

DNA Ancestry Tests May Look Cheap. But Your Data is the Price | The Guardian

By Nils Pratley

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There is nothing new under the sun. In the past decade, millions of punters have parted with their cash and a vial of saliva, and in exchange they received some information about their DNA. Our genomes are a treasure trove of biological data, and an industry has sprung up to sell products based on our newfound ability to quickly and cheaply read and interpret DNA.

The biggest of these companies is 23andMe: [five million paying customers](#) since 2006, usually nosing for clues about their ancestry. Unlike most genetic genealogy companies, 23andMe also offers health-related information, on traits such as eye colour, predisposition to a handful of diseases, and the tendency to puke when drinking alcohol.

As with Galton's scheme, 23andMe was never interested in your personal history or your eyes. What it wants is to own and curate the biggest biological dataset in the world. So it was no surprise when the company announced a [\\$300m \(£233m\) deal with pharmaceutical mammoth GlaxoSmithKline](#) last month to develop drugs based on the data you paid to give them. This is not illegal in any way. 23andMe told users that it was planning to do this, and [in 2015 had done something similar](#), but on a smaller scale, concerning Parkinson's disease. The new deal is the biggest commercial venture of its sort so far.

This is all unknown territory, and warrants serious thought by regulators as well as by customers. 23andMe is unambiguous about its plans: board member Patrick Chung told Fast Company in 2013: "Once you have the data, [the company] does actually become the Google of personalised healthcare." Genomes can be mined for subtleties that only become visible with such voluminous data. I've little doubt that interesting science will emerge from this, and new drugs may well be developed to treat awful diseases. I also have no doubt that these drugs will be

| sold back to you.

Source: [DNA Ancestry Tests May Look Cheap. But Your Data is the Price | The Guardian](#)