

## Twitter Thread by Noah Smith



**Noah Smith**

[@Noahpinion](#)



**Confession: I haven't the slightest interest in my genetic ancestry or where my ancestors came from or what they did.**

I mean, my dad's family came from Lithuania. They changed their name from Kuznets in 1905. At some point they were blacksmiths. My mom's family came from Halychyna in Ukraine. I have no idea what they did. That's about all I know.

Oh, I do know that pretty much all of my extended family who stayed in Europe got wiped out by the Nazis.

I like to think that my ancestors were nothing and nobody. Random boring peasants with no special talents or wealth.

Except for Genghis Khan, of course. But he's everyone's ancestor.

The best thing about this approach is that I don't have anything to live up to. ;-)

(end)

(more)

But, you know, I actually am really proud of my ancestors. I'm just not proud of my \*personal\* ancestors for being better than the ancestors of other people (which they probably weren't).

I'm proud of the ancestors of all humanity.

I'm proud of the humans who found a way over the bloody centuries to lift themselves up out of agricultural indigence.

Who found ways to wrench away from nature, bit by agonizing, confusing bit, the secrets of how the world actually works, and to preserve that knowledge.

I'm proud of the humans who found a way to carve out a civilized safe space for (at least some) humans, so that now at least some people can grow up without the thing we call "PTSD", which was once the universal and natural human condition.

I'm proud of the humans who, bit by agonizing bit, found moral principles more advanced than "might makes right", and who did the hard labor of centuries to craft societies who were just a little more kind and gentle than the ones that came before.

And most of all, I'm proud of the apes (or pseudo-apes), my most glorious ancestors. The animals who somehow found a way to be a little more than animals.

What a task that was. What a labor of millennia.

We humans are not fallen beings. We did not fall from grace. We climbed upward from the muck.

The fruit of the Tree of Knowledge was not sin - it was the whole damn point. Eating it was the only thing worth doing.

(That sounds profound but actually I read it in a cheesy 1980s sci-fi book: <https://t.co/8bdAE553X9>)

And of course, there's so much left to do. There is so much farther to go. We're still animals, brutalizing each other and scrabbling for a living out of the unforgiving dirt. Our ignorance still dwarfs our knowledge. Our petty selfishness still dwarfs our kindness.

But even though there's so much farther to go, I'm proud of how far we've come. Against all the odds. Against a Universe of random death and entropy that had it in for us every step of the way.

Those aren't just my ancestors. They're yours too. And you should be proud.

(end)