

1 The question to ponder asks if our primary purpose is survival and
2 reproduction or if there is more to human nature. On the one hand we're created
3 from evolving genes yet we look at ourselves as more than that. I'll argue that we
4 are more than survival creatures since we value more and morality, ethics, and
5 religion play equal roles in human nature.

6 Richard Dawkins believes that all animals are machines created by their
7 genes for survival (Dawkins, 273). He describes a replicator molecule (DNA) that
8 copies itself and stabilizes our world (Dawkins, 275). These replicators are what
9 have created us as their means of survival and reproduction. Dawkins alludes to the
10 possibility that our awareness of this is what allows us to override the instincts of
11 our genes (Dawkins, 277). Though we may be machines to keep our genes alive, we
12 are more than that.

13 Our intellectual mind is the root of what more we are. It is from this that the
14 concepts of morality, ethics, and religion form. Genes are static instructions for how
15 we look and what our instinctual reactions are, but our environment and upbringing
16 are more of a determining factor for what we believe. In *Gattaca* a character stated
17 that there is no gene for the human spirit. This is the mindset that I see as defining
18 human nature as being more than just genetics. Maybe our close genetic species
19 kinship ties with monkeys can be further evidence here, as our DNA is similar
20 enough that if we were purely genetic machines we may be more like them, but it is
21 our human spirit and intellect that separates us from them.

22 Altruism is one part of human nature that seems to disprove any claim that
23 we are purely the creation of genes. In part this is because altruism reduces the

24 chances of survival (Wilson, 265). To see why altruism still exists you must look at
25 kinship. Part of human nature is the nurture of young and care for one another; this
26 is the basic definition of altruism. Altruism, along with the fact that we're relational
27 creatures, forms the basis of our extremely successful cooperative society.

28 That leads me into where morality, ethics, and religion are rooted. Everyone
29 has their own ideas of what is ethical and moral, but despite that we agree on
30 certain standard assumptions to help glue societies together. Maybe a serial killer
31 would believe that killing an innocent baby is perfectly fine, but society teaches us
32 that this is cruel and punishes those who kill anyone. Likewise religion formed as a
33 way for us to reconcile ourselves with questions that remain unanswerable; it gives
34 meaning to that which has no answers. Were we to have lost the trait of altruism we
35 may not have had the ability to sustain cooperative societies quite the way we have
36 today. Thus as altruism isn't genetic isn't our modern political map evidence that
37 we're more than just our genes' survival machines?

38 Paul Bloom spends a great deal of time discussing morality, and he posits
39 that the biggest testament to its centrality in human nature is how little we actually
40 discuss it (Bloom, 130). He sees empathy as the start of morality, and human
41 intelligence as what separates us from being just animals. As Dawkins' theory
42 suggests our genes would drive us to be anything but impartial, yet morality
43 depends on us being impartial to ideas (Bloom, 138), and this impartiality is a by-
44 product of our intellect (Bloom, 139). Ethics is much the same way; it comes about
45 from our intellectual and relational abilities, not our genes. Morality and ethics both
46 define part of human nature because they are further guidelines by which we live

47 that aren't statically coded in our genes and are connected directly to the larger
48 meaning we give to life beyond survival and reproduction.

49 Thus my view on this question is that we're more than our genes keeping us
50 around for their survival. Though lots of what make us up may have evolutionary
51 and genetic starting points there are things like morality, ethics, religion, and even
52 altruism that are not entirely our genes. What these have in common is the
53 importance of our intellect to maintain them. So my conclusion is that our intellect is
54 the most important factor of human nature that isn't purely genetic. I cannot say
55 that intellect is in part genetic, and certainly we are our genes' survival machines,
56 but we are clearly more than just survival machines.

57

58

References

59

60 Bloom, P. (2005). *Descartes' Baby: How the science of child development explains*
61 *what makes us human*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

62

63 Dawkins, R. From *The Selfish Gene*. In David Barash (Ed.). *Ideas of Human Nature*,
64 272-277. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

65

66 Wilson, E. From *Sociobiology and On Human Nature*. In David Barash (Ed.). *Ideas of*
67 *Human Nature*, 264-272. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.