

Research Paper

A critical analysis of the relationship between the " God gene " theory and faithism

G.H. Khedri^{1*}, V. Azizi²

Received:2022.01.11

Accepted:2022.03.12

1- Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism, Payam Noor University, South Tehran Branch, Tehran, Iran

2- Assistant Professor, Faculty of Life Sciences and Biotechnology, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran V_Azizi@sbu.ac.ir

*Corresponding author. Email: gh.khedri@jonoub.tpmu.ac.ir

Received: 2021.02. 16

Accepted: 2021.05.21

Introduction

The existence of God's gene (*VMAT2*) in humans was suggested by Dean Hamer. *VMAT2* encodes a protein that transports a variety of monoamine neurotransmitters such as serotonin and dopamine in brain neurons. At the beginning of this century, with the introduction of God's gene theory, the knowledge of genetics has been opened to the fields of philosophical and theological studies, and now researchers all over the world are trying to prove the relationship between matter and spirituality (Hamer, 2004 & Silveira, 2008). In 2010, Newberg explained the principles of neurotheology and related the cognitive and physiological actions of different areas of the brain during deep spiritual activities (Newberg, 2010 & Newberg, 2003). Genetics and neurosciences will have a high capacity in studies related to human sciences, including the study of faith. Therefore, it is better that the relationship between the actions of the brain and spiritual experiences, faith and theology, should be carefully considered in interdisciplinary research. What makes Hamer's work valuable is that it introduces a primary connection between matter and spirituality to form common fields of study between natural science and theology. Faith includes a wide concept, but the most general one is trust. What is referred to as faith in philosophical texts is theistic religious faith, but it is clear that people who do not believe in the existence of God can also believe in something other than God in their minds (Bishop, 2007). Philosophers like Clegg believe that a person's primary and comprehensive encounter with life brings him a valuable flourishing ground, and in his nature there is a desire to respond to some kind of endogenous tendency. On the other

hand, the loss of faith is accompanied by a damaging psychological injury during life (Clegg, 1979). John Calvin considers faith to be a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence for man. Among contemporary philosophers, Plantinga is a defender of the tradition of reformation such as John Calvin in this field (Calvin, J., quoted by Plantinga A., 2000). By defining the power of the divine sense, Plantinga considers the beliefs of God as knowledge; because a special cognitive power plays a role in its creation and its functional design leads to the production of honest beliefs in the individual. But in line with the evolution of the human brain, two important events have taken place. First, there are deep questions regarding the issue of spirituality and faith, and secondly, it is necessary to know that science should be at the service of mankind and in line with meeting his material and spiritual needs; otherwise it will not be beneficial. A new definition that is based on biological-psychological achievements has also entered the field of applied and interdisciplinary sciences, which has been considered in this discussion. The question is, if the theories of natural knowledge are only applicable in the material areas of human beings, or are they able to generalize and extend to the areas of faith and intuition as well? Or that they are silent in these human realms and have neither the role of proof nor denial. In the present epoch, extensive, diverse and increasing studies of behavioral genetics, biology, neurophysiology and even neurophilosophy as well as comprehensive applications of empirical tools for describing the foundations of spirituality and faith in religions of human beings have posed serious questions and ambiguities about the origin and nature of religion and even faith.

Methods

Dean Hamer (1951-), a geneticist at Harvard University, aimed to identify meaningful correlations between behavioral genetics, molecular genetics as well as psychological studies and profound experiences (spirituality and faith). The present paper seeks to measure and evaluate the theory of God gene.

Analytical criticism of God's gene theory

Can the information in the genes provide a complete explanation of the spirituality-oriented and faith-oriented processes of human beings and decipher the human's belief in faith? Dean Hamer hastily put his theory in the book "God's Gene" before exposing it to specialists in biological sciences and humanities, especially philosophers and theologians, to be challenged and subject to scientific analysis and criticism. The methodological flaw that can be considered in his work is the lack of space and repetition in his research. Raising the level of repetition and choosing a more studied population in his experiment could have strengthened his argument, but he was satisfied with this and concluded that there is a relationship between spiritual experiences and genes. Although after Hamer, such researches have been carried out all over the world (Silveira, 2008), including Iran (Alale, 2016), but the statistical data have not yet reached the level of sufficiency and this is a serious weakness of an experimental research. It was mentioned before that Andrew Newberg and colleagues in 2003 found that certain areas in the brain show a significantly higher level of activity when spiritual experiences occur (Newberg, 2003). Parallel to these changes, the expression level of certain genes such as *VMAT2* increases in the neurons of these brain regions. In short, it can be suggested that the correlation of the expression level of these gene(s) and deep spiritual experiences can indicate the involvement of material substances in the spiritual aspects of human life. Assuming the acceptance of Dean Hamer's point of view, it

is possible to justify the goodness of material substances in the manifestation of an act of faith, as evidenced by the historical evidence that faith is one of the important tools for the permanence and continuation of the life of mankind, because the spiritual tendency and true belief in faith is a provider of mental health and function. It regulates the body and in this case the survival of the individual is guaranteed. From a philosophical point of view, it seems that God has provided the facilities that are necessary for the transformation and movement of beings - which are constantly transforming and changing - in the material world, and forging and creating beings in the world of nature and the best system it was not divine, instantaneous or once. Now that we have addressed the role of the material brain in spiritual experiences, we must modify this assumption a little and not consider the role of "zero degree" for genetics and neuroscience in the field of reason and consequently for faith, because in any case, the power of reasoning and speaking Man is not acceptable during his physical life minus the function of the material substance of the brain.

Results & discussion

In the present study, the relationship between aspects of natural science (genetics) and religious belief was discussed and criticized. Considering the indeterminacy of some human achievements in natural sciences, the present research tried to explain the goodness of the existence of matter in the function of the brain and, accordingly, the function of the mind as a causality of talent and not a complete reason for the faith based on rational knowledge, the opportunity of analysis in this to put the fields in front of naturalistic and enlightened biologists and philosophers. Accepting the fallibility of the brain's function can moderate the materialistic views of human beings and direct their attention to the true teachings of divine and non-divine religions. In self-views and intuitive-illuminative views on the issue of faith, the shortcomings of global studies such as Dean Hamer's research can be reduced and this weakness of biological evolutionist philosophy can be removed to some extent. In other words, with the help of improving the level of rationality of today's evolved man, the quality of faith and belief in many believers has decreased, but the number of true believers has decreased. However, the role of matter (genes and their products) in the functioning of the mind in the occurrence of semantic and faith actions cannot be denied and gave it a *zero* degree role. In doing so, it first argues that the information contained in genes and gene polymorphisms cannot possibly provide a complete explanation of the processes of spirituality and faithism and do not unveil human faith and logical revelation of human belief. Thus, answering this question more accurately warrants more extensive research. Second, such physicalism is confined to the physical aspects of human beings, and the metaphysical and spiritual aspects of human existence fall largely outside of this realm. Third, there are competing theories set forth against Hamer's theory, proving that basic beliefs and faiths are not genetically rooted nor inherited whatsoever.

Conclusion

All in all, we are standing on the threshold of a path that we know little about. What is certain is that today's mankind is in dire need of conversion to faith, and probably if such faith is based on rationality, it will be more valuable. Another result of this research is that in connection with the function of genes as material essences and the issue of faith, it is said that we should not consider the role of "zero degree" for genes such as Dean Hamer's god gene for the brain's orderly function in spiritual experiences, because in any case, the powers during his physical life, human speech

12/ A critical analysis of the relationship between the " God gene " theory and faithism

relies on the material essence of the brain, and the brain's activities will result in the functioning of the mind and ultimately the emergence of spiritual experiences and faith.

Keywords: *Dean Hamer, faithism, VMAT2 gene*

Acknowledgement: The current research has been supported by the Payam Noor University, South Tehran Branch and Shahid Beheshti University.

Declaration of conflict of interest: The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.