

2.3 Me and my genes

Some academic disciplines, such as evolutionary psychology, overemphasize the extent to which we are determined by our genes. But in as much as we have acquired self-cognition, we set ourselves free from genetic determination.

Self-cognition allows us the following basic knowledge:

Our individual lives terminally cease with our individual deaths.

Before we die, our interest is to get through our lives as pleasantly and with as little suffering as possible; once we die, our interest is in a comfortable death.

The interests of our genes are fundamentally different from our own interests. Our genes just want to propagate as successfully as possible, even if it means hardship and terrible suffering for us.

What we regard as pleasurable is decided by our constitution, which is determined by our genes. However, by granting us pleasures (sexual pleasures, that is), our genes tend to trick us into accepting non-pleasurable responsibilities and ultimately, even suffering.

But self-cognition allows us to dissociate the two: to accept the pleasures (which basically are sexual) and to organize our lives in a manner so that the responsibilities do not become disruptive, and that we get around the suffering altogether.

The above fundamentals are the same for men and women. However, the genetic mixtures of rewards and tricks to accept responsibilities and suffering are slightly different for men and women.

Women quite possibly feel more sympathy with children in need of help than do men, and quite possibly would be more willing to accept own suffering for the benefit of children. It's not that they would enjoy suffering; it's just that they are less capable of enjoying pleasure when they feel that they should help children.

The mechanism works on men, including me, too, though possibly not on as broad a front. But when my children were in danger, I would risk my life to save them.