LEGEND
MAX COMMENTS
CURI COMMENTS
Genes (or other biology) don't have any direct influence over our intelligence or personality.
I'm not sure about this.
I don't think humans being universal understanders/explainers means genes *don't* have a direct influence over our mind/personality (esp. starting conditions).
It seems reasonable that physical effects on the brain can have an effect on our mind/thinking (e.g. brain tumors, head trauma), and genes affect things in ways we don't fully understand, so there's room for them to have a direct effect.
What sort of effect or influence do you have in mind, via what causal mechanisms?
- temperament: Say someone has a gene that means they produce lots of some hormone. That hormone makes them angry more often / more easily.
Hormones are low level. Behaviors and emotions are high level. It's kinda like suggesting that heating a room with a CPU in it might result in video game bosses attacking more aggressively. Low level changes do not cause high level changes that have the appearance of complex design unless there's a specific causal mechanism set up to enable this (e.g. sleep or volume button on a computer).
Don't we have a (rudimentary) explanation for hormones affecting thoughts, though? I know--personally--I think different things when in different moods (at least I think that's the case).
Are you linking hormones to moods? You bring up something about hormones affecting thoughts but then the next sentence doesn't mention hormones.
Yes. I think most ppl presume a super tight relationship between them. That doesn't seem right--thinking about it now. *Some* effect might be there, but that's like a transition between levels of emergence, and probably means I don't have a point here.
Going to drop this angle for the moment.
Do you think your made an error? If so how'd that happen?
Yes (postmortem in #18186)
#18186 ok so how would you revise your original claim: > Don't we have a (rudimentary) explanation for hormones affecting thoughts, though? I know--personally--I think different things when in different moods (at least I think that's the case). (you may want to grab more text/context to also revise)
concluding comment: I think I agree with you that hormones don't influence personality/thoughts in a substantial way (I think you agree with that at least).
I think at this point it's up to me to come up with some other causal mechanism? Or the only other node on my conversation tree I have to look into atm is mine about unknown causal mechanism.
That's an option. Another is I could play devil's advocate and take the other side of the matter. Another is you could ask questions or think about stuff like how reacting to a hormone differs from reacting to an event like a sick parent, winning a competition, getting a high or low grade, etc. Our emotions and moods are causally connected to all sorts of things but the basic point is the connection is governed by our ideas: we can decide how to react to a particular event and if we had different ideas we'd react differently. The hormone/genes/etc ppl are claiming roughly that something different/special is going on in their case. Having a clearer idea of what the claim is helps with evaluating it.
I have a few ideas for casual mechanisms: (list in #18191)
genes encode some ideas which are 'given' to us early in life
Consider a gene pool of, say, wild dogs. Using nanobots, you tinker with it. You sterilize or kill some dogs, or manufacture others, or whatever. You don't make huge changes. You just change the initial conditions. Then you leave the dogs alone for 100 generations. Do you expect the tinkering to change the end results much? In general I don't. The selection pressures of the environment will control the results. E.g. if you make the dogs have more fur on average, but it's a warm climate, then I think they'll end up with less fur anyway.
I had in mind a dog geneticist who just sorta screwed around a bit. If he specifically tries to cause a specific result, and puts a bunch of creativity and scientific study into figuring out what changes will cause it, then he might manage to cause it. If he can predict the environment and what'll happen evolutionarily, he might figure out what to do to the gene pool to get a specific feature to be present 100 generations later that wouldn't be present otherwise. Does biological evolution put that kind of major design effort into controlling high level human ideas like whether someone is an inductivist? No. It doesn't even have knowledge of those things (like induction), let alone knowledge of the whole future memetic selection pressures and evolution of ideas and creation of layers of abstraction and so on that'll happen from ages 0-25. To cause being an inductivist at age 25 would require not only knowledge of inductivist (as expressed in an appropriate framework that makes sense in our present day culture), it'd also require knowledge about that whole childhood and education process and how to manipulate and control it. How could genes do all that? And even if they theoretically could, there were no selection pressures to cause them to do it in general. You can pick tons of ideas – like that painting is better than sculpture, or that math tests should ban calculators, or that Uber should be allowed into cities immediately despite complaints by taxi drivers – and it makes no sense that genetic evolution would have set things up to control that. Maybe you could try to come up with a few special cases and an explanation of a causal mechanism, but the standard thing is no causation like this.
Similarly, I don't think the initial ideas in the brain matter a lot. Make sense?
for clarity: so you think it is possible we have ideas encoded in genes that are given to ~everyone during prenatal development (or shortly after birth, w/e)? the idea that the *initial ideas* in the brain don't have any long term significance on our thoughts (and genes can give us some initial ideas) is a stronger and different position than I thought you had.
I think our genes set us up with adequately powerful and generic hardware + OS + maybe some initial default apps that are replaceable. I don't think these end up mattering that much cuz of choice, abstraction layers, and universality – no missing features/capabilities. As far as their ability to bias us in a particular direction (as in variance in these things between people could make some people more mathy and others more artsy, or some people more angry and some more calm), while it's not exactly zero, I think it's tiny compared to how much culture and childhood and thinking about stuff matters. It's just a drop in the ocean. (This is also DD's position btw.)
And I don't think the variance between people is anything like intel vs ARM chips or windows vs. linux OS. Even that isn't such a huge deal, but genes created a particular hardware and OS design and variance is limited to be more minor and not break things. Variance isn't gonna be so huge as to create a drastically different design.
> stronger and different position than I thought you had. What did you think I thought and what's the difference?
Another pov is you can build ruby on C or java foundations and have the same language. Once you add a few layers of abstraction over the initial functions/APIs/whatever, then the details of them end up not mattering (unless e.g. they were really broken or manage to cause ongoing performance issues).
(other list elements)
So I don't think I have any good ideas for casual mechanisms. I don't think I could convince myself that genes have a direct influence over our thoughts. But I can't convince myself they *don't*, either. I can convince myself that I shouldn't believe they do. I'm open to other ways to move the conversation forward if you have ideas.
Does this sort of thing count as a direct influence over our personality? I can see a person like this 'learning to control' themselves or something, but I'm not sure exactly what you mean by directly influencing personality.
You could get annoyed more when hot or cold. Does that mean heat and cold influence personality? I think how one responds to heat, cold or hormones is part of what one's personality is. But they aren't controlling your reactions. The reactions are your choice based on your ideas.
It feels like you're implying reactions are core to understanding personality, like the only way we can inspect personality is via its effect on our reactions.
I don't think that and I don't see how my text implied it.
Given you agreed with "personality is just a collection of ideas" I'm not sure this is important to discuss unless you think so. I can explain why I thought the implication was there if you want.
Yes I'm curious.
<Max puts a chain of reasoning; length ~10>
#18185 Be careful with complex interpretations of other people. Often you should check if they agree instead of assuming you got it right. And I don't think I said stuff that corresponds to your "core" or "only way".
> Often you should check if they agree instead of assuming you got it right. I think I was trying to do that with: >> It feels like you're implying reactions are core to understanding personality, like the only way we can inspect personality is via its effect on our reactions. If that wasn't clear, is there a good way to do it better? I could explicitly say "to check I have this right, are you implying ... ?". That feels cumbersome though.
#18188 "feels like" is kinda vague but generally (when there aren't clear emotions involved) reads similar to "i think". i don't read it as a question or requesting confirmation. A question version at around the same length is: > Are you saying reactions are core to understanding personality, like the only way we can inspect personality is via its effect on our reactions?
I googled 'personality' and found a sensible-feeling definition about patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Those are all based on ideas, so by that definition personality is just a collection of ideas.
I agree with that.
More broadly, I see room for unknown causal mechanisms, esp. relating to things that make sense to have evolutionary roles, like social stuff. I could see some genes play a role in how readily someone accepts static memes based around certain social signals (e.g. in group/out group stuff).
> What sort of effect or influence do you have in mind, via what causal mechanisms? I'm not sure about the causal mechanism, just that this is *an* effect and it's argued that it happened via evolution at the gene-level. I think I might have some counterexample to the idea that genes don't play a significant role in thoughts. It's part of a bigger idea, though. I'll try and outline relevant parts of the video. (I've bolded the key phrases) - Lindybeige has a **theory on why women have breasts** - He **explains why other theories aren't sufficient** (e.g. there's one idea that women have breasts to signal fertility, etc, and that theory compares humans to other animals like primates; this is refuted b/c other species have no *permanent* signs of fertility) - There's a bit about the **EEA (Environment of Evolutionary Adaptedness) and evolutionary context** / selection pressures / social dynamics at the time (social dynamics here means like 'dynamics of hunter gatherer society') - There's a (conjectured) **chain of reasoning and events** he goes through in early (modern) homo sapien development involving **secret menstruation and how sexes would 'react' for evolutionary advantage** - part of that conjecture is **male reaction to sexual signals ~flipping** to avoid being unattracted to fertile women - and this eventually ends with women having permanent breasts It's that second to last part about male reaction ~flipping that I think might be a counter example. The video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWkOvakd9Mo The reason I think it's a counter example is that this would be a way genes significantly changed thoughts. (assuming ideas like 'she's attractive' and 'she's not attractive' fit the bill for what we're considering.)
> - part of that conjecture is **male reaction to sexual signals ~flipping** to avoid being unattracted to fertile women The idea of ~flipping is roughly: - animals are attracted to symbols like swollen breasts / butt, particular inflammations, temporary colouring, etc. - animals (all but humans) don't have breasts when they don't need them. They only grow them when necessary, and they're not swollen at other times - modern women have ~swollen breasts *all* the time (there's some difference between lactating/not lactating but it's minor compared to other animals) -- maintaining breasts costs resources, there's an evolutionary reason not to do it - the male reaction to swollen breasts is to *not* be attracted b/c it means the female isn't fertile (this is true in other animals) - human males around the time women developed permanent breasts had this reaction too (along with other things like fatter -> good -> more resources / better chance of children surviving) - one evolutionary reaction could have been to like fix the 'pattern' for what males found attractive (e.g. breasts -> good now, fatter -> still good) - but the *simplest* change necessary is just a binary 'not' - i.e. things that weren't attractive now are, and things that were attractive aren't -- admittedly (thinking about it now) why didn't humans die out because malnourished women were selected over non-malnourished? - so males had this gene flipped by evolution and breasts were attractive now This sounds like a way genes had (and have) a significant role in thoughts. Possible criticism: this is just an idea we get when we're young and some people change it, some don't, but it doesn't mean genes have a *substantial* role in affecting thoughts, just that like this one inborn(?) idea is different. I marked inborn with a (?) because I'm not sure I'm using it right.
#18200 So once upon a time humans were animals. Apes or something. Not yet intelligent. And they had behaviors controlled by genes just like cats do. Did humans get permanent breasts then or later (after intelligence)? I'm not clear on the claim/story yet. Anyway, later, humans become human/intelligent. Then they have memes. And memes start taking over control of lots of stuff including sexual preferences, courtship behaviors, etc. Memes evolve faster than genes and have access to better control over adult humans – ideas are in a better position to effect behavior than protein design at ~birth is.
If humans evolved permanent breasts before memes, there's no real issue, right?
Agreed
If humans evolved permanent breasts after memes, that'd be more complicated. Does Lindybeige claim or address that?
I can't find a reference to dates more specific than ~last 2.5 million years (the Pleistocene). If he did mention a more specific date I don't recall it and can't find it via some quick searches.
#18200 Overall, you or we could go into more detail on this example, but maybe you'd be content to consider in enough of an unknown, with lots of uncertainty, that it's no reason to reject a model of how intelligence/minds/genes/etc work. I don't see that it's very important to look into this particular example more.
Yeah, I'm content to do that. It's not clear it's a counter example (and even if it were there are lots of issues/unknowns still)
> The reason I think it's a counter example is that this would be a way genes significantly changed thoughts. It's useful to think through what sorts of genetic effects on thoughts are important and why. E.g. being tall correlates with the thought "I like basketball" or "I want to be in the NBA" at age 25. Genes did not evolve to have knowledge of basketball or the NBA. Height genes are just about height. The causality here is cultural. Culture reacts to (partially) genetically controlled traits like height. Similarly, culture has some reactions to e.g. hair and eye color, which genes have substantial control over (barring bleach, dye, colored contacts, etc).
For example, genes could make it so we're better at integer math than floating point math. I don't think this would cause someone to be more inclined to solipsism than an alien that excels at floating point math. And there could be variance among humans, but I don't think that would cause some people to be atheists.
I agree that there are ways genes could affect our brains at a lower level (like an instruction set affects CPU performance) and that this sort of effect isn't substantial.