



**Your on the  
Street Reporter**



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**Innately Yours: Liberal or Conservative**

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**July 11, 2017**

In 2001, I cut back on my technical work and began writing about political, social, religious, and military subjects. During these 16 years, I received considerable feedback about this more subjective work.

I cannot think of an exception to this observation: I have yet to encounter a person communicating with me who varies in their ideological leanings. By this I mean they come across in all their responses as either liberal or conservative.

Granted, some feedback is middle-of-the-road. But that kind of criticism is the exception rather than the rule. Even institutions are predisposed toward liberalism (*New York Times* and MSNBC), or conservatism (*Wall Street Journal* and FOX).

I have been puzzled about this phenomenon, because my ideological views depend on the subject. For example, I am a fiscal and military conservative but liberal regarding most social issues. I say “most” in that I am liberal in my views about gays and minority groups, yet conservative in my beliefs about abortion.

Recent genetic discoveries are leading scientists to make this claim: Much of our mental makeup is disposed at birth toward having conservative or liberal tendencies. Of course, we humans are born with the genetic endowments of our parents, and it is accepted in most circles that “the human mind is hereditarily predisposed to act in certain ways.”<sup>1</sup>

However, findings in the last decade claim we are hereditarily disposed to be red or blue. How seemingly inexplicable is that? I did a double-take, and reread these papers to make certain I had interpreted them correctly the first time.

These scientists state it is not only nurture (our experience in our environment) that forms our opinions about human issues such as same-sex marriage or prayer in school. To a great extent, it is nature. What is that nature? According to these researchers, it is our gene composition.

### **The Blank Slate is not Blank**

In the previous century, political scientists hewed to the blank slate theory: People were born with a somewhat blank brain. Through their environment (nurture), people formed beliefs and established ideologies based on the world around them as they filled-in their slate with the influence of their parents and other suasions. However, in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was established:

...identical twins reared in separate households (because of adoption) usually turn out to be very similar, whereas unrelated children reared together (because of adoption) rarely turn out similar to each other, or to their adoptive parents. They tend to be more similar to their genetic parents. Genes contribute, somehow, to just about every aspect of our personalities.<sup>2</sup>

The political scientists go further:

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Wade, *A Troublesome Inheritance* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 59.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 323.

Whether you end up on the right or the left of the political spectrum turns out to be just as heritable as most other traits: genetics explains between a third and a half of the variability among people and their political attitudes. Being raised in a liberal or conservative household accounts for much less.<sup>3</sup>

### **Don't get Carried Away with Genetic Determinism**

I've had trouble agreeing with these findings. After all, I'm a self made man. These studies claim I am only a partially self made man. Jokes aside, keep in mind that one's environment and adaptation to that environment form the other half (or two-thirds) of this equation. In addition, I would like to know more about these studies, especially how many identical twins were actually examined. In addition, to balance the nature/nurture scales, consider:

[Genes] influence in most situations is or can be overwhelmed by learned behavior, or culture. ...To say that genes explain everything about human social behavior would be as absurd as to assume that they explain nothing.<sup>4</sup>

My observations about my readers' consistent leanings toward liberal or conservative ideologies still hold true. What has surprised me is the claim by political scientists that political leanings have a partial genetic basis.

If these theories hold-up as we as learn more about the role of genetics in our lives, we might lay-off the self-compliments of, "I'm proud to be a conservative or liberal." (Take your pick.) It might become, "I'm glad my parents were conservative or liberal." It's an idea that might be a bit hard to swallow for many people, including this writer, as I tend to rebel against determinism in the first place.

If nothing else, perhaps the lesson to be learned is to be a bit more humble about our supposedly sure-fire, inerrant ideologies in our complex world. These genetic experts state they may have accompanied us as we traversed our mother's birth canal.

We are at the tip of the genetic iceberg. There is much to be learned about our genome and its role in our lives. The exact functions of most of our genes and their complex interactions with one another are yet to be known. As we learn more about ourselves, let's stay patient, After all, patience is ideologically agnostic.

You can take that last thought to the bank. After all, it was uttered by a semi self made man.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 324.

<sup>4</sup> Wade, *ibid.*, 9.