During that visit Swann had proceeded to remotely manipulate a number of shielded instruments and generally astonish some of the technical people at SRI. His final remote viewing demonstration helped establish some funded parapsychology research work at SRI. The funded work involved 20 million dollars for 24 years worth of work. The funding initially came from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) [22].

Some of the remote viewing experiments as one physicist there put it, “were anything but ordinary and [they] just blew our minds” [23]. One example I considered in my earlier book involved a remote viewing exercise that seemingly failed in a big way. The coordinates given separately to two men (Swann and a retired policeman, Pat Price), both of whom claimed to possess the desired viewing abilities, were seemingly of a mundane rural location. The viewers, though, went on to independently discuss an elaborate, nearby underground facility (which they assumed was the actual viewing target). Well, as the SRI people subsequently found out from the CIA, right next to the given coordinates was a “highly sensitive underground government installation”. One of the viewers even got the classified installation’s name correct.

The next remote viewing example considered here was intelligence-inspired and involved a recruit from the ranks of the U.S. Army Intelligence and Security Command, Joe

McMoneagle. McMoneagle had been quite successful in his military career and somehow was judged to have good remote viewing potential. That assessment was apparently accurate as Joe McMoneagle turned out in his new intelligence career to “produce masses of data that were really hot and totally inexplicable by ordinary means” [24].

In one demonstration of McMoneagle’s abilities he was given some coordinates in the Soviet Union. Those coordinates unbeknownst to McMoneagle was where an enormous building was located. That building, seemingly in the middle of nowhere, had 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 [25].

After noting his initial success, the investigators gave McMoneagle a surveillance photo of the big building and asked him to try to see inside the building. Here is an excerpt from McMoneagle’s own retrospective account:

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. ... [at that time the US intelligence community’s consensus was that the Soviets were building a new type of assault ship there] [26].

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 [27].

Somehow McMoneagle even came up with an estimated launch date for the submarine - in January of all times. The subsequent January’s surveillance photos revealed a large submarine on the move. It roughly fit Joe’s description, including the presence of twenty canted missile tubes. A look at Wikipedia 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.

Together these do appear to represent sincere reports of “extraordinary knowing”. In another analogous (although over-titled) book, *An End to Upside Down Thinking: Dispelling the Myth That the Brain Produces Consciousness*, and the

Implications for Everyday Life, the author Mark Gober provided some additional remote viewing examples [28]. Gober also included some declassified official U.S. government assessment documents with regards to the remote viewing work. 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 [29].

Another official supportive conclusion came from the prominent physicist, Freeman Dyson, and was given in the preface of *Extraordinary Knowing*. He 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” [30]. These phenomena may be rare, and for the most part ignored by science and reflexively dismissed by nominal skeptics, but they strongly suggest that on occasion human consciousness can include very mysterious abilities.

Some accepted challenges to materialism

It turns out that there are other serious challenges to scientific materialism. In some of my earlier writings I included two examples of this variety. One involved the apparently normal functioning of individuals for whom their hydrocephalus condition had greatly reduced their normal brain tissues’ volume [31]. The associated brain researcher, John Lorber, was stunned to find that some such individuals appeared to have only about 5 percent of normal brain volume, but somehow, they seemed to function normally. This is a stunning and under-communicated observation.

The second earlier example involved a musical prodigy who seemingly had extraordinary innate inclinations - and even skills - with regards to playing the cello and also composing [32]. It is difficult to imagine such prodigal behaviors falling out of a Nature plus Nurture model. In fact, such innate abilities and inclinations are suggestive of some kind of carryover from a previous life.

I move on to a simple example of a cognitive conundrum facing the scientific/genetic paradigm. In the February 2014 *Scientific American* article, “Remembrance of All Things Past”

[33], some remarkable autobiographical memories observed in a number of individuals (in a syndrome called hyperthymesia) were reported on. That article opened with an excerpt from an e-mail that the lead author James McGaugh had received from a woman named Jill Price: As I sit here trying to figure out where to begin explaining why I am writing you ... I just hope somehow you can help me. I am 34 years old, and since I was 11 I have had this unbelievable ability to recall my past ... I can take a date, between 1976 and today, and tell you what day it falls on, what I was doing that day, and if anything of great importance ... occurred on that day I can describe that to you as well.

The authors then followed up and extensively tested Price's recall of events and her memory was eventually proved faulty in one case - the day of the week of one of the previous 23 Easters (and Price is Jewish). Along the way she "corrected the book of milestones for the date of the start of the Iran hostage crisis at the U.S. embassy in 1979". During tests of less significant dates she: 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.

Jill Price demonstrated an "immediate recall of the day of the week for any date in her life after she was about 11 years old". Yet she "has trouble remembering which of her keys go into which lock" and "does not excel in memorizing facts by rote". The remainder of James McGaugh and Aurora LePort's article chronicled their subsequent confirmation of similar memories in about 50 people. Such memories were found to be "highly organized in that they are associated with a particular day and date" and that it occurred "naturally and without exertion". I suggest here that simply the general ability to identify the day of the week for a given previous date is incredible.

Given the effortlessness of hyperthymesia it strongly suggestive of a DNA basis. Thus, such people would seem to have a specific DNA pattern that somehow fell out of our evolutionary history that allows them to effortlessly recall their lives and significant events in a date and day-of-the-week fashion. This point is followed up by the authors, who also manage to sidestep acknowledging the scientific jaw-dropping implications of these memory whizzes. Is science expecting too much from genetics and evolution (not to mention neural tissue) when it assumes that it can explain such memories?

One final prodigy example considered here is Kit Armstrong and his case was presented in Andrew Solomon's extensive *Far From the Tree* [34]. Kit's prodigious abilities showed up early. He was able to count at 15 months. His mother May then taught him addition and subtraction at age two. He then went on to teach himself multiplication and division. Solomon then suggests that at age three Kit was asking about things for which the theory of relativity was required for an explanation (this claim, though, would probably be tricky to establish). His mother May raised him and she was not pushy. In fact, she was concerned about his

seeming hyper-development and thus hoping he might "grow down" in kindergarten [35].

While completing second grade Kit also managed to finish off high school math. By age nine Kit was ready to try college and enrolled at Utah State University. At ten he toured Los Alamos National Laboratory with his music manager, Charles Hamlen. At that LANL a physicist took Hamlen aside and told him: unlike the postdoctoral physicists who usually visited, Kit was so bright that no one could 'find the bottom of this boy's knowledge' [36].

Within a few years Kit had a residency at MIT and there he helped edit some papers in chemistry, physics, and math. About Kit's apparent ability to pick up so much information and expertise his mother said: [h]e just understands all things. Someday, I want to work with parents of disabled children, because I know their bewilderment is like mine. I had no idea how to be a mother to Kit, and there was no place to find out [37].

If scientists are looking for cognitive and developmental - as well as underlying genetic - mysteries to ponder, examples like this are not very hard to find.

Kit Armstrong's lasting extraordinary contributions, though, have been with his piano performances and composing career. When Kit was five years old, May Armstrong wanted to find him a hobby. May then went outside of her own interests and decided to try piano lessons. Consistent with his intellectual prowess, Kit raced ahead on the piano. After his first lesson Kit returned home to make his own staff paper and proceeded to attempt a composition. Solomon reports that Kit's facility with the language of music had "come to him whole" and that he could simply hear music on the radio and then "play it back" [38]. This is an extraordinary, albeit somewhat loose claim, though.

To connect with Kit's love of music his mom moved them to London so he could study at the Royal Academy of Music. There he became the first student of the pianist Alfred Brendel (who coincidentally also did not come from a musical background). When Kit was thirteen a journalist who had been a strong critic of placing children in serious performance scenarios attended one of his concerts. Of that performance the journalist later wrote: [h]is playing was so cultured, his joy in performing so obvious, his commitment as he stretched his small frame to reach the low notes so total, that my objections seemed mean-spirited [39].

Like a number of prodigies you can read about Kit Armstrong's career on the internet.

Three mental disorders

The nature of three mental disorders or disabilities are briefly introduced here. These disorders are transgender orientations, autism (or autism spectrum) disorder, and schizophrenia. The sources for this background presentation were largely Andrew Solomon's large and fine *Far From The Tree: Parents, Children,*

and Search for Identity [34] and also three Scientific American articles. I have to add that Solomon's book, and the family efforts reflected therein, are about considerably more than a "search for identity".

Transgender orientations

Some individuals strongly identify with the opposite gender and this identification can show up when they are very young. This is not a moral issue but it can raise serious challenges for the affected individuals. In a number of ways as human beings we tend to groove into habits and routines, and some of these are gender-based. It can also be an immediately frustrating situation for a transgender individual in their having to live with an undesired body-type.

The intellectual question here is what is responsible for these tendencies? One transgender study found that amongst the subset of transgender people that have undergone sex-change surgery (or transitioned) many "knew that they had been born into the wrong gender from childhood" [40]. Such an explanation from the scientific perspective would seem to require some kind of DNA code sequence which resulted in an individual whose brain was committed to identifying as the opposite gender.

From an article in the New York Time Magazine [41] a description of a 3 year old included the following: he insisted on wearing gowns even after preschool 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.

Such behaviors can present some difficulties for parents. As one father put it, "I didn't know how to be the father of a girl inside a boy's body".

One eight year old's self-assessment presented in Andrew Solomon's *Far From the Tree* contained:

"I'm a girl and I have a penis. They (her parents) thought I was a boy until I was six. I dressed like a girl. I said, 'I'm a girl.' They didn't understand for the longest time [42].

That child's assessment went on to look ahead and state: when I'm a mommy I'll adopt my babies, but I'll have boobies to feed them and I'll wear a bra, dresses, skirts, and high-heeled shoes [43].

Do such behaviors really seem plausible in terms of evolution and in particular as a function of DNA specifications?

Solomon noted an incident following a workshop on dealing with transgender youth. One anxious father approached the presenters with the question, "but what if he changes his mind?". One of the presenters responded with, "you just explained how he told you on the changing table at two that he was a girl, and that message hasn't changed in thirteen years". Solomon went on to conclude that it took the presenters "about ten minutes to bring this man around to an acceptance he had been unable to

achieve for over a decade" [44]. One trans child told his parents at age 15 months, "I'm not a boy. I'm a girl". This child went on to request a Barbie doll at age two. Another trans girl at age two had a favorite pastime of wearing their mom's "red high heels, a towel on his head for hair, and anything he could drape as a sari" [45].

The difficulties facing trans kids include a significant risk of suicide attempts. Solomon pointed out that over "half of parents of trans people are rejected by their families", and "even in families with some acceptance, it often comes from only one parent" [46]. Solomon also went on to provide some very upsetting statements made by parents to their trans children.

A Scientific American article, "When Sex and Gender Collide", by Kristina R. Olson provided a more recent and science-framed overview of the trans phenomena. In the article Olson stated about trans kids that [47]: when predicting their identities in the future, trans girls see themselves becoming women and trans boys feel that they will be men, just as other girls and boys do. Even when we present children with more indirect or implicit measures of gender identity - the measures that assess reaction times rather than children's more explicit words and actions - we have found that trans girls see themselves as girls and trans boy see themselves as boys, suggesting transgender identities are held at lower levels of conscious awareness.

On gender-oriented behaviors, Olson wrote that: The degree of their preferences for stereotypical clothes, as well as their tendency to prefer to befriend those of their self-identified gender and the degree to which they see themselves as members of their gender group, is statistically indistinguishable from their peers' responses on the same measures throughout the childhood years.

Olson added a further conclusion that:

All of this research combines to show that transgender identities in even very young children are surprisingly solid and consistent across measures, contradicting popular beliefs that such feelings are fleeting or that children are simply pretending to be the opposite gender.

This is both a life-challenging phenomenon and a science-challenging one too.

Autism

Autism is a profound, and seems to be largely an innate, condition which appears to be centered on being socially-limited or socially-retarded. Andrew Solomon's *Far From The Tree* also includes a chapter on the condition [48]. Solomon wrote that autism is "rooted in a disruption of social function" and that its primary symptoms: are lack of or delay in speech; poor nonverbal communication; repetitive movement, including flapping arms and other self-stimulating behaviors; minimal eye contact; diminished interest in friendships; lack of spontaneous or imaginative play; compromised empathy, insight, and

sociability; diminished capacity for emotional reciprocity; rigidity; highly focused interests; a fascination with objects such as spinning wheels and sparkling things. Autistic children and adults often think in an extremely concrete manner and may have difficulty understanding metaphor, humor, irony, and sarcasm. They are given to obsessive, stereotyped behavior, forming attachments to seemingly random objects, arranging toys by size or color rather than playing with them. Autistic people may engage in self-injurious behavior, including hand-biting and head-banging; they may have sensory-motor deficits [49].

Additionally, autistic people sometimes have: Echolalia, in which they repeat words or phrases, often without any apparent understanding of their meaning. The diction of autistic people who speak may lack intonation, and such people will often talk to others at great and repetitive length about objects of their unbounded fascination. Food rituals and an extremely limited diet are common. People with autism may be exquisitely sensitive to sensory overload from crowded spaces, human touch, fluorescent or flickering lights, and noise. Many autistic people find minor irritants such as clothing tags unbearable [50].

There is a lot of variation in the symptoms experienced by people with autism. Thus, the condition has now been generalized to Autism Spectrum Disorder.

A more focused perspective is provided in Simon Baron-Cohen's "Autism and the Technical Mind" article [51]. Baron-Cohen included a short description of autism's symptoms as "having difficulty communicating and interacting with others and displaying obsessive behaviors". His article dealt with the apparent genetic overlap between autism and technically-strong minds. He stated that, "children of scientists and engineers may inherit genes that not only confer intellectual talents but also predispose them to autism". He noted that some think that the technically-concentrated locales of Silicon Valley (U.S.A.) and Bangalore, India may have 10 times higher than normal rates of autism.

To investigate this possibility, Baron-Cohen and colleagues checked on the prevalence of autism in Netherlands' "Silicon Valley", Eindhoven. By examining school records they found out that autism rates, based on a formal diagnosis, were almost three times higher in Eindhoven than in two other comparably sized cities in the Netherlands, Haarlem and Utrecht. Additionally, Baron-Cohen and his colleague Sally Wheelwright noted a correlation between families with autism and families containing an engineer. For example they found in their study of about 1000 families with at least one autistic child that 21.2 percent of their grandfathers had been engineers, compared with a corresponding figure of only 2.5 percent for a group of about 1000 families with at least one otherwise developmentally-impaired child. They also found that 12.5 percent of the fathers of the autistic children were engineers compared with only 5 percent for the other non-autistic group.

Autism is a condition for which the genetic search work be

quite frustrating. This is a profound, apparently human-centered behavioral syndrome and the inability to find significant DNA contributors should be particularly surprising. Additionally, the above inclusion of content from Simon Baron-Cohen's "Autism and the Technical Mind" is significant to the subsequent alternative discussion.

Schizophrenia

The May 2017 issue of Scientific American contains the aforementioned review article "Schizophrenia's Unyielding Mystery: Gene Studies Were Supposed to Reveal the Disorder's Roots. That Didn't Happen. Now Scientists Are Broadening the Search" by Michael Balter [11]. This is a sober piece reflecting on the very limited progress made by scientists to explain the origins of a debilitating and very significant mental illness.

The article opens with comments on the net effects of this condition including:

In the U.S. alone, estimates place the total cost of caring for patients at more than \$60 billion a year, a figure that includes both direct health care costs and indirect economic losses from unemployment and early death. Any breakthrough in understanding the causes of the illness would be a major medical advance.

Balter also mentioned that "existing antipsychotic drugs dampen only the most overt symptoms, such as delusion and hallucinations [and] [t]hey often cause serious side effects and do little or nothing for chronic symptoms such as social withdrawal and cognitive deficits".

A more extensive and personal discussion about schizophrenia can be found in Andrew Solomon's *Far From the Tree* [52]. As with other conditions discussed therein, Solomon spent a lot of time with affected individuals and their families. In characterizing schizophrenia he wrote that:

Schizophrenia is broadly characterized as having positive symptoms - the presence of psychotic hallucinations - and negative and cognitive symptoms - psychotic disorganization, absence of motivation, blunted affect, loss of language (called alogia), withdrawal, compromised memory, and general decrease in functionality [53].

Solomon provided one patient's description of their positive symptoms:

I could find no rest, for horrible images assailed me, so vivid that I experienced actual physical sensations. I cannot say that I really saw images; they did not represent anything. Rather I felt them. It seemed that my mouth was full of birds which I crunched between my teeth, and their feathers, their blood and broken bones were choking me. Or I saw people whom I had entombed in milk bottles, putrefying, and I was consuming their rotten cadavers. Or I was devouring the head of a cat which meanwhile gnawed at my vitals. It was ghastly, intolerable [54].

A sample of negative symptoms was also given:

I am all the time losing my emotional contact with everything, including myself. What remains is only an abstract knowledge of what goes on around me and of the internal happenings in myself. Even this illness which pierces to the centre of my whole life I can regard only objectively. I cannot picture anything more frightful than for a well-endowed cultivated human being to live through his own gradual deterioration fully aware of it all the time. But that is happening to me [55].

Solomon quoted the neuroscientist Eric Kandel on schizophrenia's impact on desire, "imagine someone who has a great time whenever he goes out to dinner, but who has absolutely no interest in doing it" [56]. Furthermore, estimates have it that "between 5 and 13 percent" of schizophrenics commit suicide [57].

Solomon described it as "a developmental disorder that is inscribed in the brain even before birth" [58]. He noted the progression of the condition which usually becomes apparent after puberty and eventually progresses to a final chronic and residual phase in adulthood. By then: there has been an irrecoverable loss of grey matter in the brain. Positive symptoms tend to fade somewhat, while negative ones become more pronounced. Patients remain disabled, and persistently symptomatic. While more than 80 percent of patients respond well to antipsychotics during the first episode, only half of those treated at this stage show a comparable response [59].

The "before birth" existence of the tendency would be consistent with evidence for its heritability. As Steven Pinker wrote: schizophrenia is highly concordant within pairs of identical twins [about 50% of the time when one is affected so is the other twin], who share all of their DNA and most of their environment, but far less concordant within pairs of fraternal twins, who share only half of their [variable] DNA ... and most of their environment. The trick question could be asked - and would have the same answer - for virtually every cognitive and emotional disorder or difference ever observed. Autism, dyslexia, language delay, language impairment, learning disability, left-handedness, major depressions, bipolar illness, obsessive-compulsive disorder, sexual orientation, and many other conditions run in families, are more concordant in identical than in fraternal twins, are better predicted by people's biological relatives than by their adoptive relatives, and are poorly predicted by any measurable feature of the environment [60].

A succinct statement of the support for heritability, although the possible environmental contributions to schizophrenia appear to be shortchanged here.

Reincarnation framework

I suggest that it is time to start seriously questioning the DNA-based framework of life. That so many heritable characteristics are somehow diffusely based amongst the limited variable portion of our genome is very difficult to imagine. This situation is furthered by the need to provide genetic origins for some

unusual but accepted behavioral tendencies, as with prodigies and paranormal abilities. And beyond this is the challenge of supporting many complex behavioral instincts. In the latter case one might consider the possibility of fields of habit (or morphic resonance) somehow endowing individuals with their species-specific general behavioral patterns [61]. Rupert Sheldrake suggests that such a species-specific memory might be carried about by some subtle physical field.

The alternative briefly introduced here is that the common premodern belief in reincarnation reflects an underlying dualistic and soul-bearing reality. Such a dualistic phenomenon could provide relatively simple explanations for a number of mysteries, as well as offer a general explanation for the missing heritability [14-15]. The reincarnation perspective seems to have been a common premodern occurrence and as presented in M'Clintock and Strong's Cyclopaedia of biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature, "transmigration, dating back to a remote antiquity, and being spread all over the world, seems to be anthropologically innate" and perhaps be "the first form in which the idea of immortality occurred to man" [62]. Chris Carter also suggested the broad historical existence of the reincarnation belief [63]. Included therein was a quote of Ian Stevenson to the effect that "nearly everyone outside the range of orthodox Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Science - the latter being a secular religion for many people - believes in reincarnation".

This belief is separable into two components: the intuitive continuity of behavior/personality component and the more puzzling karma or cause-and-effect component. Traditionally these two aspects apparently were "in fact ... virtually always conjoined" [64]. Possibly the apparent continuity of personalities across lives in relatively undistracted small groups helped to establish the continuity hypothesis. The karma belief perhaps gained traction in parallel when observing individuals encountering their just deserts across lives. Perhaps these beliefs could have been furthered by the insights of dedicated mystics or psychics. Another explanation for the origin of these beliefs is that they were derived from reports of the previous lives by individuals [65].

As an introductory synopsis of some of reincarnation's potential explanatory power one might: argue that in addition to offering a straightforward explanation for our natural religion, a [reincarnation] perspective also provides traction on some scientific conundrums including prodigies, transgender individuals, and the surprising variations in personality found amongst a number of species; a simple explanation for the mysteries associated with monozygotic twins; a backdrop for some controversial phenomena including near-death experiences; and finally a consistent framework for the missing heritability problem. In brief, the missing origins for a number of our innate specifics could be understood as carryover from previous lives and with some standout behaviors - as found with prodigious savants and prodigies [and mental disorders] - there

could be some additional carryover consistent with some of the remarkable descriptions of the intervening disembodied state [66].

The continuity aspect could be consistent with individual cases of young children experiencing the apparent recall of a previous life [67-69] as well as exhibiting some consistent behaviors. More subtle continuity support might be argued to have been observed by the psychiatrist Brian Weiss with his past-life therapy [70]. Contributions from the karma aspect would also be consistent with the unexpectedly large health differences found between identical twins and more generally the disease susceptibility portion of the missing heritability problem.

Another basic point here is that reincarnation's import would likely overlap with, as well as be complementary to DNA's. If as was commonly believed the incarnating soul is drawn to their future parents, then the soul might tend to find some continuity in the conception-beget DNA specifics - beyond the default codes for species and sex. This could include DNA-defined unusual conditions as well as the general features of appearance. Of significance here is that if such a parental-draw dynamic represented roughly a draw between similar beings - analogous to the assortative mating phenomena [51] - then that dynamic could produce its own crude heredity pattern. Thus, if an incarnating relatively risk-averse soul were drawn to similarly-inclined future parents, then that dynamic should produce an apparent inheritance of the tendency to be risk-averse. This would be true even in the absence of any DNA basis for that tendency (as appears to generally true in behavioral genetics).

An additional point on a possible reincarnation dynamic will be considered here in this very short introduction. There really are a number of surprising innate behavioral tendencies such as in the neighborhood of exceptional intellectual capacities and inclinations. These would seem to form very challenging requirements for a DNA explanation. They would also seem to demand significant complexity out of any alternative explanation. I can not see burying this complexity in a karma explanation. For example, what kind of previous behaviors could produce a cause and effect influence to result in having the extraordinary (and calendar-tracking) memory of hyperthymesia [33], a stunning capacity for remote viewing [16], or ending up in the wrong gender's body? I suggest here that the rebirth process is somewhat of a volatile process and that can result in some exceptional rebirth states. This is also relevant to possible transmigration-based explanations for mental disorders, and also perhaps some of our innate fear of death.

Mental disorders and reincarnation

I get started with the relatively simple transgender syndrome. The possible interpretation offered by the reincarnation perspective is the obvious one - an individual's gender is the opposite one from its previous incarnation and behavioral continuity established the current dilemma. What ultimately is not an existential big deal - a soul simply changing genders - can

produce significant challenges and opportunities for lessons in the embodied world. Perhaps simple volatility and/or some kind of recurrent desire to experience (or re-experience) the opposite gender could contribute to this phenomena. A related question that arises with such an explanation is - what about changes in species across incarnations? What besides personality (which varies enormously within many species) could be symptomatic of such a reincarnation dynamic?

Next, I consider schizophrenia. I get started by commenting on a problem with nightmares described in the fine and sober book, *Nothing to be frightened of*, by Julien Barnes [71]. As described, Barnes and some of his literary friends had serious difficulties with recurrent nightmares involving their fears of death (thanatophobia). Barnes' own dreams at one point were described as waking him and leaving him beating his "pillow with fist and shouting 'oh no Oh No OH NO' in an endless wail" [72]. The content of these dreams were described as involving "being chased, surrounded, outnumbered, outgunned, of finding myself bulletless, held hostage, wrongly condemned to the firing squad" [73]. The presumed explanation for this condition (naturally given the Barnes' sober education as reflected in his commentary) ultimately fell to DNA - "thanks for the gene, Dad" [74].

The basic idea I introduce here is that schizophrenia is not a hardware problem (and thus schizophrenics are not the dreaded "crazy" material-only entities [75]). Instead I suggest that it reflects an unfortunate tendency of a soul to regularly experience nightmares (even in the waking state) and this can become a very big problem. Before pursuing this line of reasoning I return to Julien Barnes's nightmares. Those nightmares seem similar to the discussions of the intermediate state described in the very old Tibetan Book of the Dead (TBD) [76]. That book attempts to give some insight and help to a recently diseased spirit with regards to the dynamic rebirth process. At a minimum the book is supposed to offer advice to help avoid a bad rebirth. But the underlying point here is the intermediate state (or bardo) as described can be very volatile and frightening. In the bardo one might feel that "you are being chased by various terrifying wild animals and pursued by a great army in snow, rain, storms and darkness" [77]. Such terrifying experiences, though, were described as a soul's "own confused projections" and can ultimately be recognized as such.

Continuing, the tendency to experience our confused and perhaps frightening projections is purported to be very strong in the disembodied state. Once a soul becomes embodied it then transitions away from that disembodied or spirit experience and hopefully becomes grounded with bodily sensations and realities (the initial spirit state or "natural religion" we find ourselves in as infants is presented in the book, *Born Believers - the Science of Children's Religious Beliefs*, by Justin L. Barrett [78]). The suggestion here is that a shortage of grounding and/or traumatic events can lead the underlying soul to flashback to the dualistic super-dynamic state. For some their previous existences might

produce a benign or friendly experience, but for many others previous difficulties might produce significant nightmares. In the case of full blown schizophrenia, that unanchored nightmare scenario can really infect a person's life. A suggested possible helpful strategy here is that someone experiencing schizophrenia - considerably more than those not in that state - needs to pursue some form of a bodily grounding strategy. Something simple like regularly following (or counting) one's breath might be helpful (it has helped me with a Restless Legs Syndrome sleep problem). Trying to stay with bodily sensation is a good way to avoid the excesses of the mind.

I move on to autism. I open here with a brief description of a little known phenomenon described in the fine like-named book, *Einstein Syndrome: Bright Children Who Talk Late*, by the well known economist and author Thomas Sowell [79]. A good alternative subtitle for this book might have been *Nerd-Inclined Children Who Seem to Hit the Pavement Running*. Sowell pointed out that children with this syndrome have "speech development [which] lags far behind that of other children their age, while their intellectual development surges ahead of their peers" [80]. These children often are late in toilet training, very strong willed, weak socially, and their intellectual strengths are focused in analytical areas and/or music. They also tend to demonstrate exceptional memories. Simply put these kids appear to be born quite strongly nerd-inclined ("nerd" is not a slight). Another prominent characteristic is that they are almost always born into families with a strong technical and/or musical presence. Sowell's own son exhibited this condition.

Some of the precocious behaviors of kids exhibiting Einstein syndrome are truly remarkable. One of musical prodigies considered in *Far From the Tree* appeared to fit the requirements of Einstein syndrome. Of some significance here is that this syndrome suggests two competing explanations. The contemporary explanation is that these kids received a big helping of nerd-tending DNA. Such DNA would be more prevalent in nerd-inclined families. The second explanation is that these kids were reborn in a rather focused way and thus their precocious nerd behavioral preferences. From this perspective, such kids have been determined nerds before (been around that block so to speak) were drawn to nerd-connected families and moreover came back with strong behavioral inclinations. One advantage apparent with the second explanation is that it doesn't require seemingly stunning genetic behavioral influences (like being drawn to a particular musical instrument and having a biological-like drive to practice on it).

Of more significance here is that Einstein syndrome tends to beget poor social skills. Those fitting the syndrome's description were socially such that (as rated by their parents), "more than two thirds of the children [in one study] were rated either below average or far below average, as were more than half of the children [in a second] study" [81]. These relatively weak social kids were likely borderline autistic, and more particularly in the Asperger's neighborhood. They also shared some

characteristics with the autistic children consider in Simon Baron-Cohen's previously mentioned study. In the two Einstein study groups the prevalence of having engineer fathers was 20 and 22 percent, respectively. The aforementioned rate cited for autistic kids by Baron-Cohen was 12.5 percent.

The core fixation being Einstein's syndrome might simply be described as being a nerd. This indirectly entails being weak socially. A possible fixation or focus associated with an analogous autism explanation - in particular for a serious (or classic) autism condition - is that the soul inadvertently bailed out on socializing. Additionally, I would suggest that the obsessive behaviors aspect commonly found with autism might then be a corresponding mechanism for avoiding socializing. As a personal observation, one way to avoid stress in a social situation is to shift your attention elsewhere, from a minor diversion like playing with change in your pocket to something more substantial (increasingly this is likely to be electronic). Such a transmigration-based explanation could be consistent with the fact that classic autism is about four times more common in males and perhaps nine times more common in the case of Asperger's [51], and is also more common in nerd-heavy locales.

Finally on a potentially relevant note, Sowell noted that bright children are much more likely to experience myopia [82] and among autistic or retarded musical prodigies "a majority ... have been either congenitally blind or severely visually impaired" [83]. Sowell had used these points in part as supportive of a heredity-based explanation for the Einstein syndrome. From the reincarnation perspective such visual impairments could be viewed as symptomatic of rebirths that were extremely focused on music and thus inadvertently involved corresponding losses of neglected capacities. In the case of classic autism then, such a loss dynamic could be hypothesized to be playing itself out with social capacity. An individual to bent away from socializing - and thus more likely a male and further nerd-inclined - could inadvertently setup a very socially-limited rebirth.

As for possible helpful ongoing strategies here, I can think of only one. Perhaps animal companionship could be a helpful way to encourage some socializing for autistics. In some ways pets - certainly dogs - probably fill this function for many other people too.

Conclusion

Although uncommon it is not hard to question the scientific understanding of life. If the crisis in genetics continues then perhaps more people will consider alternatives. The premodern reincarnation perspective offers some immediate footholds with unusual behaviors, as well as some broad traction with apparent heredity.

Problems with mental health are both significant and heavily invested in genetic assumptions. As a possible response to genetic failures the reincarnation approach could help shed

daylight on mental disorders. It also might further encourage some constructive living attitudes. These might include trying to paying attention; watching out for becoming too narrow; and trying to be aware of the suffering of others (or “all sentient beings” in Buddhist parlance). It might even help engender some interest in religions or religious perspectives.

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