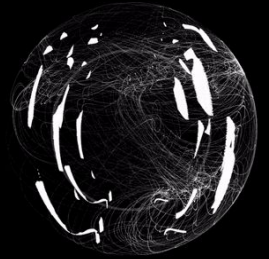
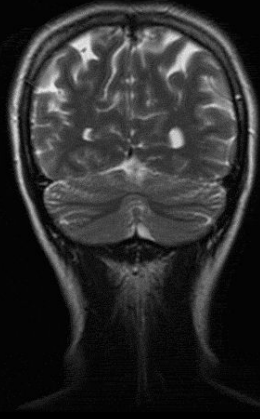




The Fall of the Prince



Round

1

2

3

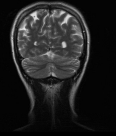
4

5

6

7

8





Important concepts

Empirical Claims

A claim is **empirical** when it can be verified through observation.

Note: Many of the more interesting empirical claims can only be verified through **systematic observation**, i.e., science.

Rules of the Game

1. Lay out the empirical claims of each ethical theory.
2. Cross reference them with Cognitive Science.
3. Update or eliminate theories with empirical problems.



Question:
How judicious should we be?

Answer:
Ruthless.







Empirical Claims

- ❑ All human actions are driven by self-interest (psychological egoism).



Empirical Claims

- ❑ All human actions are driven by self-interest (psychological egoism).
- ❑ Absent some powerful central authority, i.e., a Leviathan, humans are in a state of constant war (the state of nature hypothesis).
- ❑ We submit to a government willingly, out of our own self-interest (Hobbesian social contract theory).



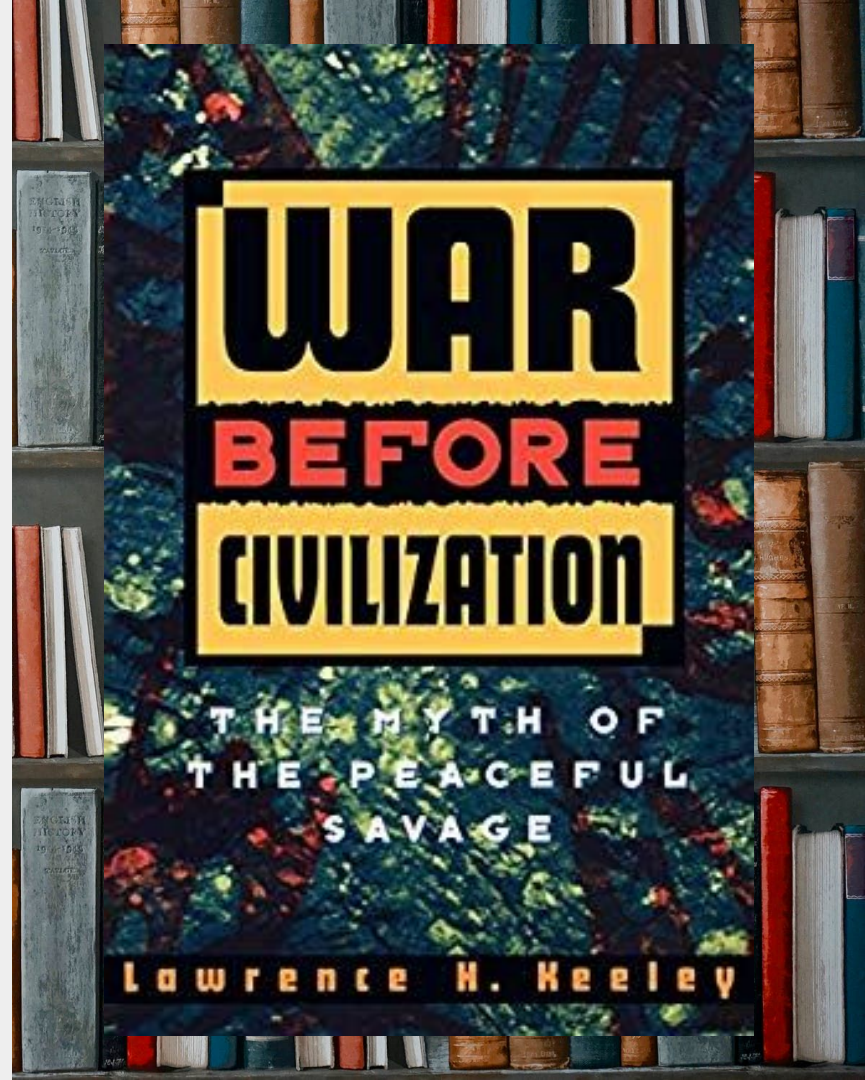
EMPIRICAL

DATA

TIME

**The Question of the State of Nature hypothesis:
Has the centralization of authority reduced
interpersonal violence, as Hobbes argued?**

Lawrence Keeley (1997) documents the evidence of prestate tribal violence from sites in Ukraine, France, Sweden, Niger, India, and the Americas showing that prestate war is common and that **prehistoric societies were more violent than modern ones.**



Steven Pinker (2012) agrees with Keeley and adds **more** data.

Both suggest that there has been a hidden agenda among **archaeologists** to **ignore evidence of violence in prehistoric societies**.

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

STEVEN
PINKER

Author of The Blank Slate and The Stuff of Thought

THE
BETTER
ANGELS
OF OUR
NATURE

WHY VIOLENCE HAS DECLINED

"A supremely important book . . . [A] masterly achievement."
—THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW 



Food for thought...

R. Brian Ferguson (of Rutgers University), along with many other archaeologists have charged that Keeley and Pinker are “war-ifying the past”..

For example...

Some of the sites supposedly presenting evidence for warfare actually contain only a single case of violent death, suggesting homicide, not war





Also...

The criteria for inferring violent death include skeletons in close proximity to arrowheads, which leaves open the possibility that the arrowheads were merely being used as tools.

Lastly...

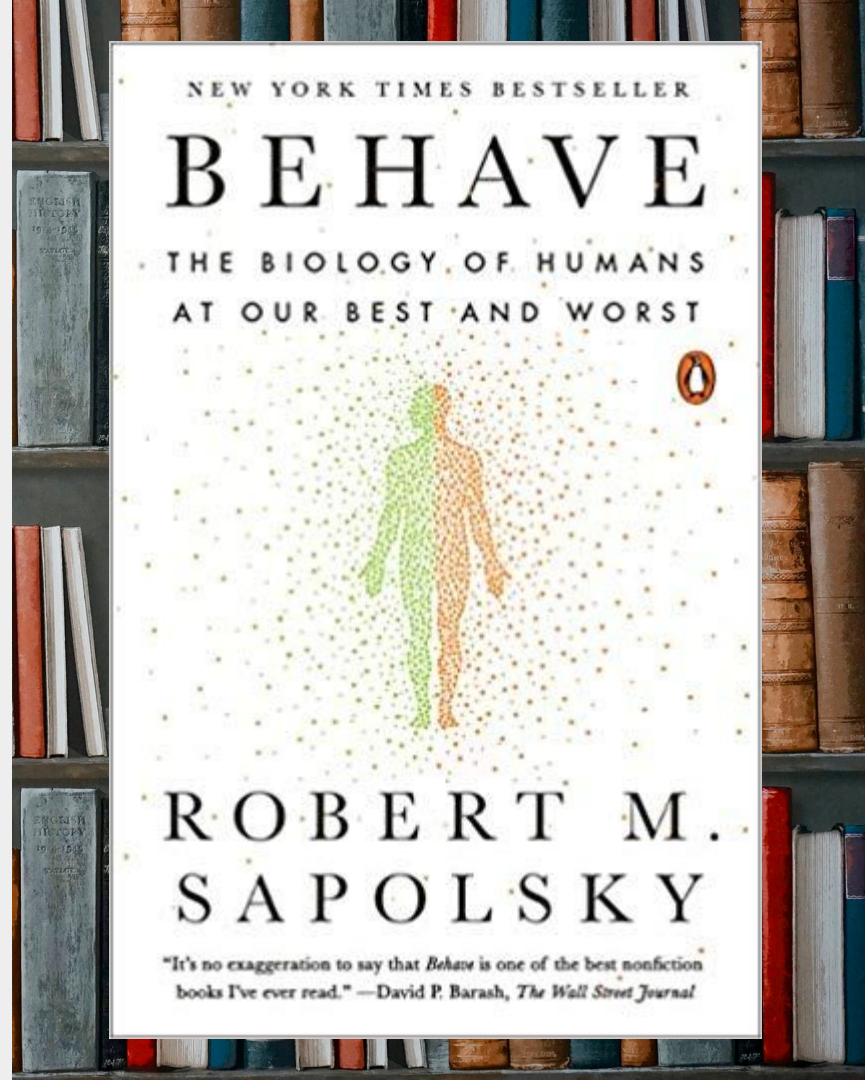
Keely and Pinker have been accused of “cherry-picking” their data.

Note:

Pinker responds [here](#).



See Chapter 9 of Robert Sapolsky's (2017) *Behave* for an introduction into and summary of these debates.



For his part, Randall Collins (2008) argues that human psychology actually makes it very difficult for us to harm each other.

To be “successful” at violent behavior, humans need sociological features to “aid” in overcoming confrontational tension and fear, e.g., the training that society imparts on its soldiers.

VIOLENCE

A Micro-sociological Theory



Randall Collins

“What one does not see is a contagion of belligerence, everyone starting to fight with everyone else. People are not on a hair trigger of aggressiveness, ready to be released by the slightest catalyst.

The Hobbesian image of humans, judging from the most common evidence, is empirically wrong.

Fighting, and indeed most overt expressions of conflict, most typically call out fear or at least wariness” (Collins 2009: 11).

VIOLENCE

A Micro-sociological Theory



Randall Collins



Empirical Claims

- ❑ All human actions are driven by self-interest (psychological egoism).
- ❑ Absent some powerful central authority, i.e., a Leviathan, humans are in a state of constant war (the state of nature hypothesis).
- ❑ We submit to a government willingly, out of our own self-interest (Hobbesian social contract theory).

**The Question of the Hobbesian Social Contract:
Is the Hobbesian social contract **historically** accurate?
In other words, did humans submit to a central authority
out of self-interest?**

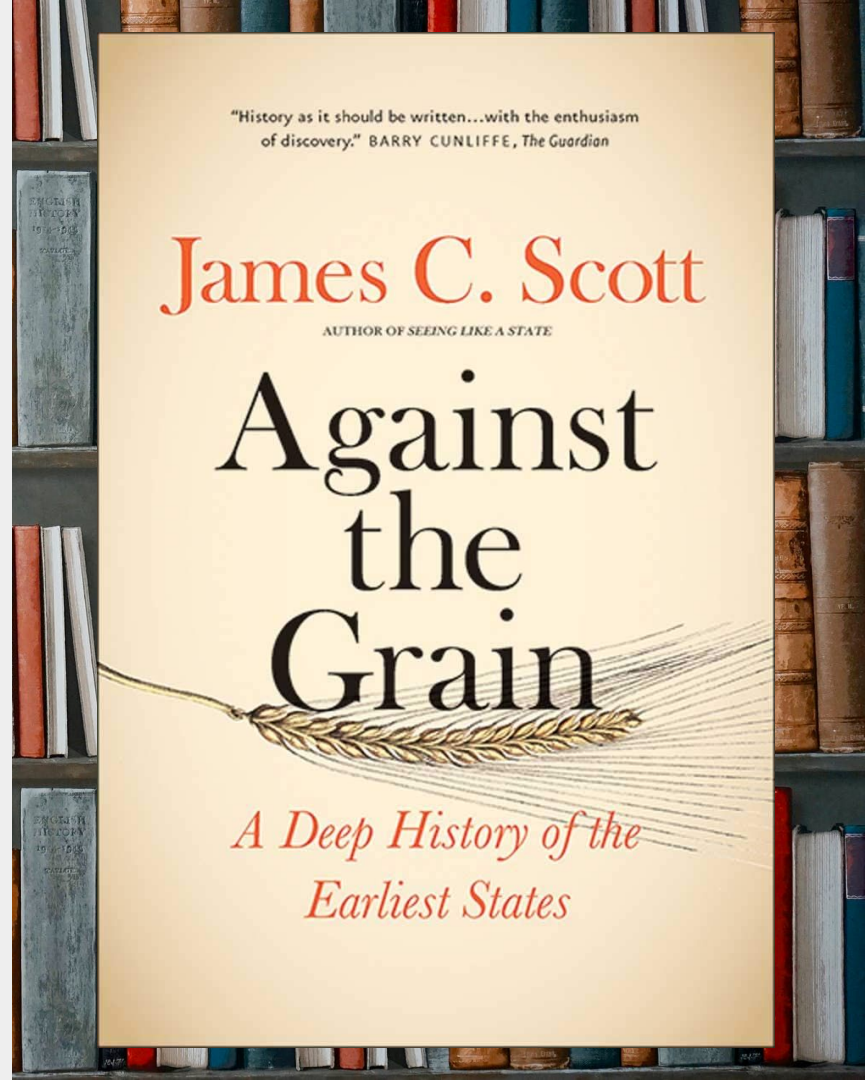


“If the formation of the earliest states were shown to be largely a coercive enterprise, the vision of the state, one dear to the heart of such social contract theorists as Hobbes and Locke, as a magnet of civil peace, social order, and freedom from fear, drawing people in by its charisma, would have to be re-examined.

The early state, in fact, as we shall see, often failed to hold its population. It was exceptionally fragile epidemiologically, ecologically, and politically, and prone to collapse or fragmentation.

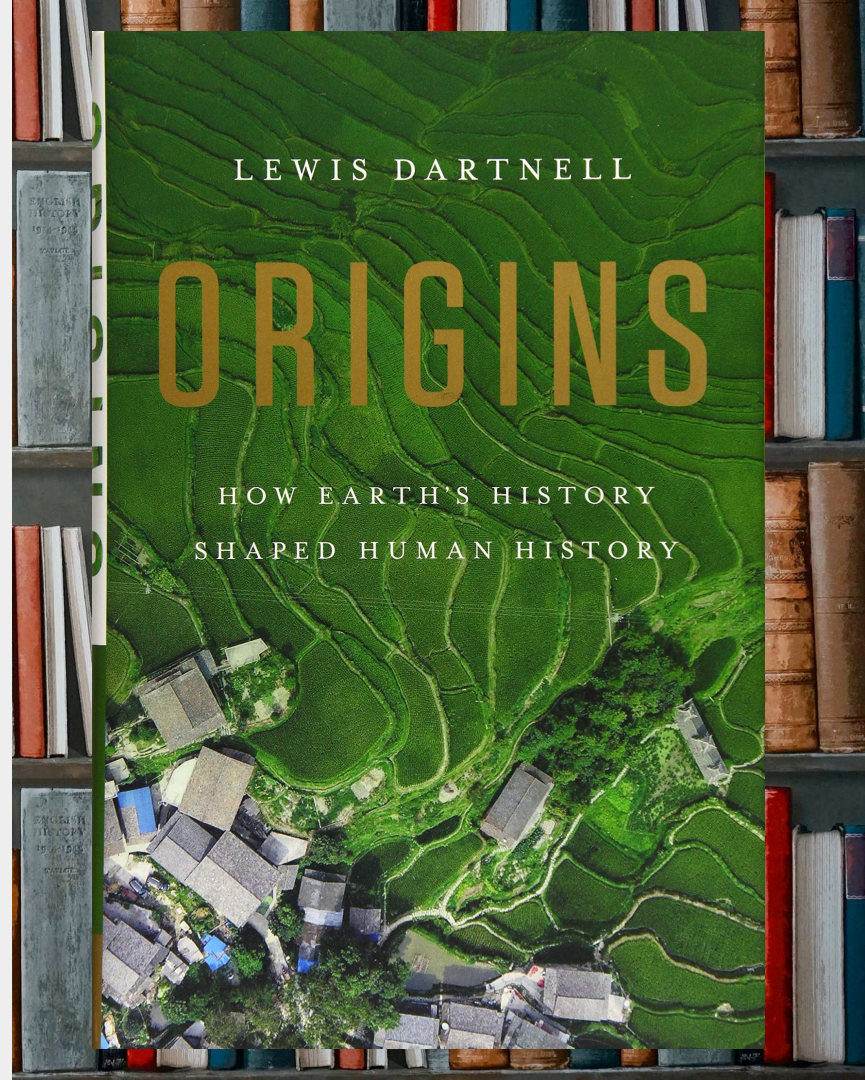
If, however, the State often broke up, it was not for lack of exercising whatever coercive powers it could muster. Evidence for the extensive use of unfree labor, war captives, indentured servitude, temple slavery, slave markets, forced resettlement in labor colonies, convict labor, and communal slavery (for example, Sparta’s helots) is overwhelming” (Scott 2017: 26-9).

See Scott (2018) for more info.



Why did *sapiens* settle starting around 15,000 years ago?

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.





Empirical Claims

- ❑ All human actions are driven by self-interest (psychological egoism).
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**The Question of Psychological Egoism:
Are all human actions driven by self-interest?**

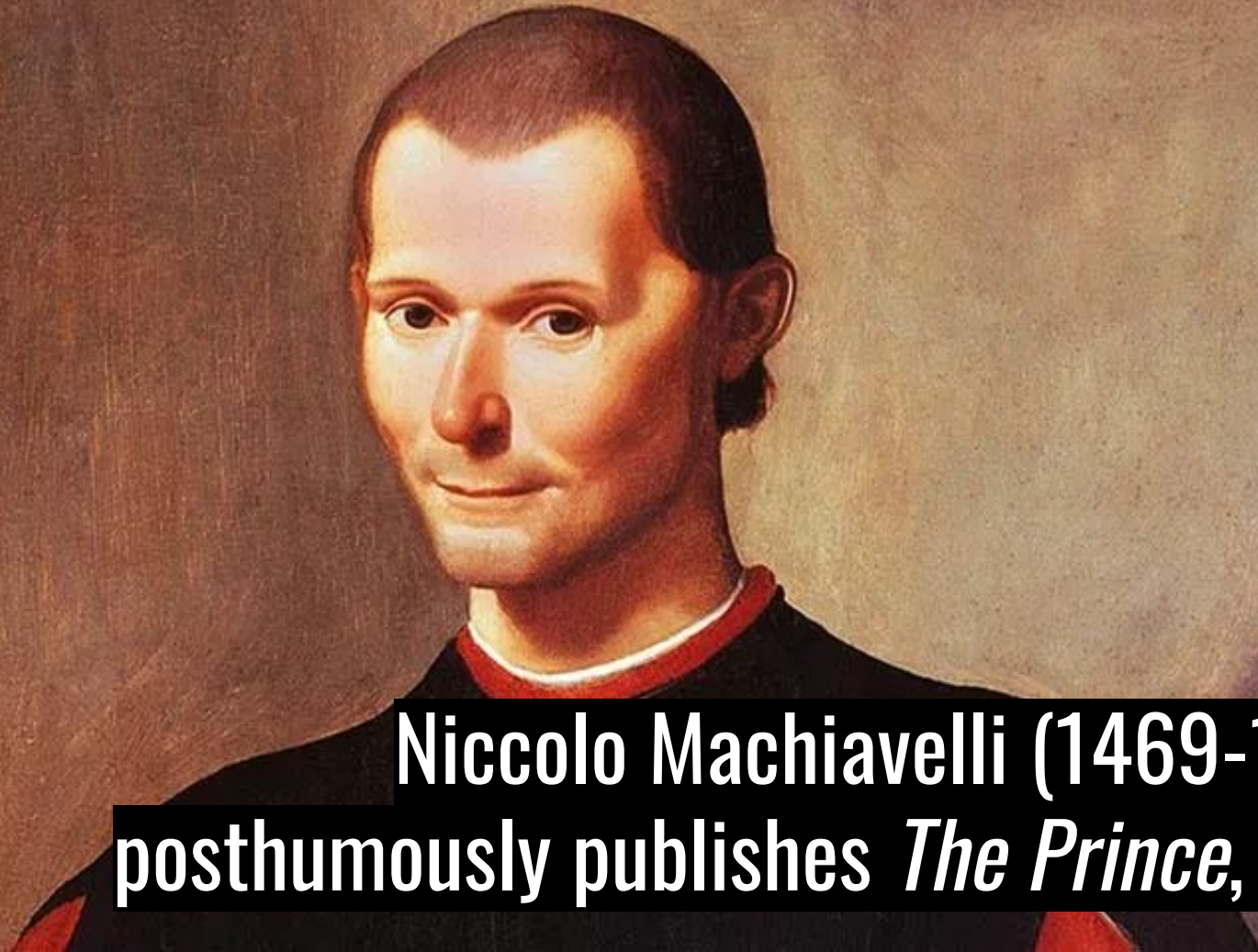
Rational Choice Theory

Outside of philosophy, e.g., in Game Theory, psychological egoism has been developed into rational choice theory.

The basic premise of this theory is that individuals are utility maximizers.



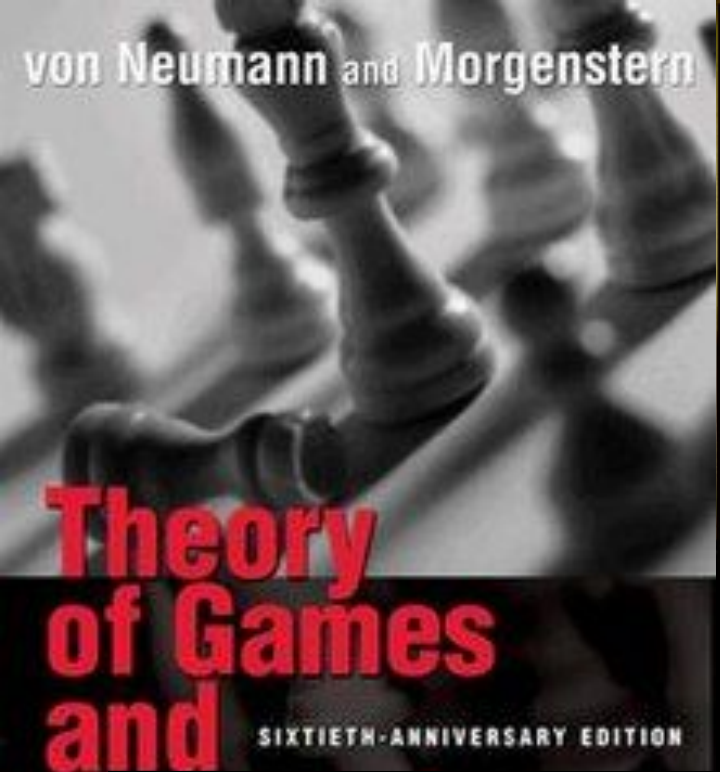
**Glaucon's Speech in Book II of
The Republic, ca. 380 BCE**



Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527)
posthumously publishes *The Prince*, 1532



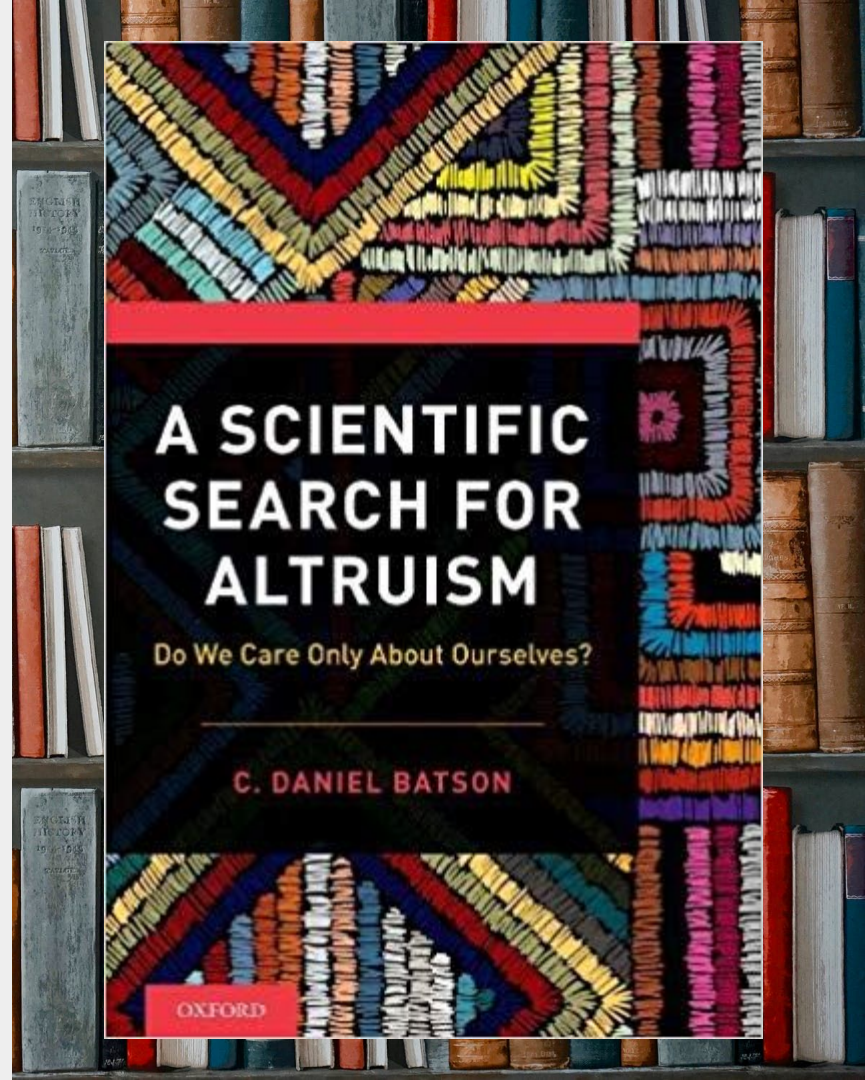
Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), *The Leviathan*, 1651



E Von Neumann and Morgenstern publish *The Theory of Games and Economic Behavior*, 1944

This question is precisely what Daniel Batson has been focusing on his entire career...

The first step is to define *egoism* and *altruism* such that they are amenable to empirical examination.

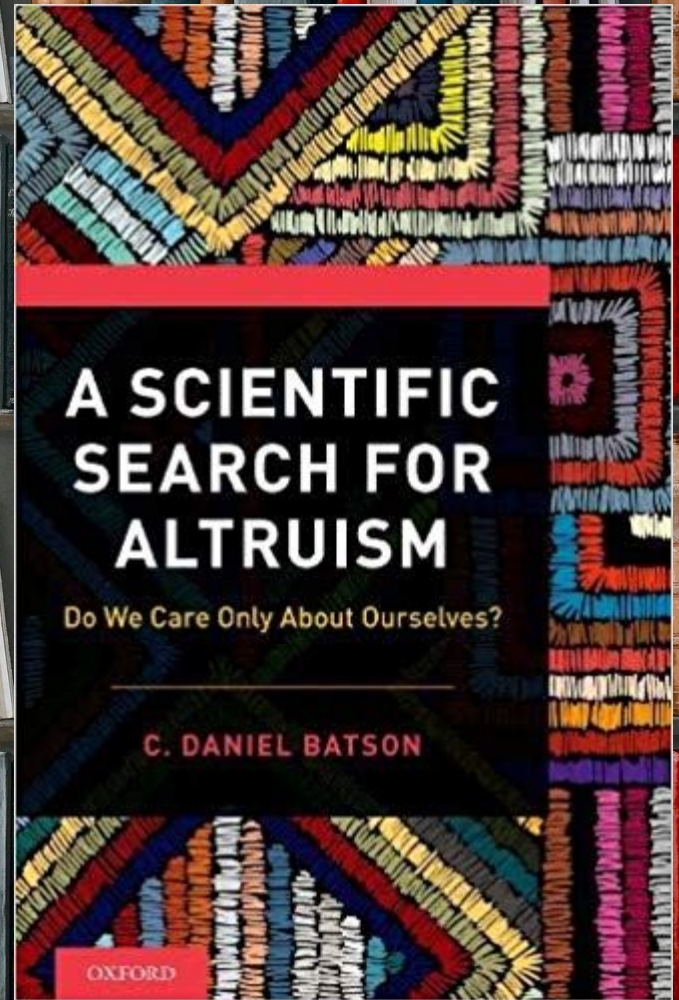


He defines each term thus:

Altruism is a **motivational state** with the ultimate goal of increasing **another's welfare**.

Egoism is a **motivational state** with the ultimate goal of increasing **our own welfare**.

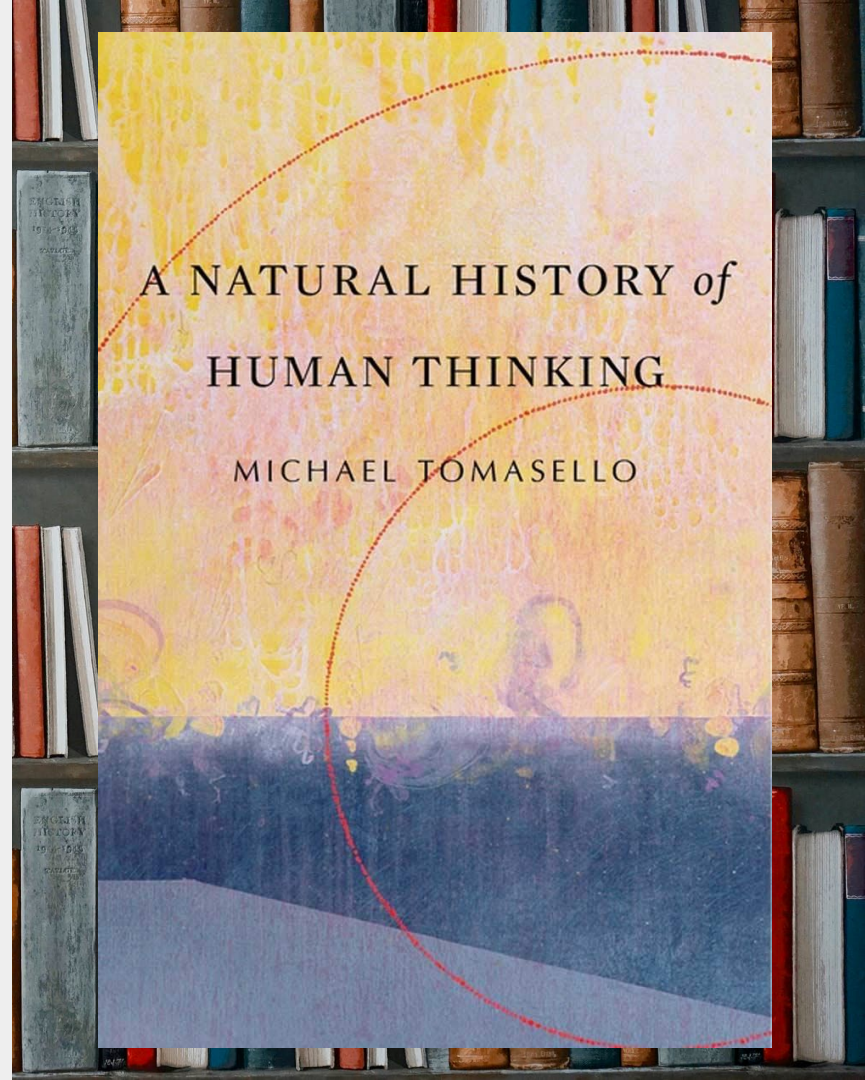
See Batson (2019: 22).



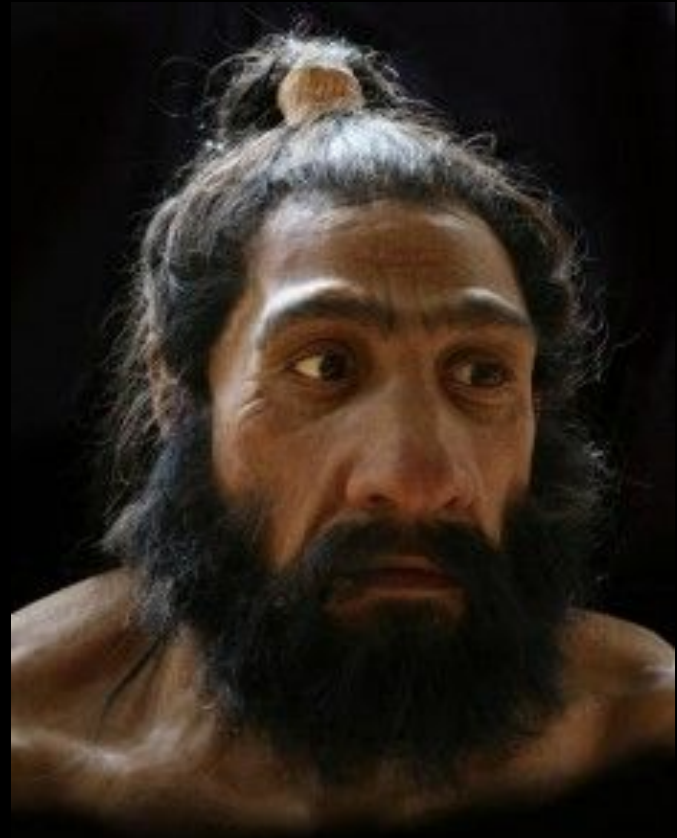
There is evidence from Linguistics that does not fare well for the egoists/rational choice theorists...

Tomasello (2014) makes the case that if we were purely driven only by self-interest then the human language faculty could not have evolved the way that it did.

His view, in short, is that environmental pressures required that early humans worked together to forage and hunt, and so humans had to develop new psychological mechanisms that would allow them to speak and think **collaboratively**, at times motivated by the welfare of others.

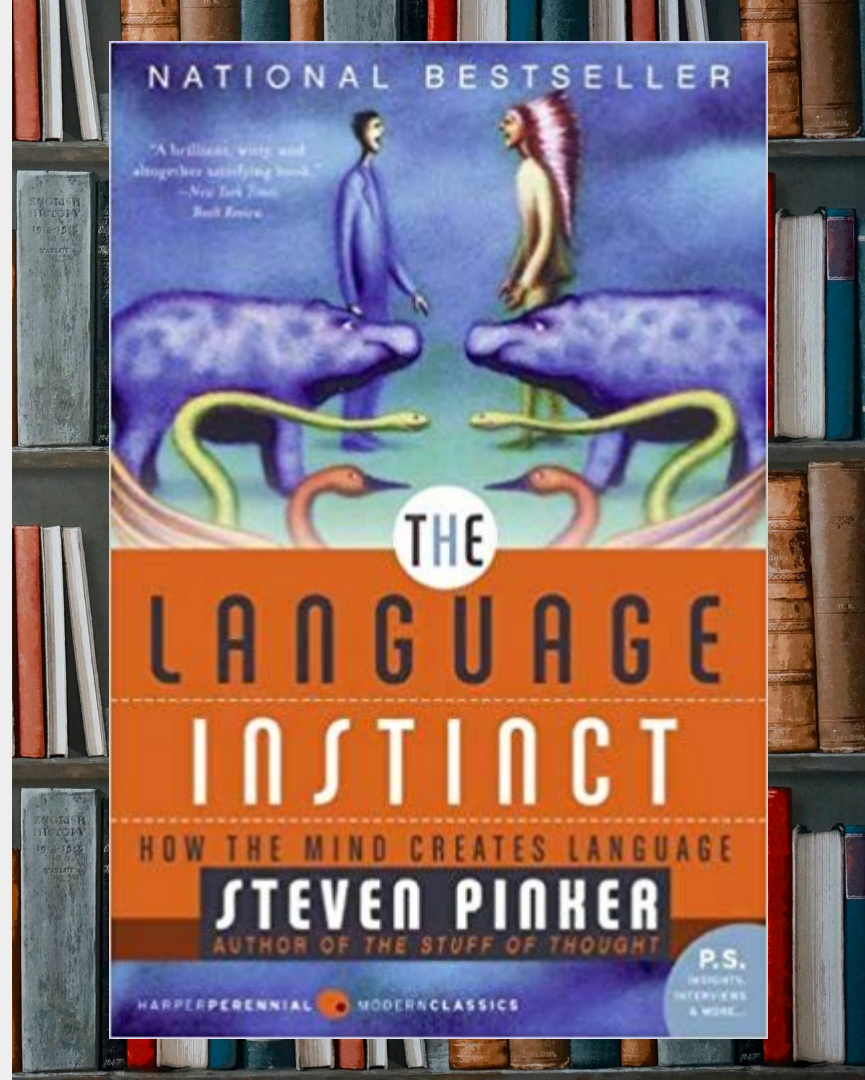


“Lying only works if there is first a mutual assumption of cooperation and trust: you only lie because you know that I will trust your information as truthful and act accordingly... [I]f we want to explain the origins of humans’ commitment to characterize the world accurately independent of any selfish purpose, then being committed to informing others of things honestly, for *their* not *our* benefit, is the starting point” (Tomasello 2014: 51-2; emphasis in original).



Pinker concurs...

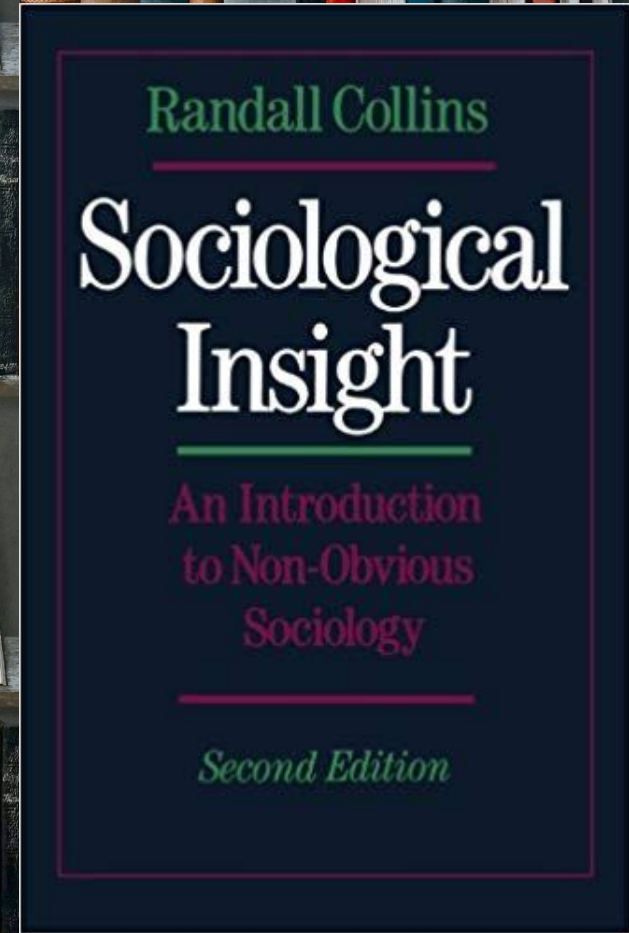
“The act of communicating relies on a mutual expectation of cooperation between speaker and listener. The speaker, having made a claim on the precious ear of the listener, implicitly guarantees that the information to be conveyed is relevant: that it is not already known, and that it is sufficiently connected to what the listener is thinking that he or she can make inferences to new conclusions with little extra mental effort” (Pinker 1994: 228).

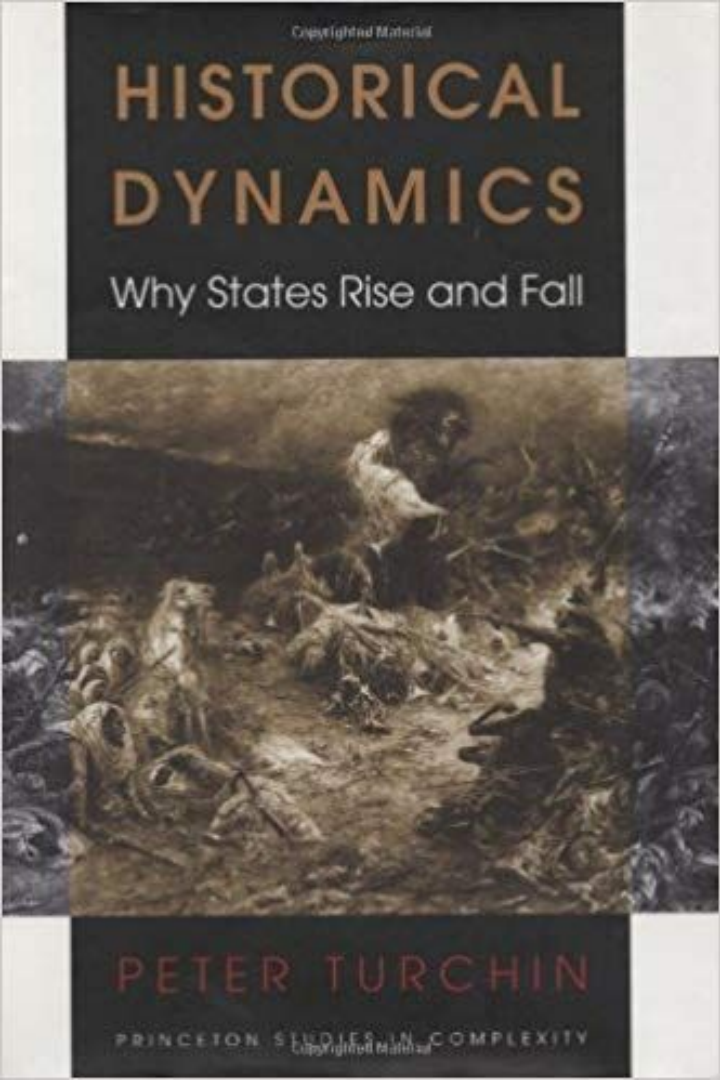


Also, an important problem in **Sociobiology** is the question of how societies can function without falling apart. Researchers have looked at a variety of models, including rational choice theory, to see which model solves the puzzle of collective action.

Randall Collins (1992) gives ample evidence that if people acted on a purely rational basis, they would never be able to get together to form a society.

This is because society requires that we *sometimes* be motivated by **the welfare of the collective**, not ourselves.





Russian-American historian and expert in complex systems Peter Turchin agrees arguing that “although people pursue their selfish interests most of the time, they also have feelings of solidarity with at least some other people...

States and armies break apart when people stop thinking of themselves as members of the group and think only of their own individual self-interest” (Turchin 2003: 30)

Haidt (2012) concurs with Turchin that sometimes we're selfish, but other times we're *groupish*.

That is to say, we act for the benefit of our group, a type of motivation sometimes called collectivism (see also Batson 2019: 260-261).

"A landmark contribution to humanity's understanding of itself."
—*The New York Times Book Review*

THE RIGHTEOUS MIND

WHY GOOD
PEOPLE ARE DIVIDED
BY POLITICS AND
RELIGION



JONATHAN
HAIDT

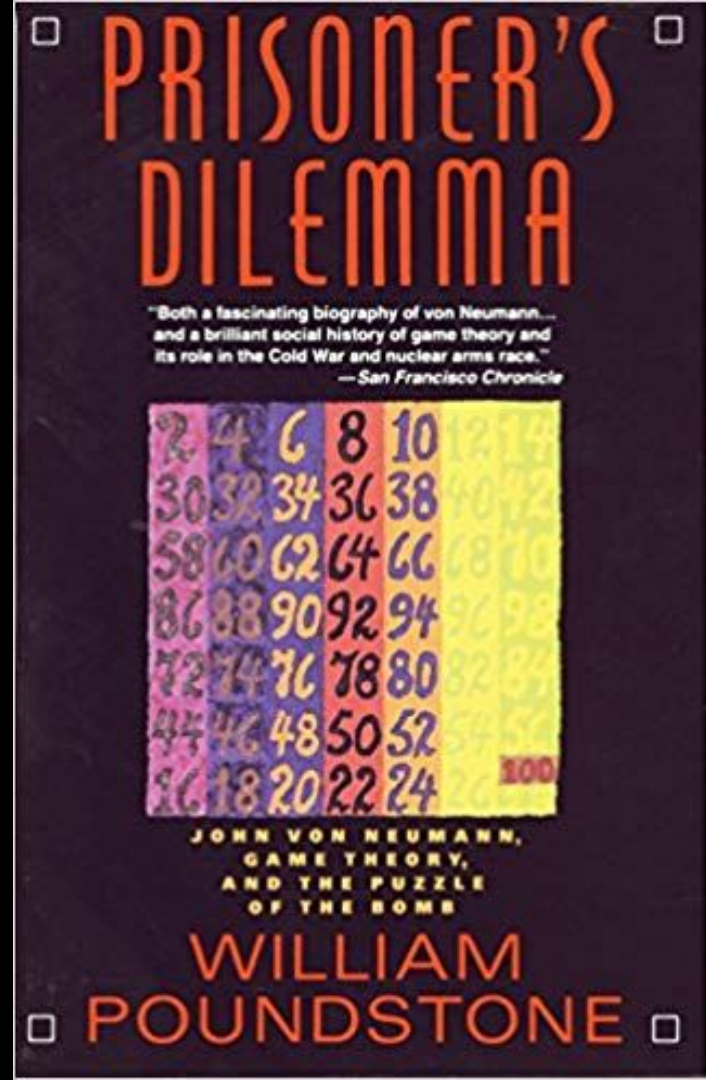
S | D E B A R

Problems for egoism/rational choice theory also come from criticisms of Game Theory...

Game Theory has several theoretical and empirical problems.

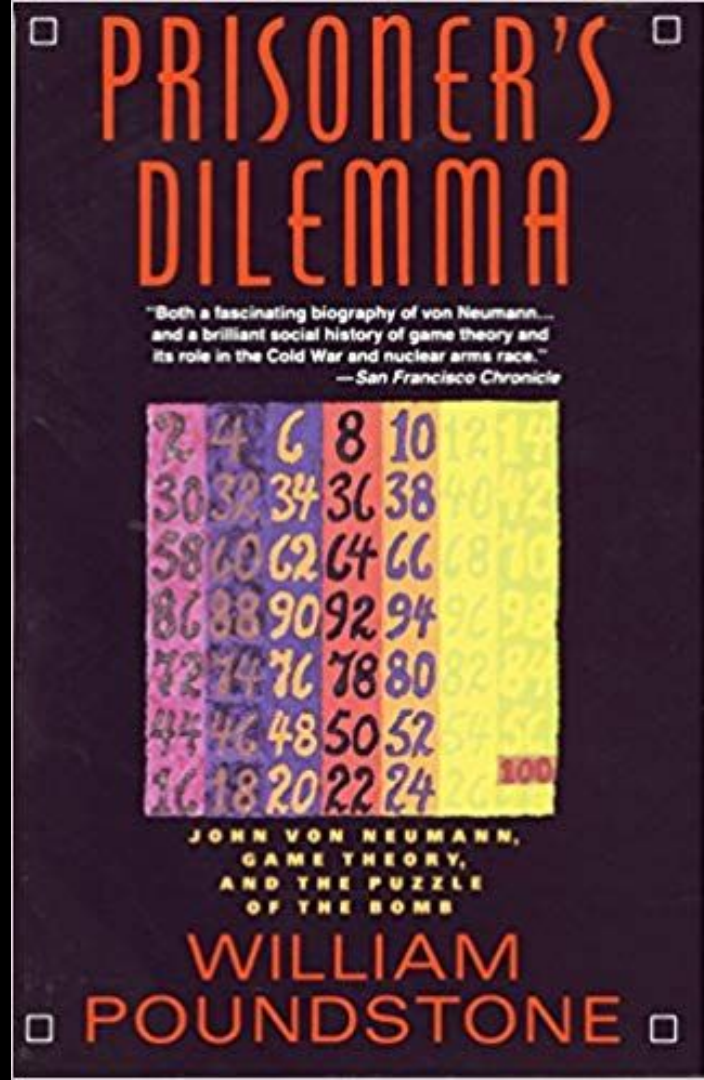
For one, game theorists' conception of utility isn't reflected very well in the general population.

“Any two people are likely to rank a set of game outcomes differently, provided the outcomes are not cash prizes but very complex states of human affairs”
(Poundstone 1992: 170).



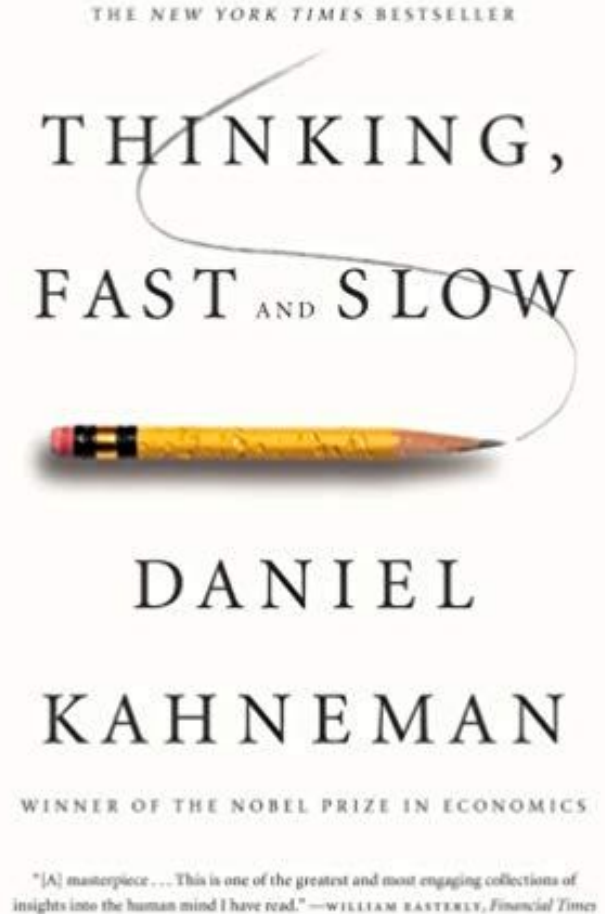
Moreover, in studies where participants are asked to play zero-sum games, game theory has little to no predictive value (ibid., chapter 8).

This is because one or both players do not intuitively “play rationally.”



People are just not very rational, when rationality is defined as it is in Game Theory.

Daniel Kahneman has made a career of showing how humans are not rational in this game theoretic sense (see Kahneman 2011).



Lastly, experimental data from **social psychology** looks (really) bad for the egoists...

In a recent [study](#), researchers ran several tests in which each participant in a small group received money and then had to decide how much to invest in a shared group fund.

The Result:

The more time people had to choose how much to donate, the less they gave.

In other words, subjects told they had to make a decision within 10 seconds gave more than others who were told they had to wait the same 10 seconds before deciding.

Because snap decisions are based on intuition, Greene concluded that generosity is the intuitive human response.

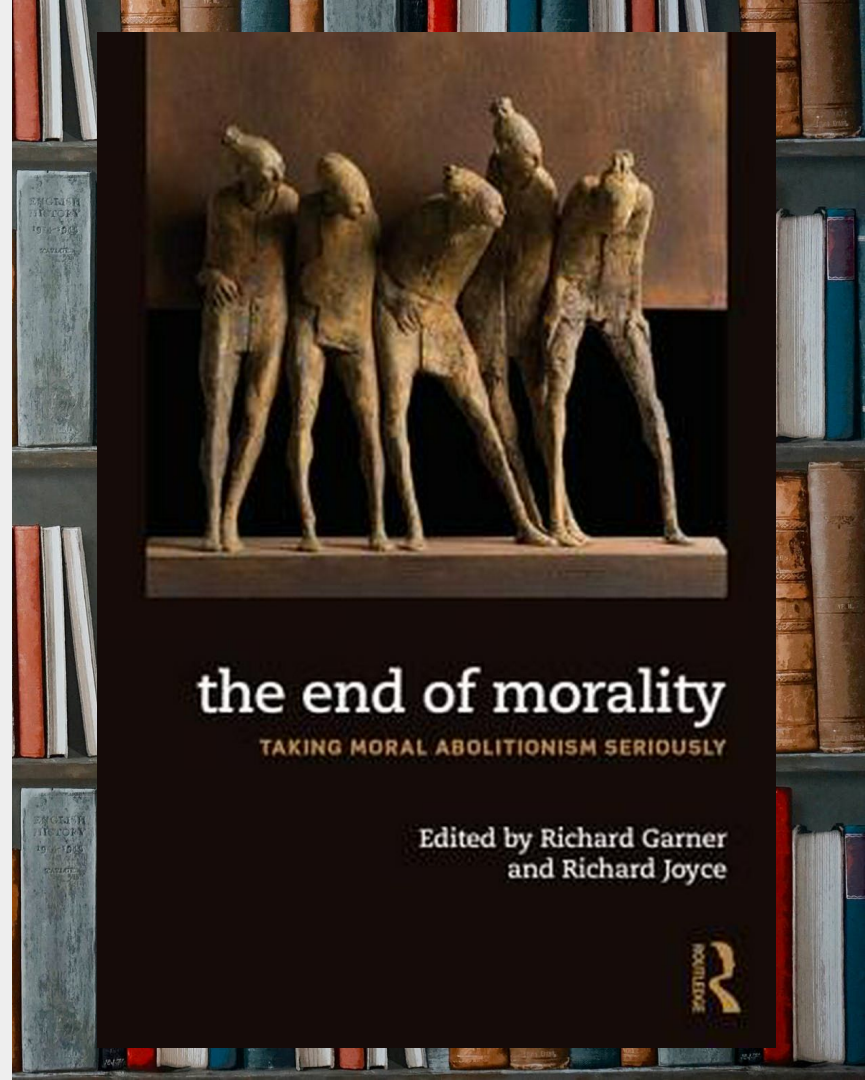


But given time, we can reason our way to a more selfish decision.



In a recent essay, Caroline West reviewed some “disturbing” literature on the effects of studying economics on undergraduate students.

Apparently, **learning about rational choice theory makes students behave in more self-interested ways.**

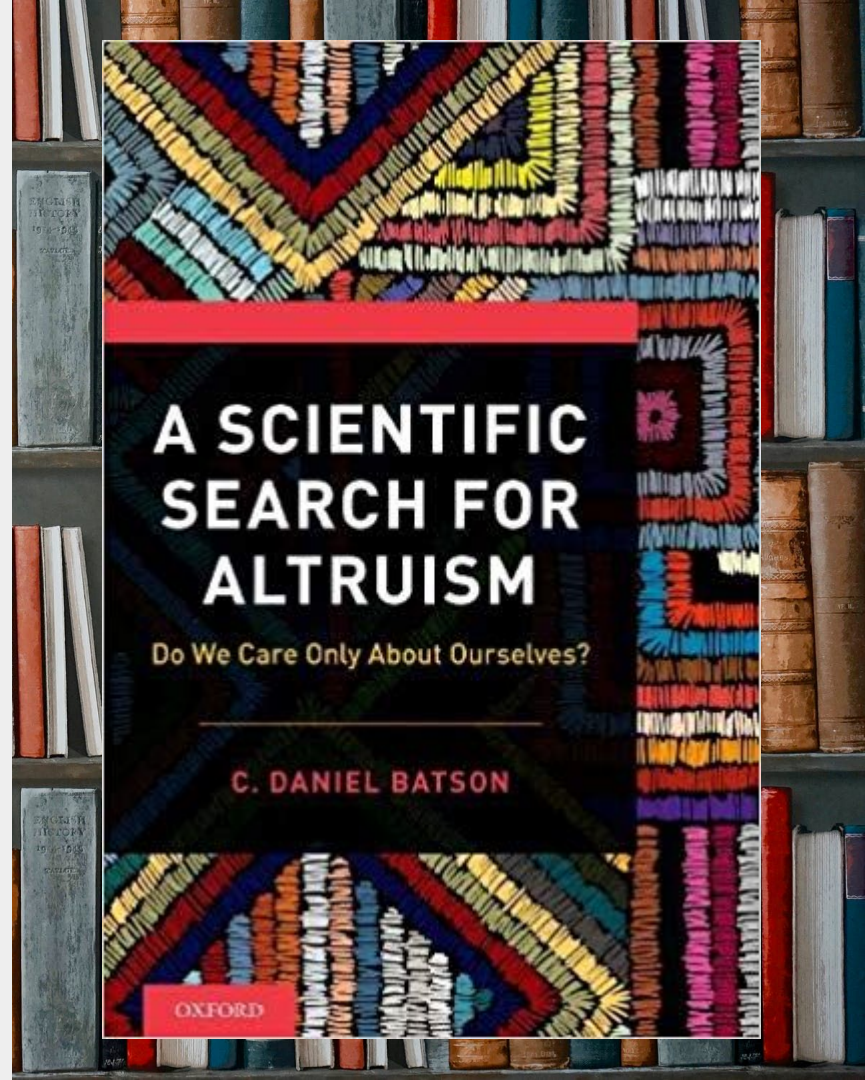


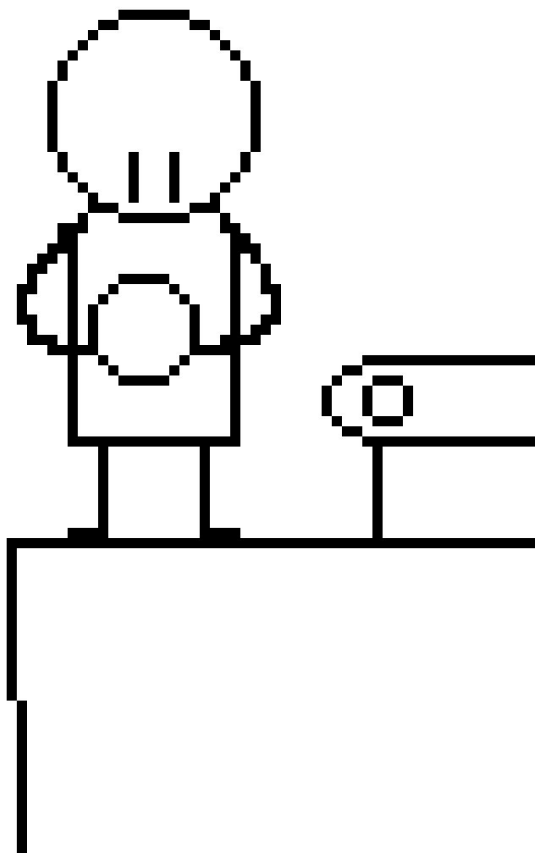
Some findings...

- Economics students are more likely to deceive others for personal gain than students from other majors ([Frank and Schulze 2000](#)).
- Economics professors give less money to charity than others, and more than twice as many give nothing ([Frank, Gilovich, and Regan 1993](#)).
- Repeated experiments show that economics students prioritize their self-interest over the common good ([Marwell and Ames 1981](#); [Carter and Irons 1991](#)).
- There is evidence that narrowly self-interested individuals are drawn to study economics in the first place ([Frey and Meier 2007](#)).

Which brings us back to Batson...

In a series of clever experiments, Batson has **repeatedly** shown that if subjects are primed to feel empathy for another, their motivations are altruistic (see Batson 2019).



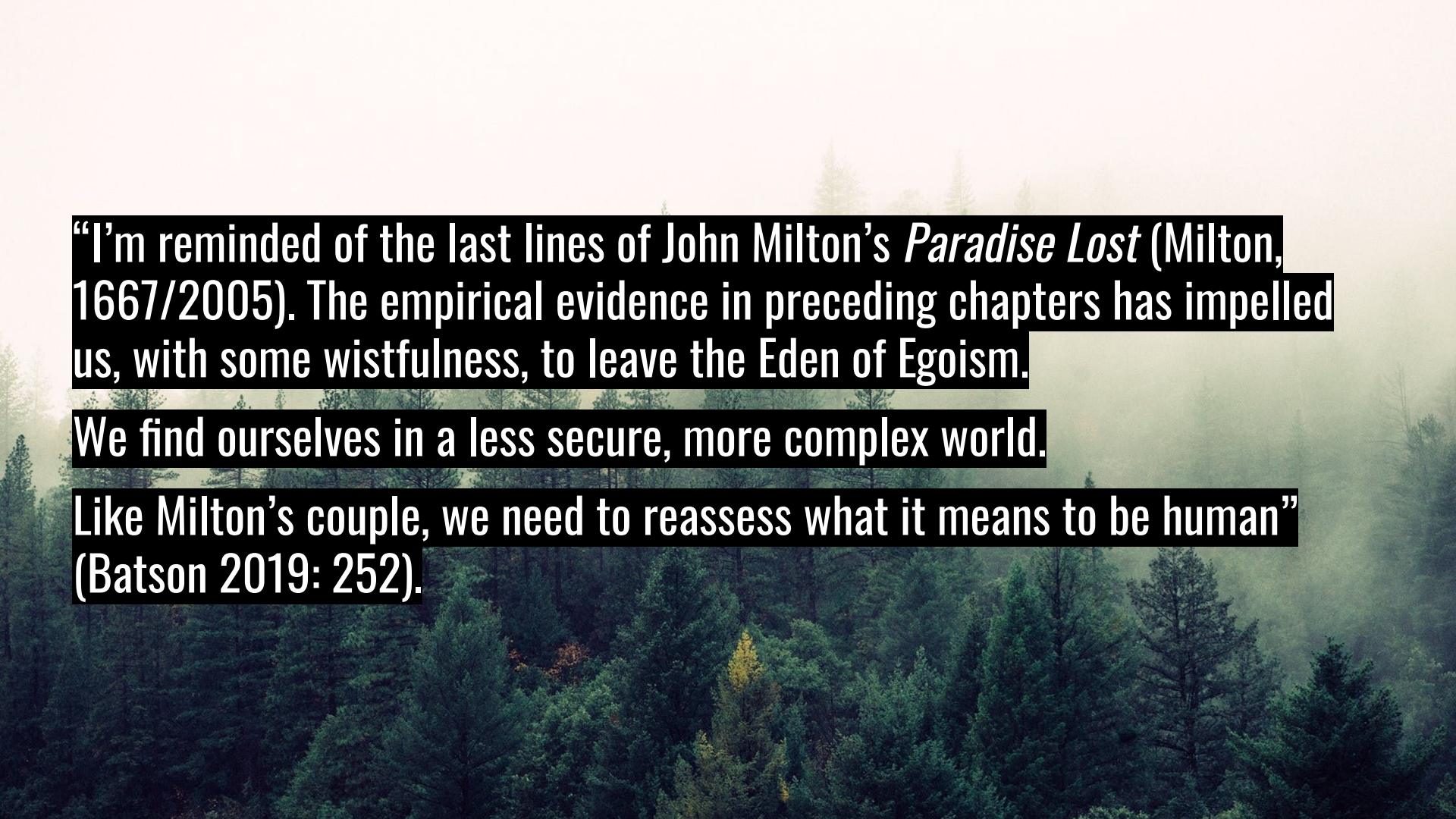




The technical details of
Batson's experiments
have been banished to
Appendix C.

Batson concludes that there are various motivational states, not just self-interest...

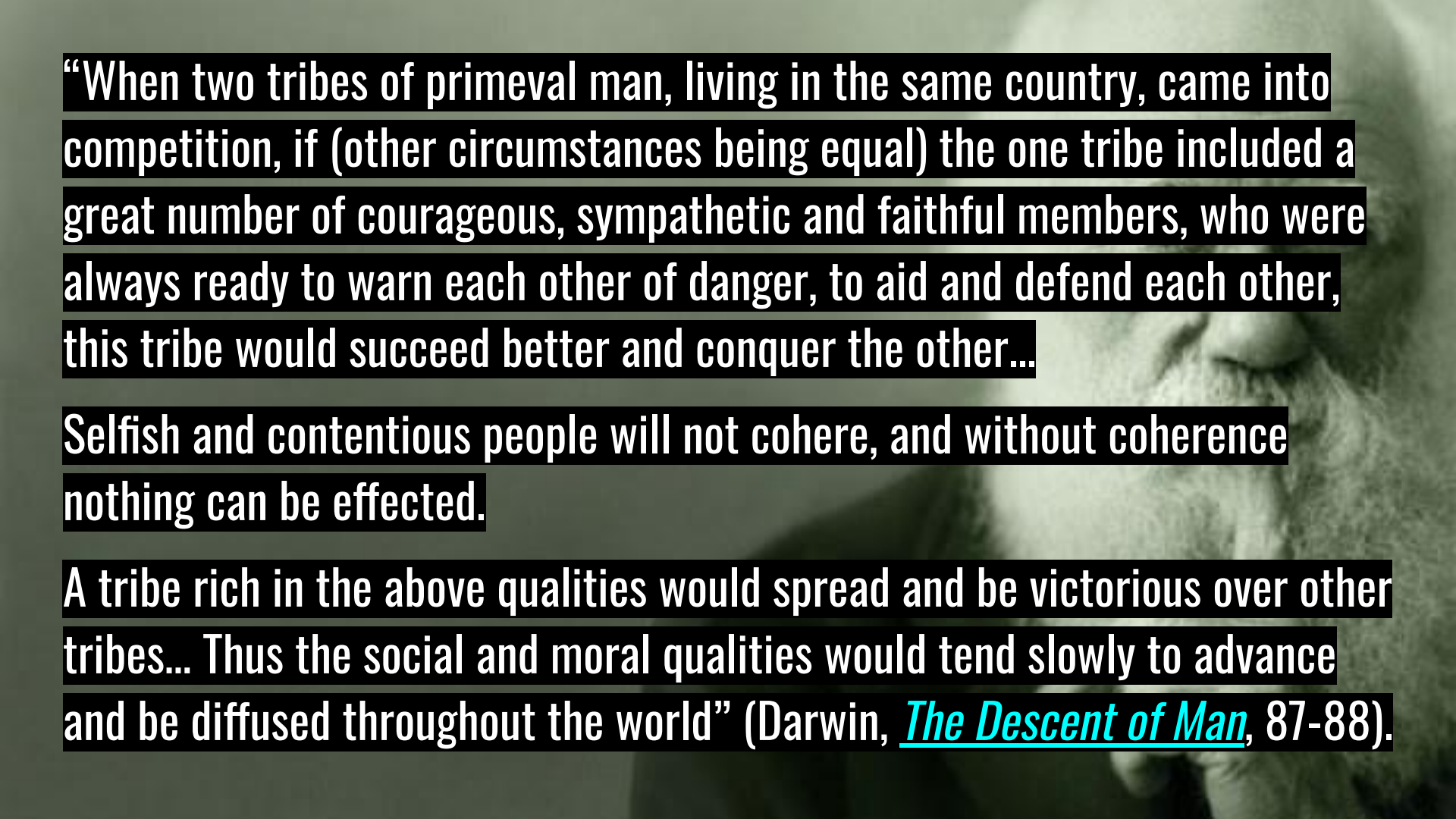
- **Egoism: motivated by self-interest**
- **Altruism: motivated by the interests of another**
- **Principlism: motivated by adherence to some rule**
 - **For example, a Kantian would be a principlist. Stay tuned.**
- **Collectivism: motivated by group interests.**
 - **Haidt calls his *groupishness*, Turchin calls it *social solidarity*.**



“I’m reminded of the last lines of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (Milton, 1667/2005). The empirical evidence in preceding chapters has impelled us, with some wistfulness, to leave the Eden of Egoism.

We find ourselves in a less secure, more complex world.

Like Milton’s couple, we need to reassess what it means to be human” (Batson 2019: 252).



“When two tribes of primeval man, living in the same country, came into competition, if (other circumstances being equal) the one tribe included a great number of courageous, sympathetic and faithful members, who were always ready to warn each other of danger, to aid and defend each other, this tribe would succeed better and conquer the other...

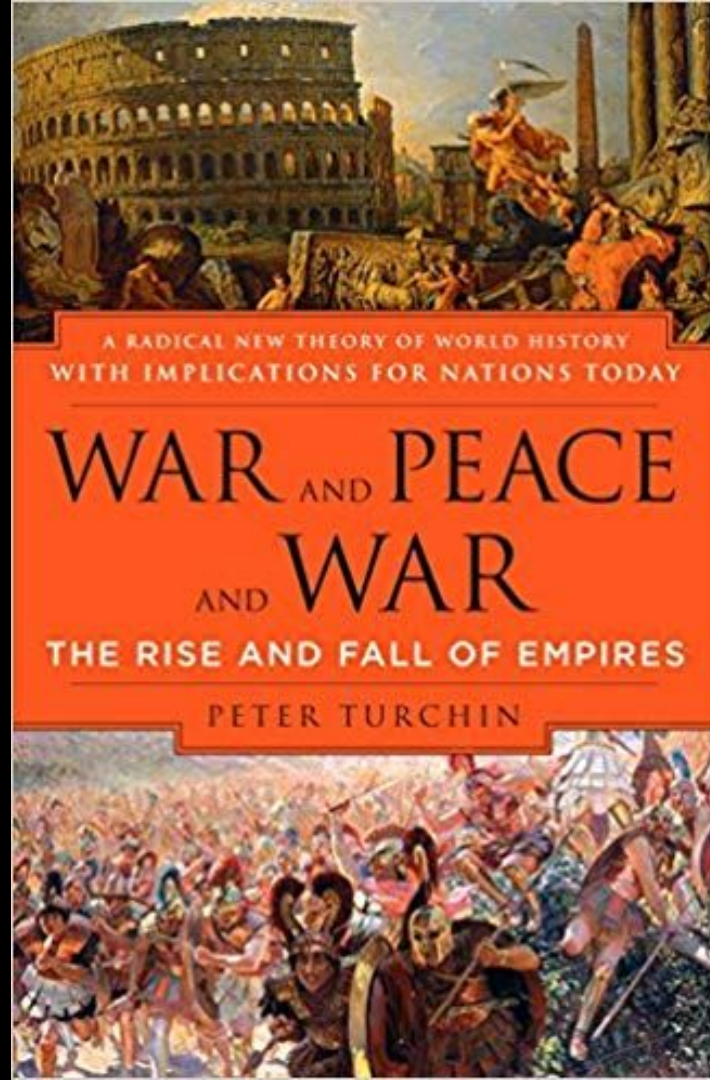
Selfish and contentious people will not cohere, and without coherence nothing can be effected.

A tribe rich in the above qualities would spread and be victorious over other tribes... Thus the social and moral qualities would tend slowly to advance and be diffused throughout the world” (Darwin, [*The Descent of Man*](#), 87-88).

In short...

Given an overview of relevant data from the fields of History, Sociobiology, Linguistics, and Social Psychology...

“Machiavelli was wrong” (Turchin 2007: 123).





Empirical Claims



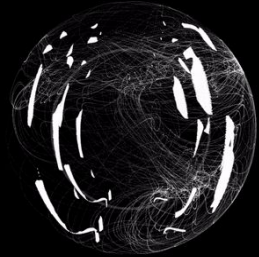
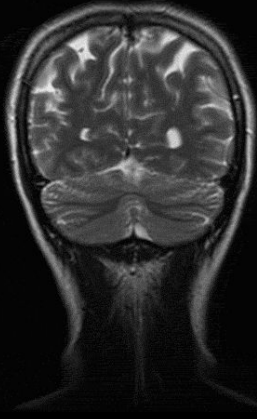
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Absent some powerful central authority, i.e., a Leviathan, humans are in a state of constant war (the state of nature hypothesis).



We submit to a government willingly, out of our own self-interest (Hobbesian social contract theory).



To be continued...