



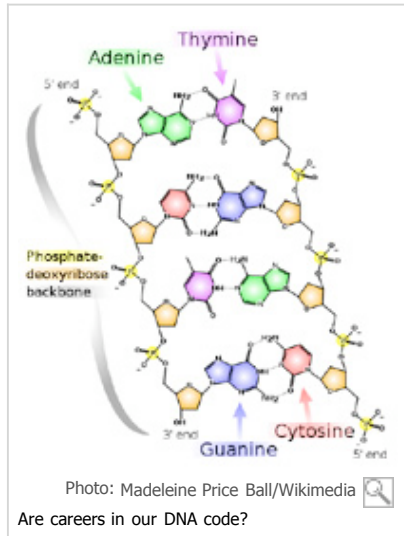
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## GLOBAL: Is humanitarianism genetic?



DAKAR, 16 March 2010 (IRIN) - That creatures like ants and bees are willing to sacrifice their lives for the sake of the colony seems to defy Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest, UK researchers noted in a [recent paper](#) on the genetics of altruism. "Altruism reduces the reproductive process of the altruist – so why is it not weeded out by natural selection?"

The suicidal defenders of food stores and the sterile workers of the social insect world are the "extreme altruists". But the lineage of a colony means everyone is related. So, the authors conclude, nature's altruists are actually boosting the chances of passing on their genes - either directly or indirectly – by being selfless, and ensuring the growth of the nest.

Is the altruism of humanitarians a genetically programmed function to preserve our global hive? "By asking if humanitarianism is genetic, you assume aid work is attached to altruism, which I do not believe to be the case for all aid workers by any stretch," commented one aid worker, who has been

in the field for a decade, and asked to remain anonymous.

Genetics cannot explain all behaviours, Stuart West, co-author of the report told IRIN. "There does seem to be some evidence that genes directly influence the level of helping in humans. However, this is relatively negligible when compared to other factors such as environmental conditions [and] learnt behaviours."

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**Theme(s):** (IRIN) [Aid Policy](#), (IRIN) [Health & Nutrition](#), (IRIN) [In Brief](#)

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