

Scientist knocks view of genes as “blueprints” for development

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The report that sequencing of a fetal genome demonstrates that we have a crude “blueprint” for adulthood has spawned the expected push back from cultural anthropologists who rebel against the predictive quality of genes. “Genes play an important role in our development and functioning, not as directors but as parts of a complex system,” writes Augustin Fuentes, a University of Notre Dame anthropologist. Well, yes and no. Genes provide a lot more than just a part of development equation, as most post modernist anthropologists like to claim. Genes should be thought like the frame of a house—they circumscribe possibility, and do provide, like a blueprint, limitations. But like a house design, much of the cool stuff is how you decorate the insides—what you do to reach your genetic limits. But make no mistake about it—genes do set limits, although they don’t “determine” behavior per se. Here’s Fuentes’ misaimed criticism:

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