

Are Some Born that Way and Does It Matter?

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We humans are diverse in our likes and dislikes, personalities, talents, and behavioral tendencies. Why? Are various tendencies, including sexual orientation, physically based (usually, but not always, meaning genetically determined)? Do they stem from our environment, the parenting we received, the friends we had, the stability or lack of it we experienced? Or are they really only a matter of choice? Do the answers to these questions make any difference as far as the Bible is concerned? That is, does a link to some physical factor, such as a particular genetic configuration, for what the Bible defines as sin absolve the person from responsibility?

The question of the cause of homosexuality has been hotly debated for years. Unfortunately, the arguments from all sides are commonly biased by personal and political agendas and are driven by emotion. Therefore, it can be helpful to look at research involving similar but less volatile issues. Does this or that behavior have physical or environmental origins and how much choice do we have in how we respond to these influences?

Genetics and Disease

To start, we can even take a further step back and, instead of looking at, say, genetics and behavior, we can look at genetics and disease. Medical research shows that we can have genetic susceptibilities to certain diseases. These include various cancers, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and asthma. But, and this is important to the topic of this article, research has shown that these genetic susceptibilities are only just that: susceptibilities. Because these are only susceptibilities, some people with the predisposing genetic variation won't get the disease while others will. Other modifiers, such as environmental factors and lifestyle, can make the difference (see "What does it mean to have a genetic predisposition to a disease?") (<http://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/handbook/mutationsanddisorders/predisposition>) ("Genetics and common diseases") (<http://www.who.int/genomics/about/commondiseases/en/>). If this is so in the link between genetics and disease, is it also true of behavior? Are physical factors only a nudge in a certain direction, but not an unalterable course?

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Criminal and Other Behaviors

Ongoing research also shows that genetics can be linked to various criminal tendencies. One interesting example is work that shows that people who lack a particular gene that regulates the levels of neurotransmitters involved in impulse control are predisposed to violent behavior. Yet not everyone who lacks this gene will become violent. Jim Fallon, professor of psychiatry at the University of California, found that he himself had many genetic variations linked to violent psychopathic behavior. In fact, he has many murderers in his family tree. According to a BBC article,

His explanation is that he was protected from a potentially violent legacy by a happy childhood. "If you've the high-risk form of the gene and you were abused early on in life, your chances of a life of crime are much higher. If you have the high-risk gene but you weren't abused, then there really wasn't much risk. So just a gene by itself, the variant doesn't really dramatically affect behaviour, but under certain environmental conditions there is a big difference."

"Are murderers born or made?" (<http://m.bbc.com/news/magazine-31714853>)

In other words, as the article sums up, "murderers are both born and made." And if this is true of murder, why not of other behaviors that are good, bad, and indifferent?

I would not be surprised if scientists eventually find that many of our psychological tendencies—introvert, extrovert, intuitive, emotional, logical, and so forth—have genetic bases. But, as we have found already with many of these behaviors, they can be modified. Probably many of us can say, I'm naturally shy or bellicose or impetuous or procrastinating or a daydreamer or whatever, but for the sake of holding a job, caring for my family, and simply getting along with the people around me, I've learned to control it.

A natural introvert may withdraw or may blossom into a Steve Martin, a Gwyneth Paltrow, a Bill Gates, a David Letterman, or an Abraham Lincoln (this is just a small list of famous people a web search revealed as introverted). What makes the difference? Upbringing, nurture, choosing to learn certain social skills, and other environmental factors. Notice that choice is a factor. If you choose to break out of it, you can.

The person may always have the tendency toward introversion, but he or she can choose to behave otherwise and enjoy a rich social life.

Sexual Orientation

What about sexual orientation? Is this particular behavior somehow unique? Many would have us believe so, but the evidence simply does not support their contention. Like other behaviors, homosexuality seems to have genetic as well as environmental factors, including choice.

In an article surprising for its objectivity about a subject notorious for emotion and political correctness, science writer Marcia Malory writes in "Is Homosexuality a Choice?" (<http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/guest-blog/2012/10/19/is-homosexuality-a-choice/>),

We know, from many twin and adoption studies, that sexual preference has a genetic component.... Genes can't control behavior completely, though....

Environment, like genetics, plays an important role in how our behavior develops....

With the right experiences, your brain can change even after you have reached adulthood.... If sexual preference can be altered, then people who support gay rights can't rely on the argument that gay people should be protected from discrimination because gay people have no choice but to be gay.... In his blog post [http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2012/01/23/is_cynthia_nixon_s_sexuality_really_a_choice_.html?wpisrc=slate_river], [J. Bryan] Lowder states, "Many critics will argue that appealing to biology is the only way to protect against the attacks of the religious right."

It might make these critics unhappy to hear this, but that's not how science works.

Science doesn't change in order to support political opinions.

Malory's article is not saying that homosexuals can always become heterosexual, and I agree. But, as Malory says, "Even if gay people can never stop being attracted to members of the same sex, they can learn not to act on their desires."

My point is that we should not see genetics as the last word when it comes to behavior. If we do, we will logically have to excuse alcohol and drug abuse, kleptomania, rape, murder, and so forth, as beyond our control and excusable because that's the way we were born. Do we stop punishing criminals because it's in their genes and they couldn't help themselves? Maybe we'll also find genes for adultery, lying, and coveting. What about laziness, cheating, and bullying? Are there genes for being late for work, speeding, or spending too much time at the water cooler? Are you driven to create and send out computer viruses? That's okay. It's genetic.

Where do we stop? Science simply does not support the idea that because a predisposition toward a certain behavior is in our genes or even in the structure or chemistry of our brains, that we have no control over it.

As Christians, of course, we need to be concerned with more than what scientists say. We need to know what the Bible says.

What Does the Bible Say?

Right from the beginning, we find that God punished Adam and Eve for disobeying Him, He banished Cain to a nomadic life for killing Abel, He caused the Flood because of the people's wickedness. We see this pattern repeated on and on. The Bible invariably holds people responsible for their actions. In the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 24:16 says, "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin." God's design in giving this Scripture is to teach that no one else is responsible for our sins. But, by implication, it also shows that we are responsible for our actions, and if those actions are sins, we deserve punishment. The Bible never allows for the excuse of being born a certain way. Throughout the Old Testament, unless God extends undeserved mercy, He punishes people for their sins.

The New Testament also makes clear that we deserve punishment for our sins, but it also brings grace into sharp focus. God doesn't base His grace on the excuse of our genetics. He bases it squarely on His Son. Scripture teaches that, motivated by love, Jesus Christ died for all who will put their trust in Him as their Savior. His sacrifice pays the sin penalty for believers and wipes away their sins. Believing in Him puts

believers into the New Covenant under which there is no condemnation.

The New Testament plainly labels homosexuality a sin and includes those who practice homosexuality among others who will not inherit the kingdom of God: "Or don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don't be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor extortioners, will inherit the Kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Romans 1 likewise teaches that God's wrath is against male and female homosexuality.

But we mustn't make the mistake of singling out this one sin above all others. It's only one sin among myriad sins, and, because we are all naturally sinners, none of us has the right to start pointing fingers at one particular sin simply because we don't have a tendency toward it (or want to cover up the fact that we do).

Notice that I said above that we are all naturally sinners. That is, we all have the predisposition to sin. Each of us might have more of a bent toward one sin or another, but we all have the tendency to sin.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen has Mr. Darcy say to Elizabeth Bennet, "There is, I believe, in every disposition a tendency to some particular evil, a natural defect, which not even the best education can overcome." It's true, and the defect will always be there. We can try to resist it and compensate for it, and we can largely succeed. The tendency, however, will always be there. There is no getting around it in this life. Humans, by their very nature, are flawed. The apostle Paul points out, "As it is written, 'There is no one righteous; no, not one. There is no one who understands. There is no one who seeks after God. They have all turned aside. They have together become unprofitable. There is no one who does good, no, not, so much as one'" (Romans 3:10-12). The only real answer is to find forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

Our inclination toward sin started with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. All of us are their descendents, and we all take after them in our tendency to sin. It is hereditary, but that does not excuse the fact that we commit our own sins: "For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Some might try to excuse our sins by saying that, since God is in charge of the entire universe and has predestined all events, we can't be held responsible for our sinful actions. But while it is true that God has predestined all things, the Bible disagrees about the responsibility for sins.

You will say then to me, "Why does he still find fault? For who withstands his will?" But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed ask him who formed it, "Why did you make me like this?" Or hasn't the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel for honor, and another for dishonor? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath made for destruction, and that he might make known the riches of his glory on vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory.

Romans 9:19-23

God may have made us a certain way, but He did not make us automatons. We think, we make choices, and we do the actions. We are responsible.

So, it seems that our tendencies, including sexual orientation, have both a genetic and an environmental origin. Perhaps there's even a spiritual element; maybe our souls predispose us to certain tendencies. But the Bible reveals that it doesn't matter where our tendencies come from. Ultimately, we are responsible. Without exception, we are all guilty of sin. Yet, we can't accuse God of being cruel. He gives us a very simple out, an easy way to get rid of that guilt: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him" (John 3:16-17).

It makes no difference why someone becomes a homosexual. God calls the homosexual lifestyle sin. There is no reason, however, to single out homosexuality from any other sin. We are all naturally sinners and deserve God's punishment unless we believe on His Son as our Savior. This, of course, involves admitting our sin. We cannot receive God's forgiveness if we proudly proclaim our sin to be an acceptable lifestyle:

He who believes in him is not judged. He who doesn't believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and doesn't come to the light, lest his works would be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his works may be revealed, that they have been done in God.... One who believes in the Son has eternal life, but one who disobeys the Son won't see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

John 3:18-21, 36

The homosexual has as much potential to receive God's love and forgiveness as anyone else. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9).