

GENETICS, PHILOSOPHY

AN EXPLANATION OF HEREDITY

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An explanation of heredity can be found at the [Wired interview](#) of [Carl Zimmer](#).

People have been trying to use genetics as a form of identification for a very long time. Of course they didn't always call it that. DNA is just a modern substitute for the old idea of blood. But in many ways it hasn't evolved much from the time we thought of ancestry as a pure substance. We still say "I've got some Irish blood in me," but it's not like you can take out just the Irish blood and fill a cup with it. It's the same with the bits of DNA in your genome that came from people that once lived in that part of the world. We're all an amalgam of fragments that have all traveled different paths and each only influences us in very subtle ways. What we really want from heredity is an explanation of why we are the way we are, and genes alone can't give us that. There are other things we inherit that matter just as much—like the chemical modifications to our DNA that turn genes on and off or the microbes that abound in our bodies or the human-made environments we're born into. We literally pass down the whole world to our children, and right now our children are inheriting climate change.

This is clearly an argument against the European genetic exceptionalism. But even accepting that argument to a large extent, I do not understand why Zimmer uploaded now the genomes of his children Charlotte and Veronica for public viewing? Because it is largely irrelevant?