

Information in The Book of Life

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Abstract

Whether or not genes contain intentional information is a hotly debated issue. In this paper, I survey and examine the rationales behind both sides of the debate against the background of some well-established theories on the philosophy of language and conclude that, at this point, there is no good reason to support the idea that DNA or other nucleotide sequences contain intentional information. It is also shown that the hypothesis that intentional information may be contained in genes is a severely watered-down version of more typical intentional ascriptions. I proceed to argue that the idea that genes might be endowed with intentional information, even in its minimal sense, quickly leads to a version of genetic determinism, dubbed “normative genetic determinism” Finally, I argue that normative genetic determinism renders our bodies or psychological characteristics some normative status they do not possess.

Key Words: gene, genetic information, genetic determinism