

Genetic Determinism, Psychiatry and *Place*

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- We review genetic determinism and highlight how our earlier research on psychoanalysis and the philosophy of *place* (see Gildersleeve, Crowden, 2018) can contribute to a better understanding of its relationship to psychiatry.
- There “is concern that health communication about genomics will increase public beliefs that genes [directly] determine health (Harris, Weiner, & Parrott, 2005), a phenomenon referred to as genetic determinism.
- Genetic determinism is a problematic philosophy because it “reduces the self to a molecular entity, equating human beings, in all their social, historical, and moral complexity, with their genes” (Nelkin, Lindee, 2004, p. 2).
- When this occurs, *place* is foreclosed and this leads to a psychopathological complex being formed (Gildersleeve, Crowden, 2018). As we have argued elsewhere, the aims of both Jungian and Lacanian psychoanalysis are informed by a restoration of *place*. The foreclosure of *place* creates the obstructiveness of a complex experience of ‘not-being-at-home-in-the-world’. Jungian and Lacanian psychoanalysis aims to change this so the analysand can “‘return’ to place-as a homecoming” (Malpas, 2012, p. 19)
- Unfortunately, genetic determinism distances itself from *place* in opposition to these aims of psychoanalysis. When *place* is not acknowledged individual mental health is potentially challenged. Thus, genetic determinism will potentially contribute to mental illness through the formation of complexes (Gildersleeve, Crowden, 2018).
- The Human Genome Project has been described as the search for the “essence of life”, the ‘Holy Grail’ that would enable the understanding of humanity” however this “may lead people to conceive of genes as playing a deterministic role” (Dar-Nimrod, Heine, 2011, p. 812). This is psychologically dangerous because “people are influenced by scientific arguments regarding the role of genes in their lives”, more specifically “people’s understanding of genes also influences the ways that they live their lives” (Ibid, p. 800). In other words, belief in genetic determinism alienates an individual from discovering their *place* in the world and history because it can “lead people to view outcomes as immutable and determined. That is, an outcome is perceived to unfold according to some fixed set of underlying genetic processes that people assume is largely independent of environmental influence and beyond individuals’ control” (Ibid, p. 802).
- Genetic determinism is blind to the reality that the effect of genes is “constituted through an essential mutuality of relation at every level” (Malpas, 2012, p. 4). The effect that genes have on an individual is determined “in the way in which the multiple elements of *place* are gathered together (everything other than genes) in their mutual relatedness to one another” (p. 18)
- *Place* will affect (experienced through the obstructiveness of a complex) an individual who covers their *place* in the world and history with genetic determinism, which “is the belief that human behavior, personality, and physical appearance are determined exclusively by a person’s genetic makeup” (Kirby, 2000, p. 197)
- This overemphasis of genes puts *place* into darkness and “By attributing a trait entirely to genetic factors, a reductive and determinist view of behavioural genetics research can also shift blame away from environmental factors created by society” (Rothenberg and Wang, 2006, p. 359). Furthermore, this shifts “blame for the behavior away from both individual ‘free will’ and the environment created by the family, community, and society”
- Our philosophy of *place* combined with Jungian and Lacanian psychoanalysis (Gildersleeve, Crowden, 2018) offer an individual the opportunity to “find their unity not in any single preexisting element [e.g. genes] in that place from which the unity of the whole derives, but rather in the way in which the multiple elements of the place are gathered together in their mutual relatedness to one another” (Malpas, 2012, p. 18).
- We oppose the idea that “genes invariably determine characters, so that the outcomes are just a little, or not at all, affected by changes in the environment or by the different environments in which individuals live” (Jamieson, Radick, 2017, p. 1265).
- Our philosophy of *place* means that instead of “presenting human beings as deterministically constrained, such a conception opens up a view of the human as enmeshed in an essentially reciprocal relation with the world in which it is also situated. The human thus cannot be assumed in advance, nor can it be taken to arise out of only one set of structures or elements alone” (Malpas, 2012).
- The ideology of genetic determinism contributes to mental illness by claiming, “we are what our genomes tell us to be” and “once we know the sequence of the human genome, we will now know how to cure such diseases as homelessness and homosexuality” (Gilbert, 2002, p. 123). This belief in genetic determinism is disastrous as it can “inhibit attempts to engage in preventive health behaviours by engendering a sense of fatalism and a belief that such behaviours will be ineffective” (Senior, Marteau, Weinman, 2000, p. 1086). Therefore, genetic determinism can prevent an individual from obtaining mental health and understanding their “reciprocal relation with the world” (Malpas, 2012, p. 156) to achieve homecoming to their *place* in the world and history.

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