



Endless Night (Pt. II)

An
extremely
unwanted
DIVERSION
INTO
metaethics!



Metaethics

Meta-ethics is a subdivision of ethics concerned with the philosophical study of the meaning of ethical terms; e.g., questions like “What is good?”, “What is moral responsibility?”, etc.

Logical Background Concepts

A **monadic predicate** (a.k.a. a one-place predicate) is a predicate that says something about one thing;

e.g., “Joe is happy” has a monadic predicate, namely “_____ is happy.”

In symbols: Hj

Logical Background Concepts

A **relational predicate** (e.g., a dyadic predicate, a.k.a. a two-place predicate) is a predicate that asserts a relationship between two or more things;

e.g., the predicate in “Sabrina is taller than Katia” is “___ is taller than ___.”

Logical Background Concepts

This relational predicate would be symbolized using two constants (or variables):

Tsk

It is read as

“Sabrina is taller than Katia.”

Moral Relativism

Moral relativism is the view that moral predicates (usually expressed as, for example, “___ is morally wrong.”) are actually *relational predicates*.

Moral judgments are only true relative to some individual or group.

E.g., “___ is wrong for ___.”

Cultural relativism is the view that:

- a. there is no objective way to establish that a particular morality is the correct morality;
- b. there is no reason to believe in a single true morality; even though
- c. there may be certain moral universals.



arranged



marriage

“Arranged marriages are morally permissible in (for example) India.”



Moral Absolutism

Moral absolutism is the denial of moral relativism.

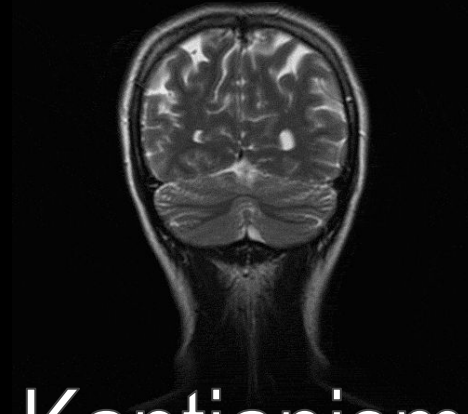
In other words, actions are permissible (or impermissible) regardless of context.

Put another way, moral predicates are *monadic predicates*.

Utilitarianism



Divine Command Theory



Kantianism

Moral Objectivism

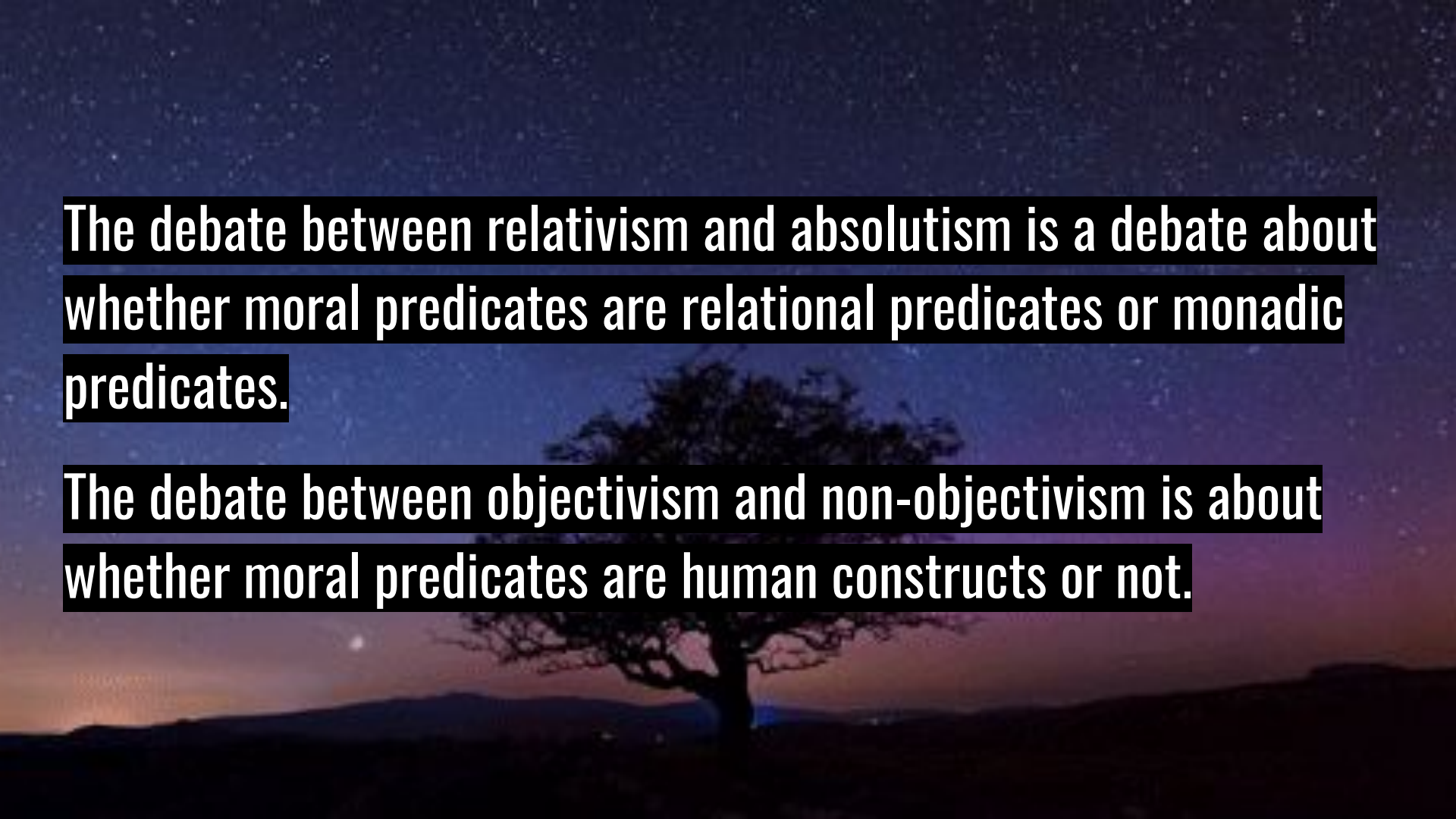
Moral objectivism is the view that moral predicates (i.e., the predicates in moral judgments like “Capital punishment is **morally abhorrent**”) are mind-independent.

In other words, they are independent of human thoughts and actions.

Moral Non-objectivism

Moral non-objectivism, a.k.a. moral anti-realism, is the view that moral predicates are mind-dependent.

In other words, moral properties are **human constructs**.

The background of the image is a night sky filled with stars. In the lower half, there is a silhouette of a large, spreading tree against a twilight horizon. The sky transitions from a deep blue at the top to a soft orange and purple near the horizon. The text is overlaid on this background in white, bold font, with each line of text enclosed in a black rectangular box.

The debate between relativism and absolutism is a debate about whether moral predicates are relational predicates or monadic predicates.

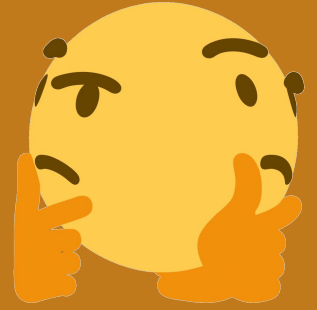
The debate between objectivism and non-objectivism is about whether moral predicates are human constructs or not.

First-order Moral Positions

First-order moral positions refer to one's commitment to a particular ethical theory (e.g., Utilitarianism, Kantianism, etc.), as opposed to one's second-order metaethical positions (e.g., non-objectivist relativism, or objectivist absolutism).



Food for thought...



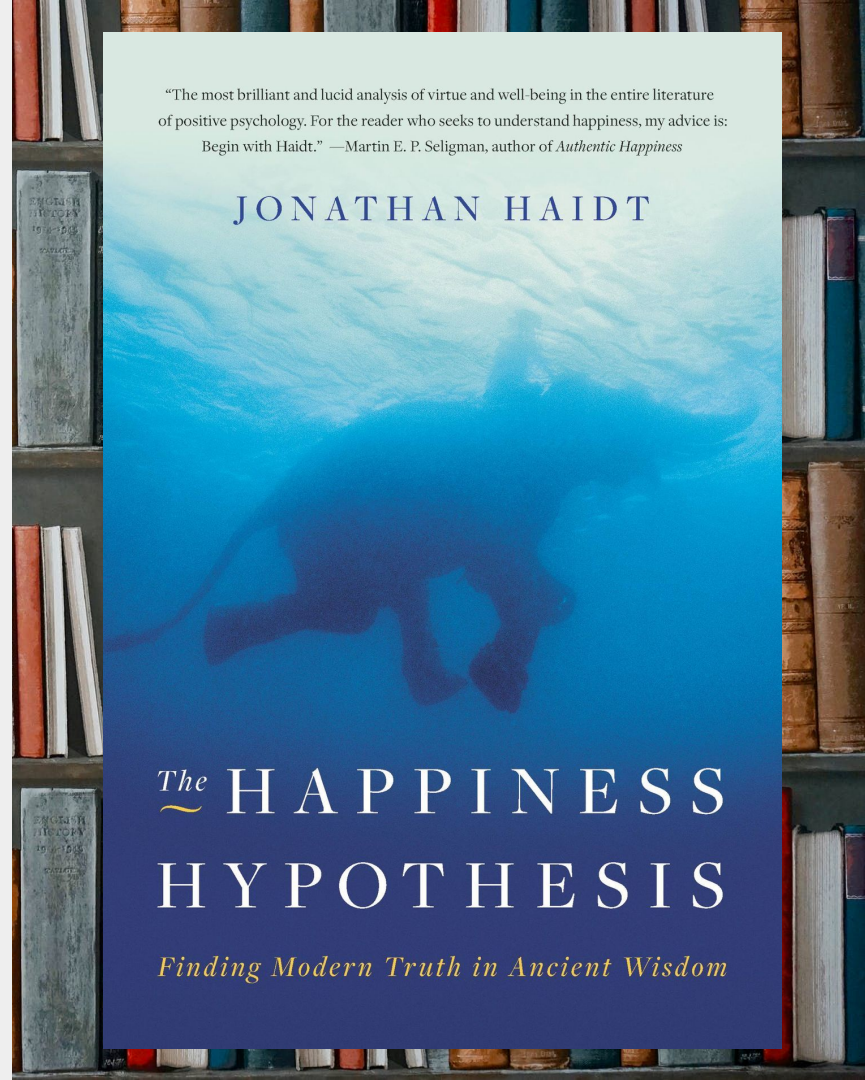
Do the findings in cognitive science push us towards moral non-objectivism?



Far back in the evolutionary history of life,
some animals developed
individual intentionality...
They could cognitively represent experiences,
they could make inferences and transform
these representations, and
they acquired the ability to self-monitor and
make thoughtful behavioral decisions
(see Tomasello 2014: 8-9).

Haidt (2006: 47) reminds us that, although ultrasociality appears to go against the spirit of evolution, Darwinian processes have produced ultra social creatures on at least four occasions:

- **hymenoptera (ants, bees, wasps)**
- **termites**
- **naked mole rats, and**
- **humans.**



Non-human ultrasocial species cooperate due to the genetics of **kin altruism**, an evolutionary strategy that favors the reproductive success of one's relatives.





In these creatures, the foundation of their ultrasocial cooperation is that they are all siblings.

For example, some ants spend their lives hanging from the top of a tunnel offering their abdomens as food storage bags for the rest of the nest.





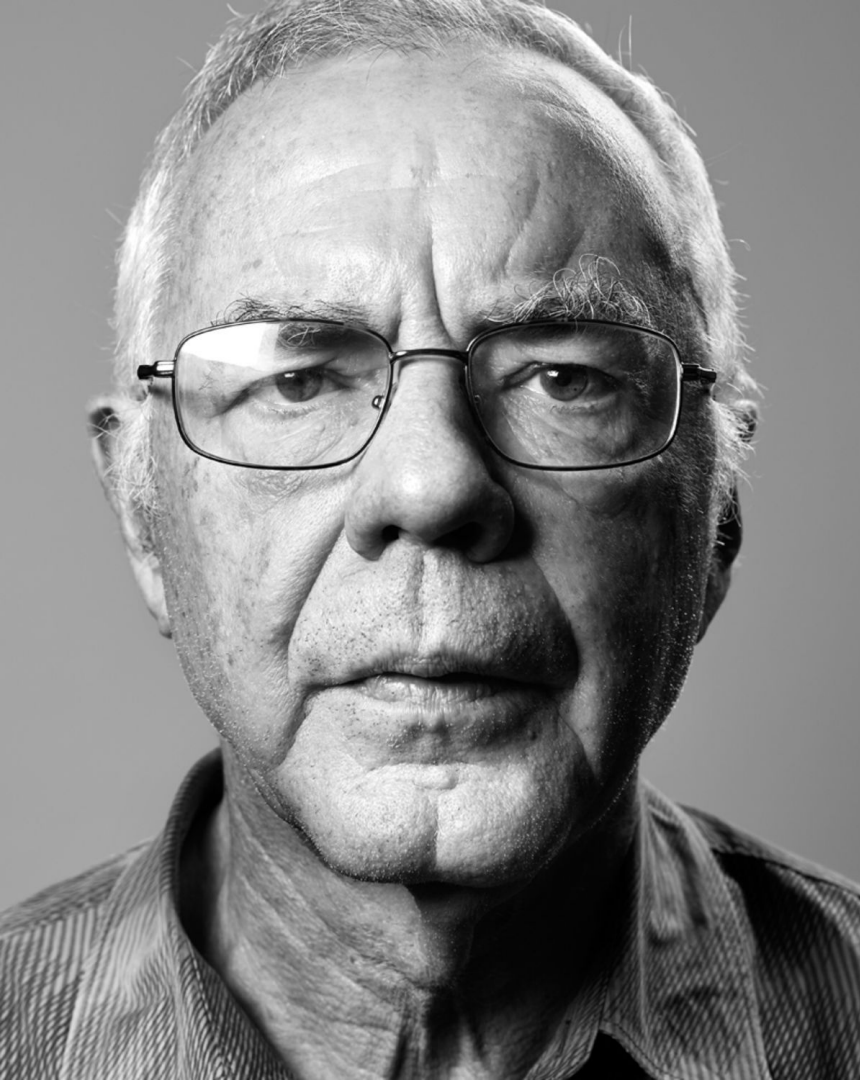
This ultrasociality bred ultracooperation, which is what enables the massive division of labor seen in these species.

BBC



ANT WAR!!!





Another adaptation that enables cooperation was first introduced by Trivers ([1971](#)): reciprocal altruism.



This is the tendency to help another individual at a cost if there is a chance that this individual might be able to return the favor at a later date.



But humans go further still...

Tomasello et al. ([2012](#)) hypothesizes that around 2 million years ago, soon after the emergence of the genus *Homo*, there evolved a capacity for cooperative communication (which he calls *joint intentionality*) not found in the great apes...

Finally, humans acquired **collective intentionality**, the capacity for robust culture and transmission of values.

“This required that modern humans not just acquire instrumental actions by observing others, as did early humans, but actively conform to the behavior and norms of the group, and even enforce conformity on others through teaching and social norm enforcement” (Tomasello 2014: 80).

“The second step of collective intentionality likely evolved in a population of modern humans in Africa before they migrated out into other parts of the world after 100,000 years ago. But once they started migrating out and settling in highly variable local ecologies, differences in cultural practices became pronounced” (*ibid.*,141).



Turchin (2017) argues that only conflict, escalating in scale and severity, can explain the extraordinary shifts in human society—and society is the greatest military technology of all.

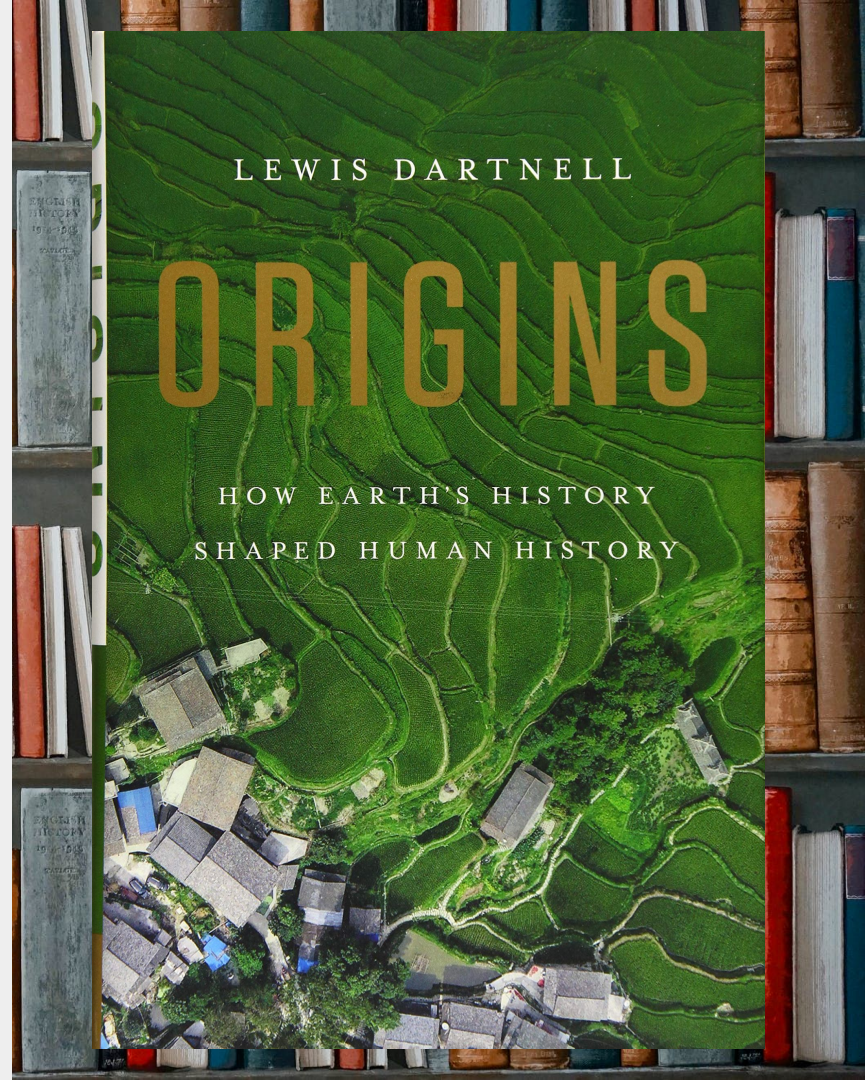


ULTRA SOCIETY

how 10,000 years of war
made humans the greatest
cooperators on earth

PETER TURCHIN

Dartnell (2019, chapter 3) argues that perhaps the naturally-occurring cyclical rapid warming and cooling of the planet may have been the cause of settled societies.



One possible scenario is that during a period of stasis (during a cool period), some societies had plenty available to them and so they settled.





But then as the cool cycle ended,
the areas that had been
populated began to **desertify**.

This might have been what happened in, for example, ancient Egypt.

Large numbers of climate refugees crowded the Nile Valley regions.

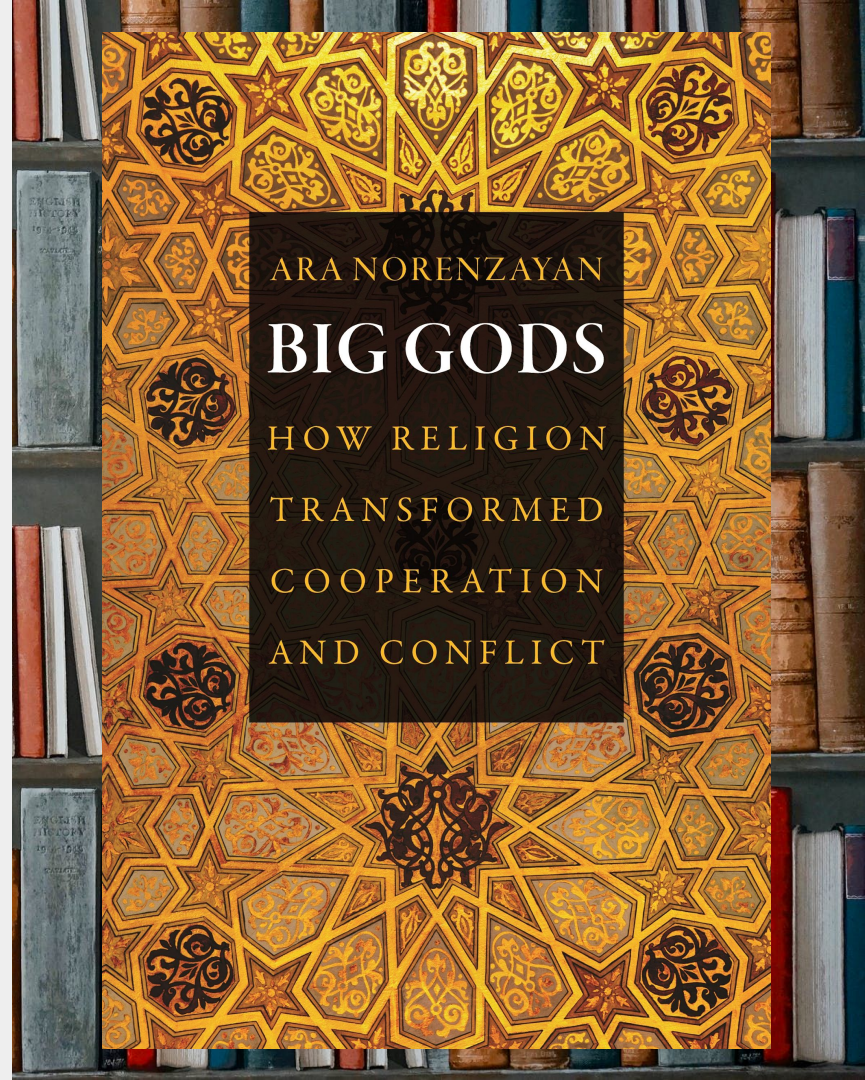




Centralized bureaucracies were the only structures that could coordinate agricultural practices, and they thereby gained legitimacy.

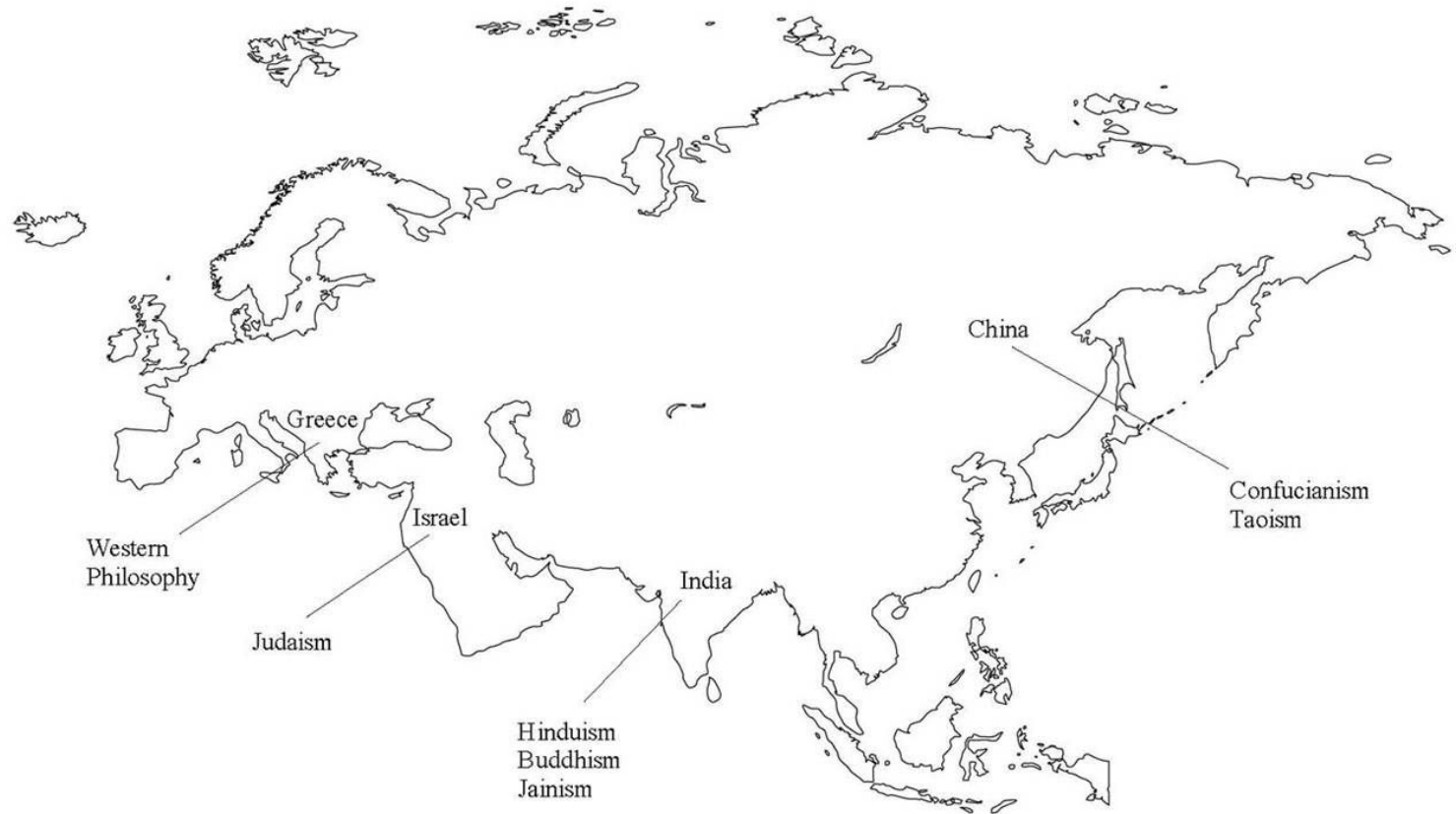
Armies were organized to protect raiders and thus generals were born, followed by empire.

And then Big Gods were invented via cultural evolution during the Axial Age (see Norenzayan 2013).

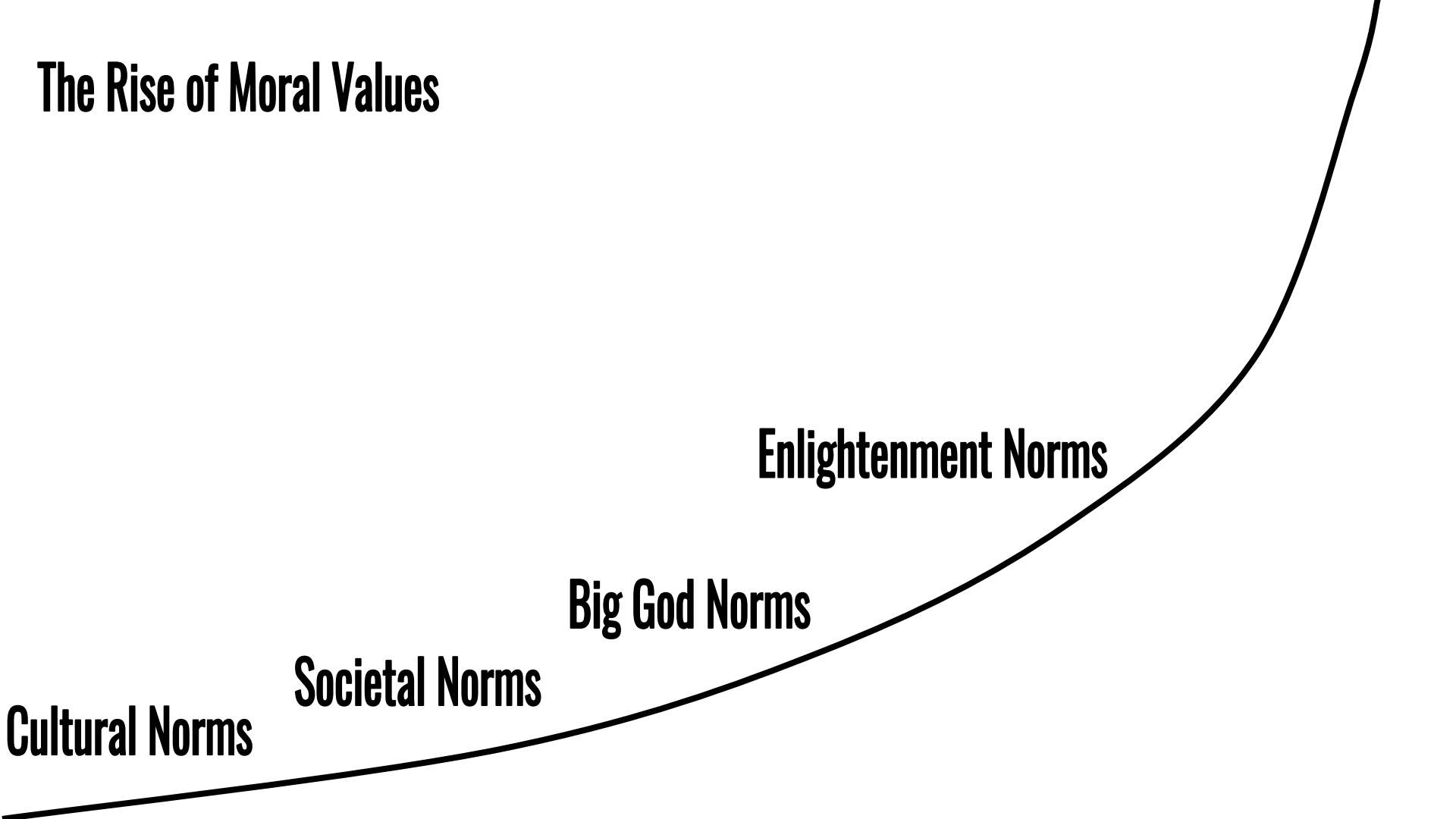


The Axial Age (800 – 200 B.C.E)

Centers and Religions



The Rise of Moral Values



Enlightenment Norms

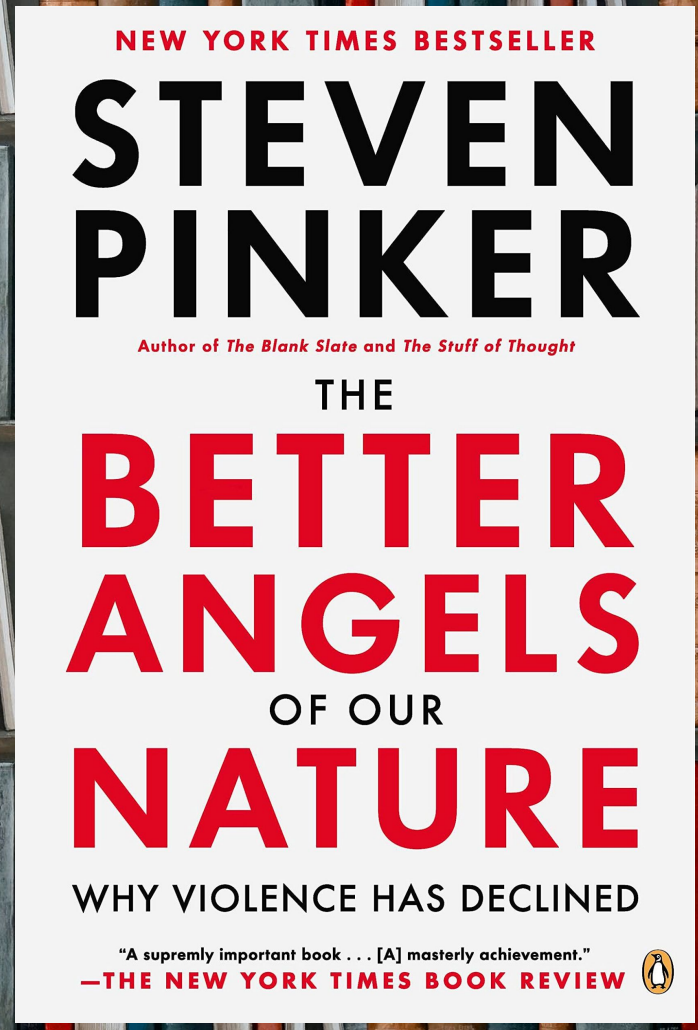
Big God Norms

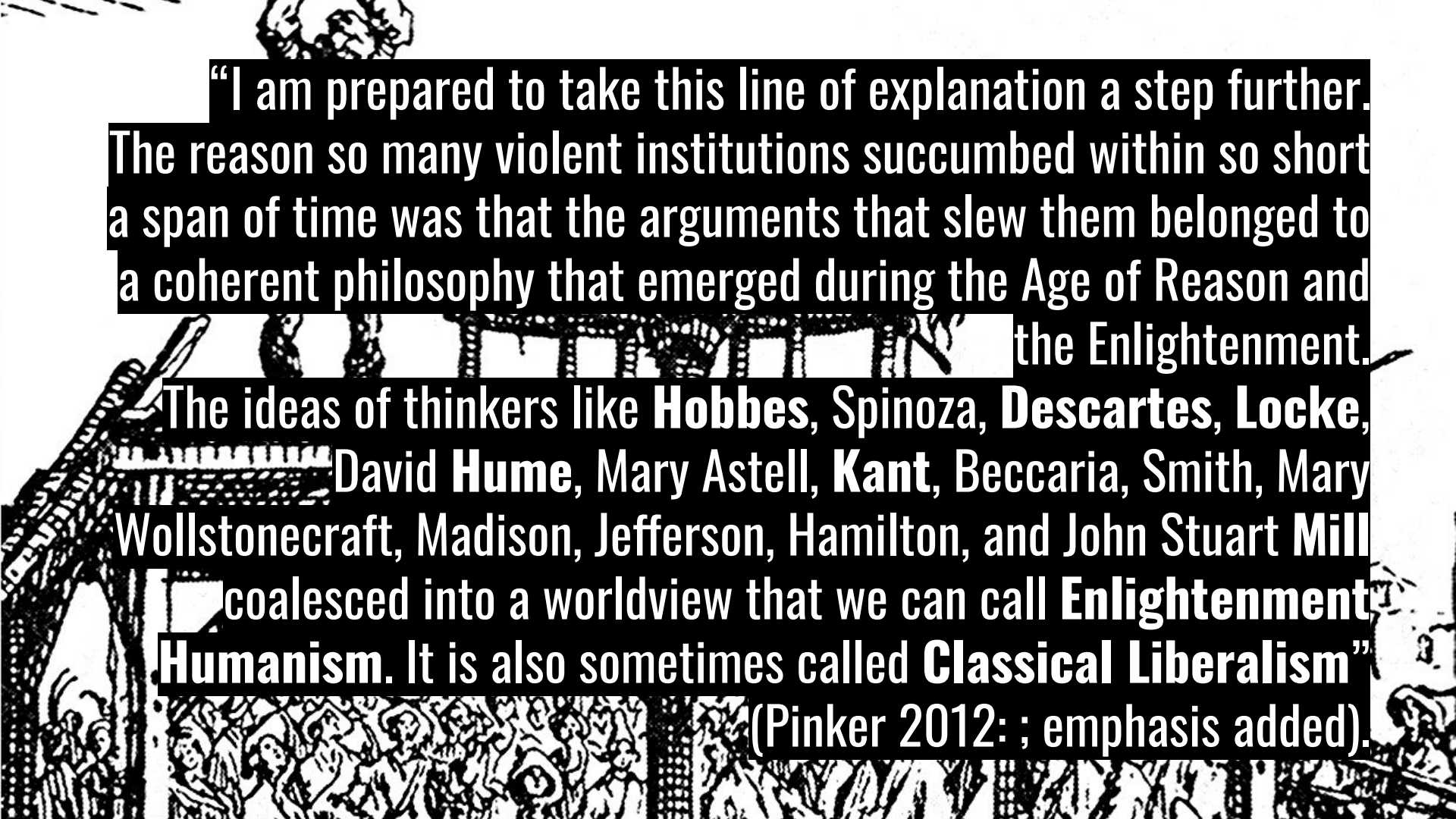
Societal Norms

Cultural Norms

In chapter 4 of *Better Angels of Our Nature*, Pinker surveys a catalogue of horrors (e.g., human sacrifice, torture, wars of religion, witch burning) and points out that these are now, by and large, considered inhumane.

He then makes his case as to what lead to this moral progress...





“I am prepared to take this line of explanation a step further. The reason so many violent institutions succumbed within so short a span of time was that the arguments that slew them belonged to a coherent philosophy that emerged during the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment.

The ideas of thinkers like **Hobbes**, Spinoza, **Descartes**, **Locke**, **David Hume**, Mary Astell, **Kant**, Beccaria, Smith, Mary Wollstonecraft, Madison, Jefferson, Hamilton, and John Stuart Mill coalesced into a worldview that we can call **Enlightenment Humanism**. It is also sometimes called **Classical Liberalism**” (Pinker 2012: ; emphasis added).

Governments were seen as instruments of social organization rather than as divine orders.



THE
L I F E
AND
STRANGE SURPRIZING
ADVENTURES
OF
ROBINSON CRUSOE,
Of YORK, MARINER:

Who lived Eight and Twenty Years,
all alone in an un-inhabited Island on the
Coast of AMERICA, near the Mouth of
the Great River of OROONOQUE;

Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, where-
in all the Men perished but himself.

WITH
An Account how he was at last as strangely deli-
ver'd by PYRATES.

Written by Himself.

L O N D O N:

Printed for W. TAYLOR at the Ship in Pater-Noster-
Row. MDCCXIX.

The technology of printed word
spread literacy and proliferated the
practice of regularly taking the
perspective of another, i.e., empathy,
through the reading of novels.

The spread of manners lead to diminished uncleanness which might also have facilitated respecting the dignity of others. And commerce also played an important role.

THE
SCHOOL
OF
MANNERS.
OR
RULES for Childrens
Behaviour:



The Fourth Edition.

L O N D O N.

Printed for *Tho. Cockerill*, at the
Three Legs and Bible against Gro-
cers-Hall in the *Poultry*, 1701

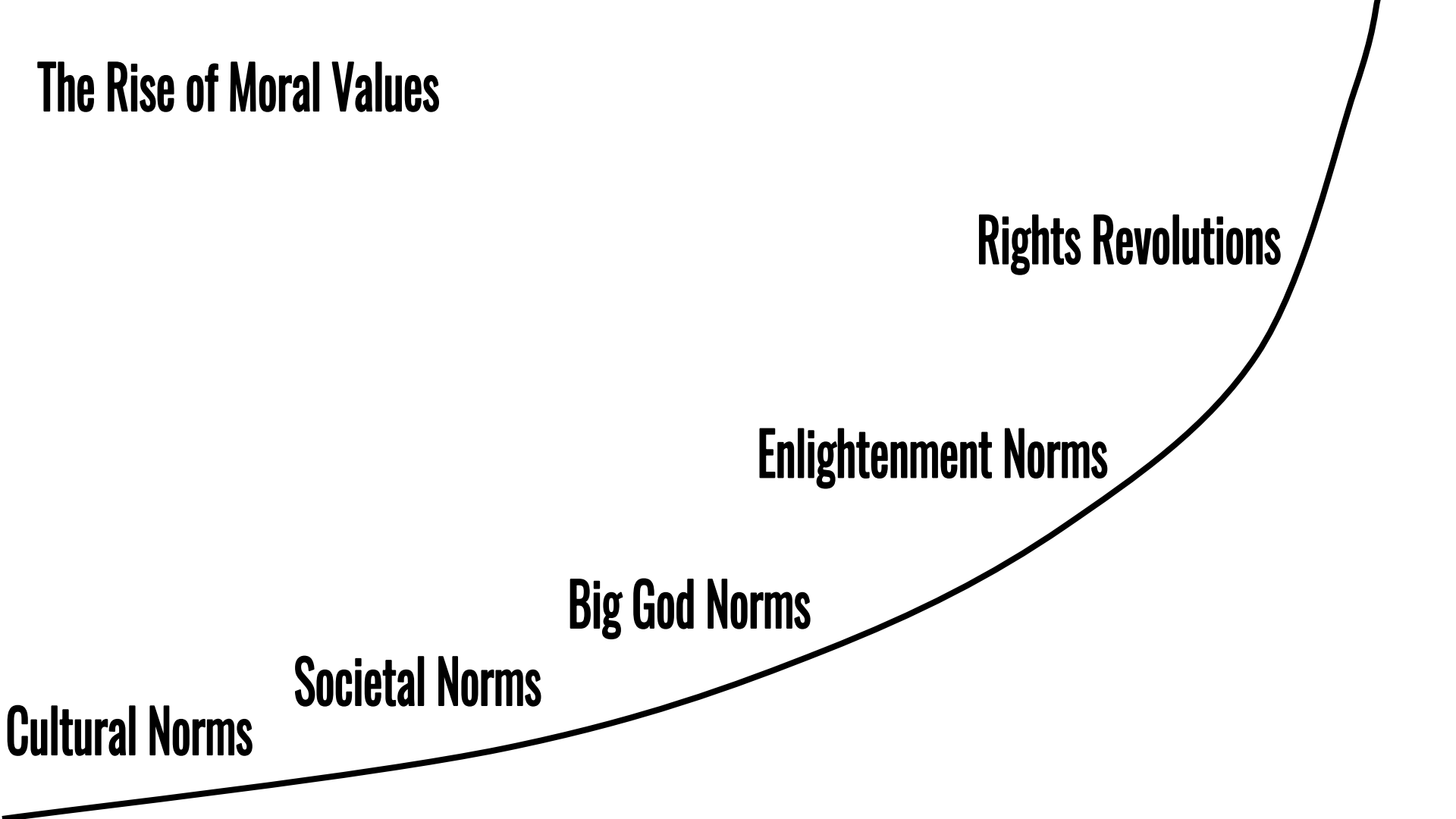
INVENTING
HUMAN
RIGHTS



LYNN HUNT

See Lynn Hunt's *Inventing Human Rights* for more information.

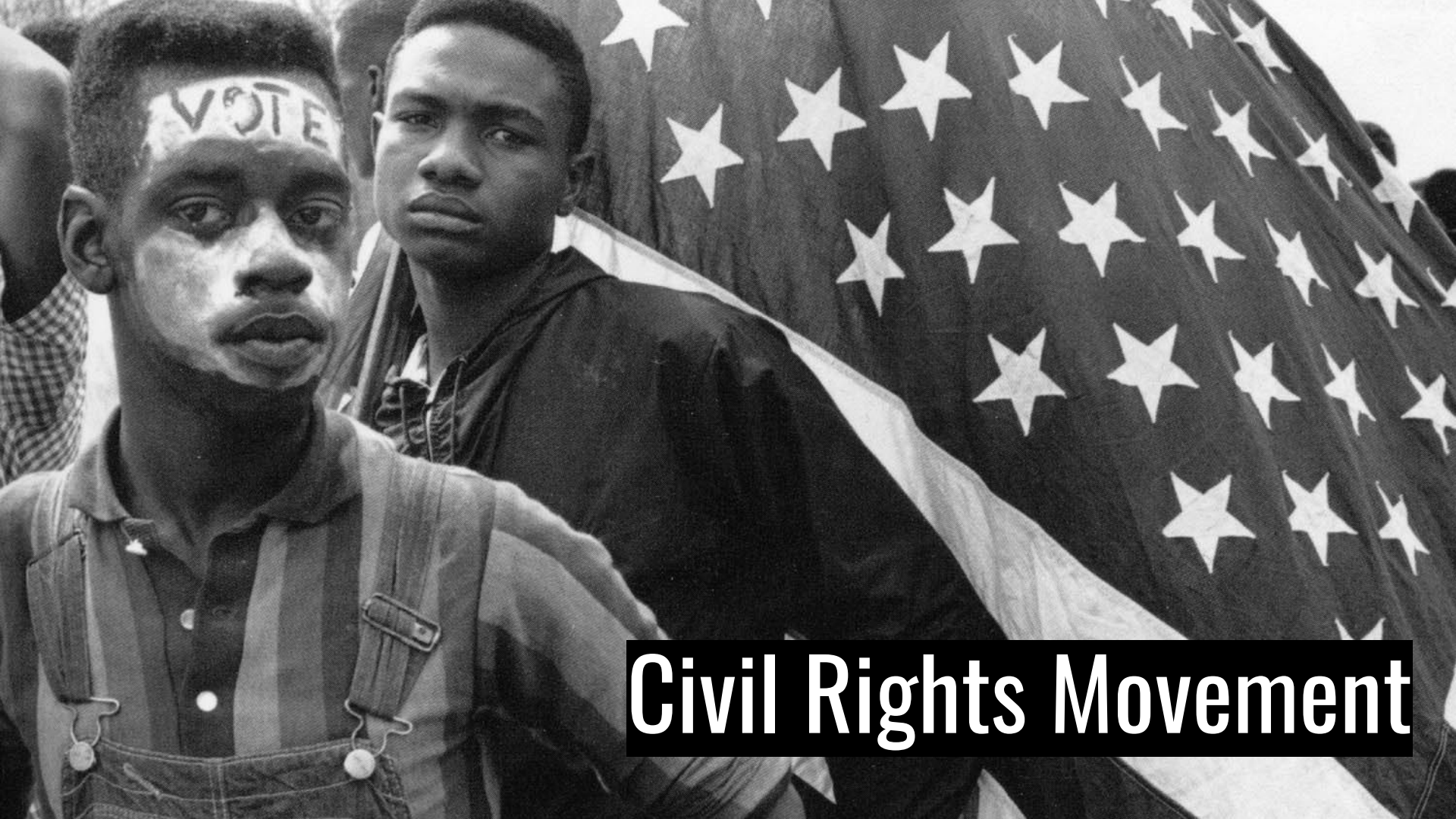
The Rise of Moral Values



FEMINISM

is the radical
notion that

Women's Rights Movement



Civil Rights Movement



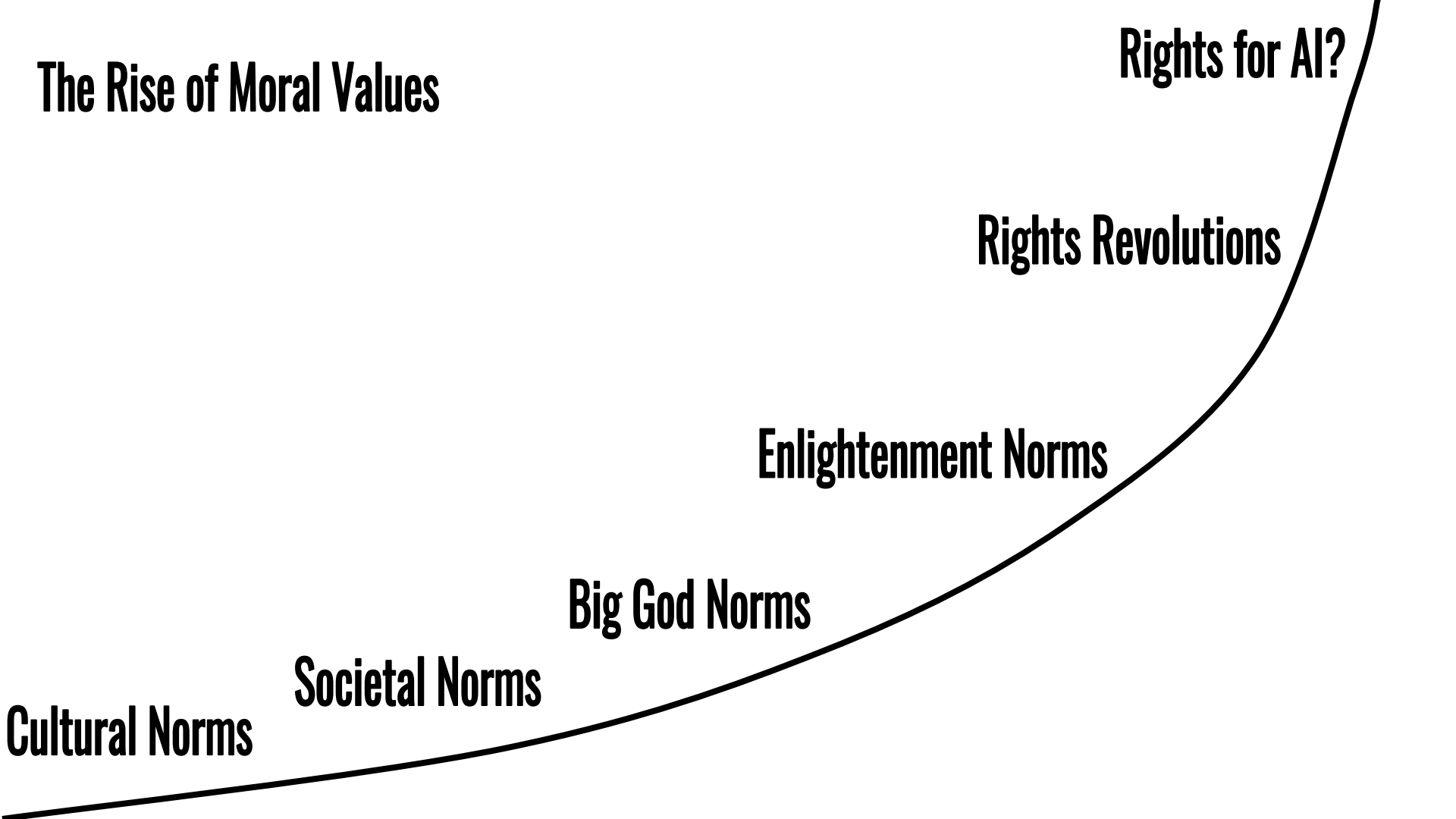
Children's Rights Movement



Gay Rights Movement



Animal Rights Movement



The Rise of Moral Values

Rights for AI?

Rights Revolutions

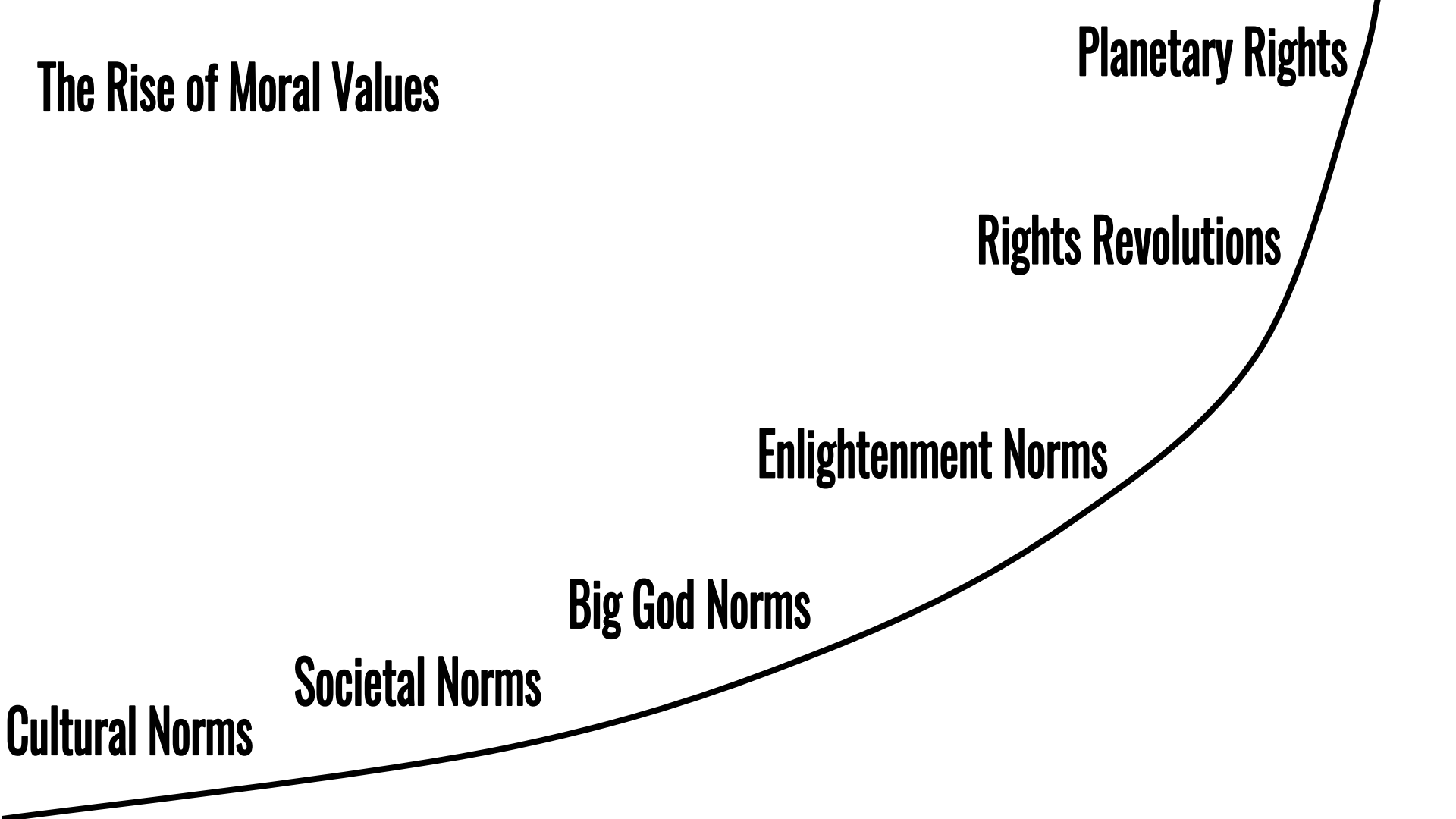
Enlightenment Norms

Big God Norms

Societal Norms

Cultural Norms

The Rise of Moral Values



Planetary Rights

Rights Revolutions

Enlightenment Norms

Big God Norms

Societal Norms

Cultural Norms

HORNS

OF A

DILEMMA



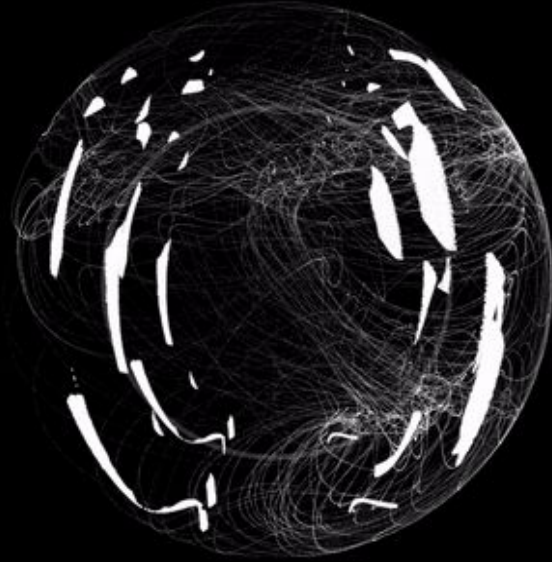
EITHER SOME ETHICAL THEORY
(WHETHER WE COVERED IT OR NOT) IS
TRUE

OR...





...WE EVOLVED MENTAL MECHANISMS THAT
LED TO THE **INVENTION** OF MORALITY,
AND MORAL PROPERTIES ARE
MIND-DEPENDENT (NON-OBJECTIVISM)
BUT OUR MINDS MAKE THEM *FEEL* LIKE
THEY ARE MIND-INDEPENDENT
(OBJECTIVISM).



Moral Skepticism