

The Fearless Vampire Conservator: Phillip Kitcher and Genetic Determinism

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Abstract

Genetic determinism is the idea that many significant human characteristics are rendered inevitable by the presence of certain genes. The psychologist Susan Oyama has famously compared arguing against genetic determinism to battling the undead. Oyama suggests that genetic determinism is inherent in the way we currently represent genes and what genes do. As long as genes are represented as containing information about how the organism will develop, they will continue to be regarded as determining causes no matter how much evidence exists to the contrary. Philip Kitcher has strongly disputed Oyama's diagnosis, arguing that the conventional 'interactionist' perspective on development is the correct framework for understanding the role of the genes in development. While acknowledging the legitimacy of many of Kitcher's observations, I believe that Oyama's view is substantially correct. In this paper I provide several lines of support for support the Oyama diagnosis.

Keywords: genes genetic determinism susan oyama phillip kitcher richard lewontin genetic information bioethics developmental systems theory developmental psychobiology

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