

Genes

My only “New Year Resolution” (this year) was a rather modest, undemanding one. I resolved no longer to poke fun at those less fortunate than myself...specifically, those who (through no fault of their own) feel an urge to eat sprouts. Having read a scientific paper on the subject, I am now aware that there is a bio-chemical reason for this otherwise inexplicable behaviour: sprout-eaters are actually short of a gene.

Christened “the discernment gene” (but only by people like me) its absence allows the genetically-challenged to enjoy an activity which would be anathema to those who are better endowed. Mercifully, this deficiency in their make-up means they will never once experience the true and horrific taste of these vegetables. Well...that resolution didn't last too long, did it?

But reading about this issue, made me wonder if genes (or the lack of them) are responsible for any other quirks of personal taste. I didn't have to look too far to find evidence of this: In recent months, I've had an almost irresistible urge to buy a couple of things from Ebay. One was a cast iron tortoise-shaped spittoon, and the other – an 18th century prosthetic arm, complete with rusting hook. I was only prevented from purchasing them, by my wife threatening to leave. I'm inclined to believe that genetics were responsible for the situation – after all, no-one likes to think their wife is *that* devoid of good-taste...*unless* there is a medical explanation.

Or maybe it's a female thing. The tortoise spittoon changed hands three times in as many weeks. I wrote to the current owner of this wonderful artefact, curious to know why *he* was now putting it up for sale. “Same reason as the other guys – the wife won't have it in the house”. He also said that if it didn't sell, he'd be happy to split up... as long as he got custody of the tortoise. Perhaps implausible male bravado is also a genetic issue.

It is easy (and tempting) to attribute many personal tastes to genetics. But that can promote a smug superiority over those who don't share ours...as in - he/she watches Big Brother/wears a baseball cap/supports Arsenal, and is therefore a slack-jawed half-wit from the shallow end of the gene pool. Truth is, though – they're just different. But human nature being what it is, many people don't need to know even *that* many details about others, before forming an opinion about them.

They will judge on first appearances – how someone dresses, perhaps how they speak. It's happened to me. I remember hearing a church-leader was very impressed with a theological paper I had written...but then he met me, and heard my accent. Then he said, “It's very good – but who wrote it for you?” “Actually”, I said, “I wrote it myself. But who read it to you?”

People don't really need advances in genetics to underpin their prejudices – bigotry will always thrive, with or without science. But leaving aside teasing about sprouts, I really think diversity is something to be celebrated, rather than condemned. For one thing, it is diversity which makes churches run smoothly (when they do!)- with sometimes very different people contributing to the Body of Christ. For another, Christ himself was never bothered about people's backgrounds, interests or preferences – he loved them the way they were. “Seeing others through the eyes of Christ” is a wonderful ability. It changes the way we think of people, and how we relate to them. And it can overcome the most pronounced differences...even genetic ones!