

Moral Ambition

Stop Wasting Your **Talent**
and Start Making a **Difference**

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Translated from the Dutch by Erica Moore



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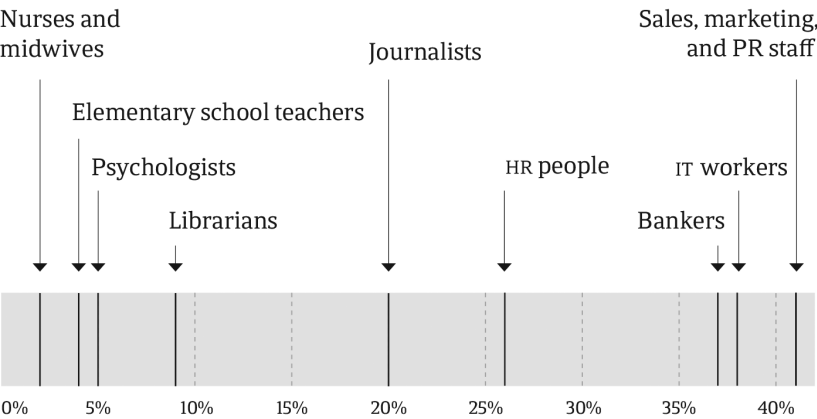
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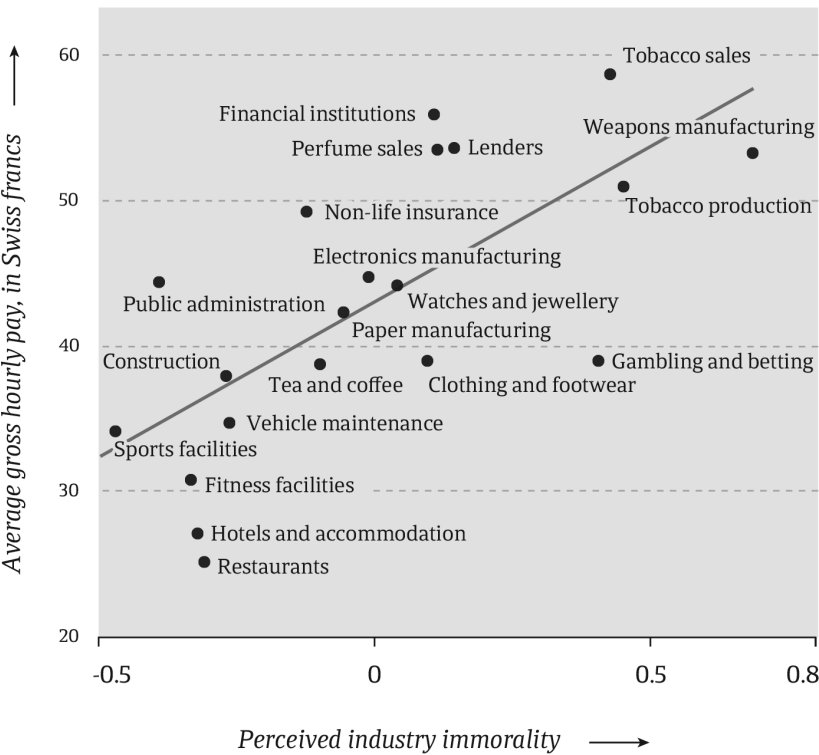
Who thinks their own job is bullshit?

The percentage of people who think their job is pointless or who have doubts about its value for society, by occupation



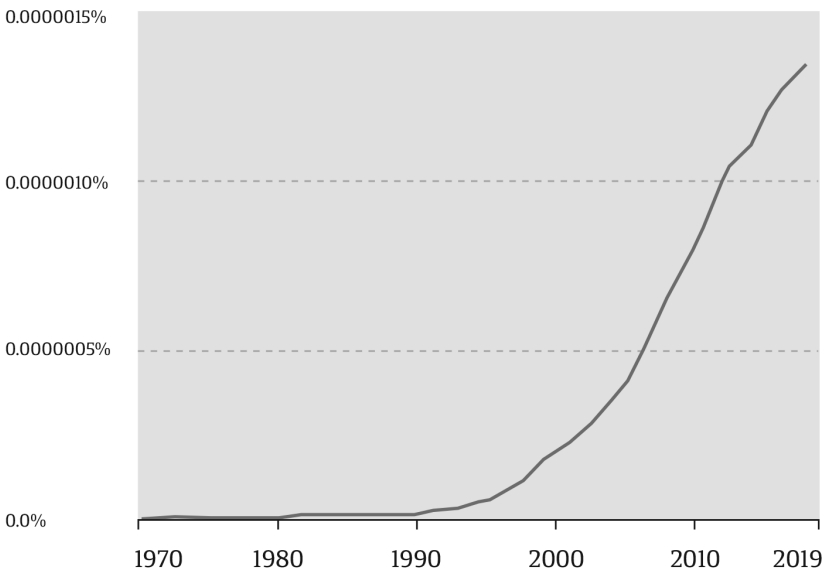
Source: Dur and Van Lent (2019)

The higher the pay, the more immoral the work?



Source: Schneider, Brun, and Weber (2020)

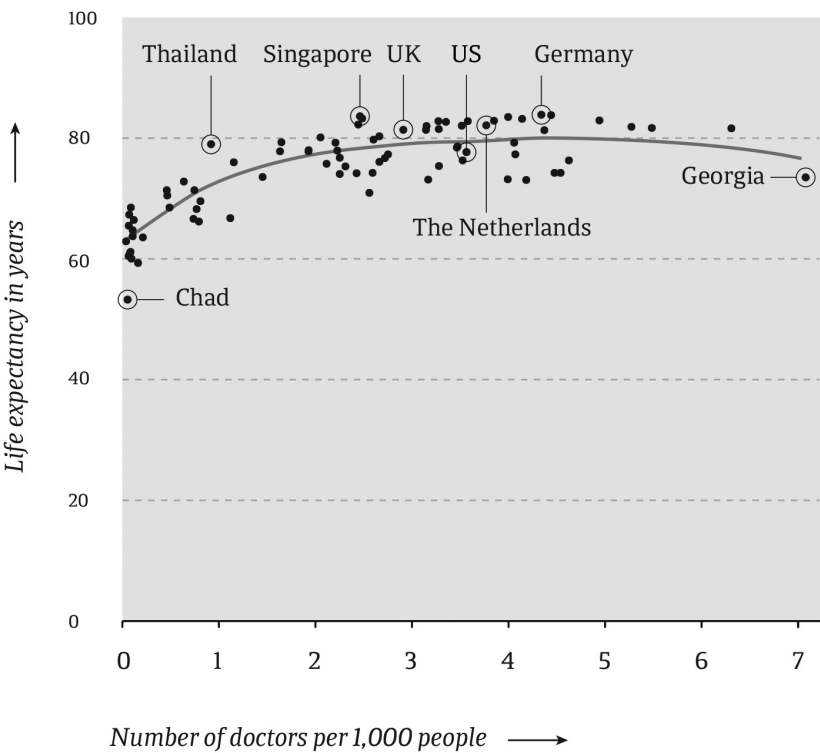
**The rise of the phrase ‘Follow your passion’
in books published between 1970 and 2020**



Source: Google Ngram

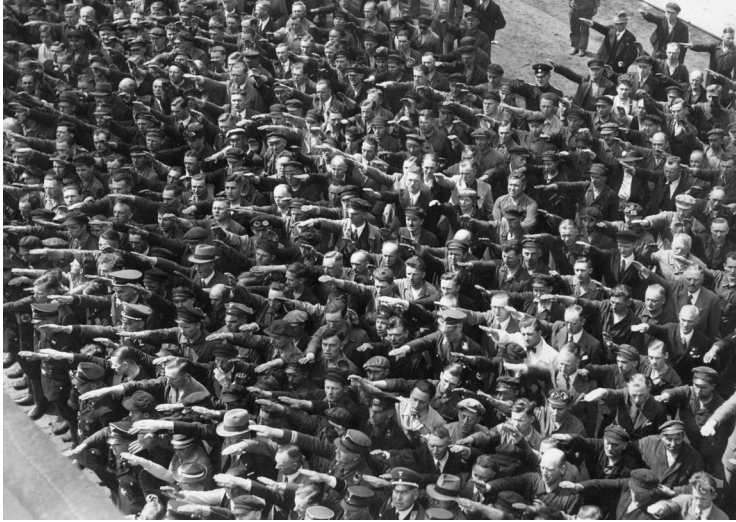
More doctors ≠ longer lives

Life expectancy vs. number of physicians per 1,000 people

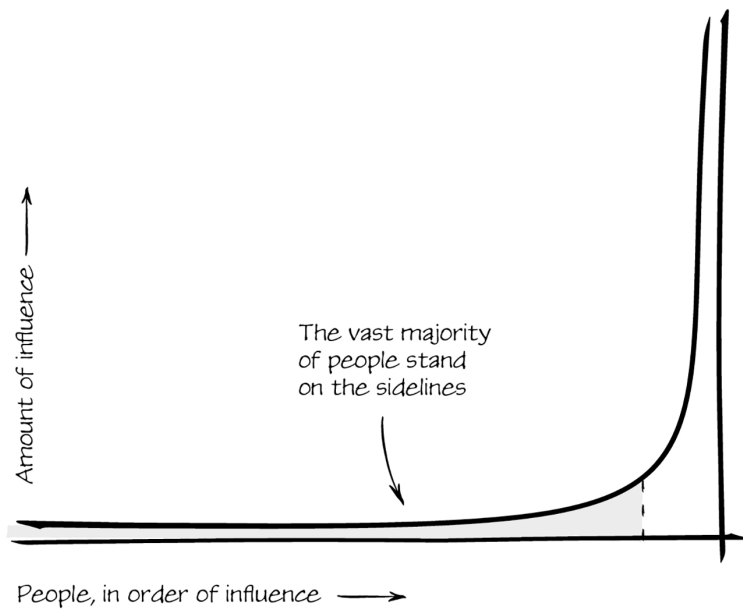
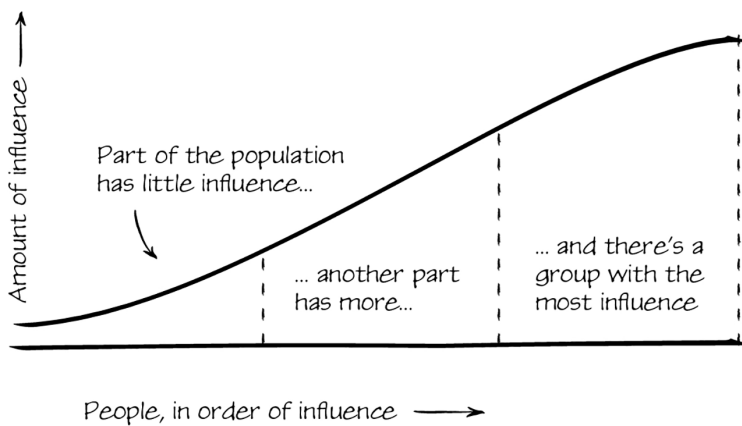


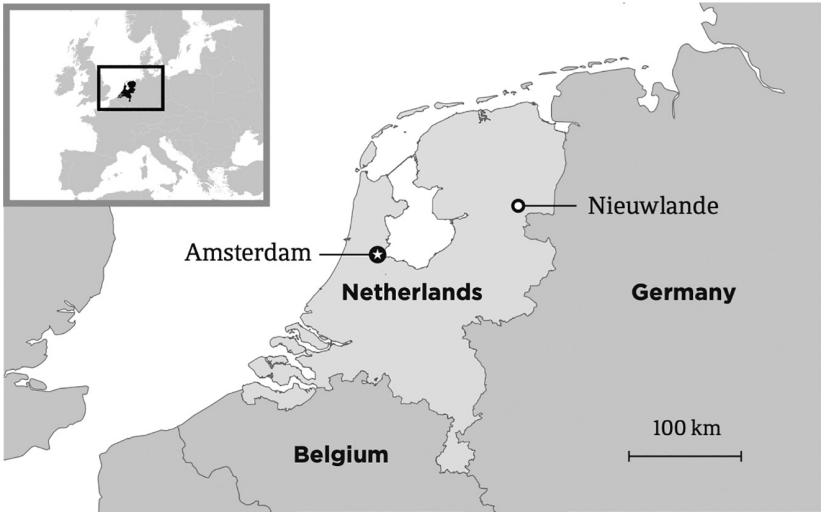
Source: World Bank (2019)

There's a well-known photograph taken in 1936 of German shipyard workers doing the Nazi salute. If you look closely, you can see one man in the crowd who's not joining in. As over a hundred people stretch out their right arms towards the führer, this man stands there, coolly defiant, arms folded across his chest.



You might think influence in the world is distributed like this:







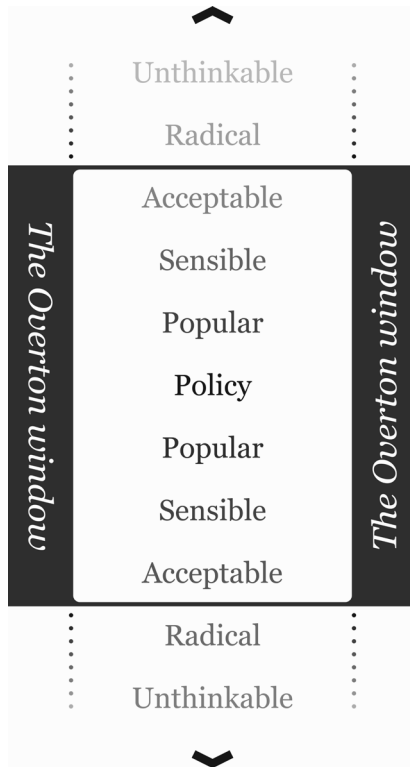
A photographer from Life magazine captured this group in the summer of 1969, posing on the steps of the Capitol building in Washington DC. It's a portrait of one of the most influential action groups of the twentieth century, also known as the Radical Nerds.



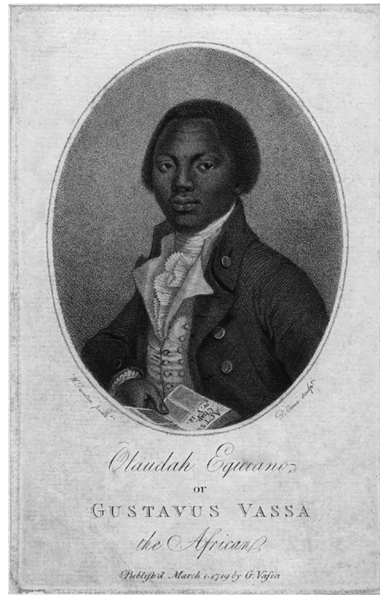
A photographer from *Fortune* magazine made a group portrait of the men, dressed as mobsters.



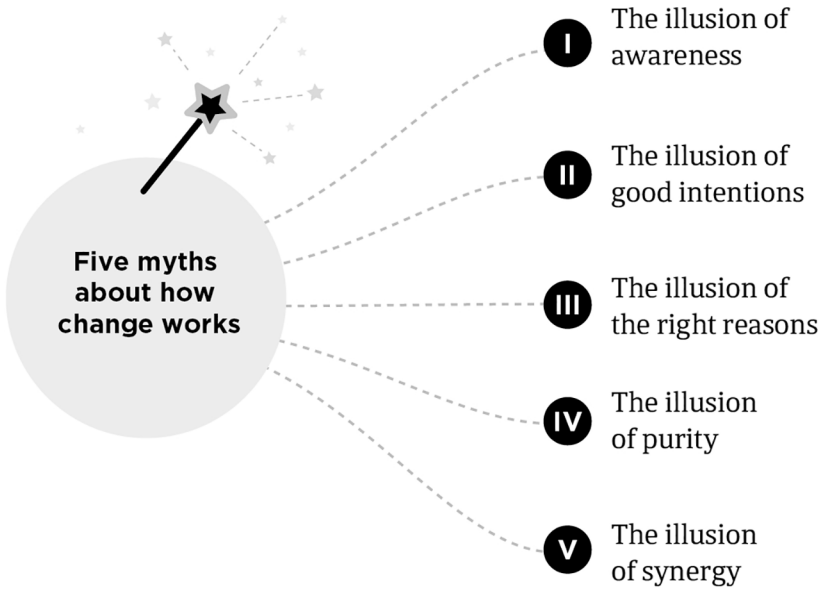
What did a Quaker meeting look like?



The Overton Window



This was the cover of the biggest bestseller of the British anti-slavery movement. The author was known for years as Gustavus Vassa, the name his former owner had given him. But now he chose to publish under his original African name, too: Olaudah Equiano.





The man-who-didn't-salute



Gustav Wegert in 1948 (right)

We now have strong indications that it's Gustav Wegert, and not August Landmesser, in that famous photograph from 1936. We know for certain that Wegert (1) worked at that shipyard, (2) consistently refused to do the Nazi salute, and (3) resembled the man-who-didn't-salute even more than Landmesser.

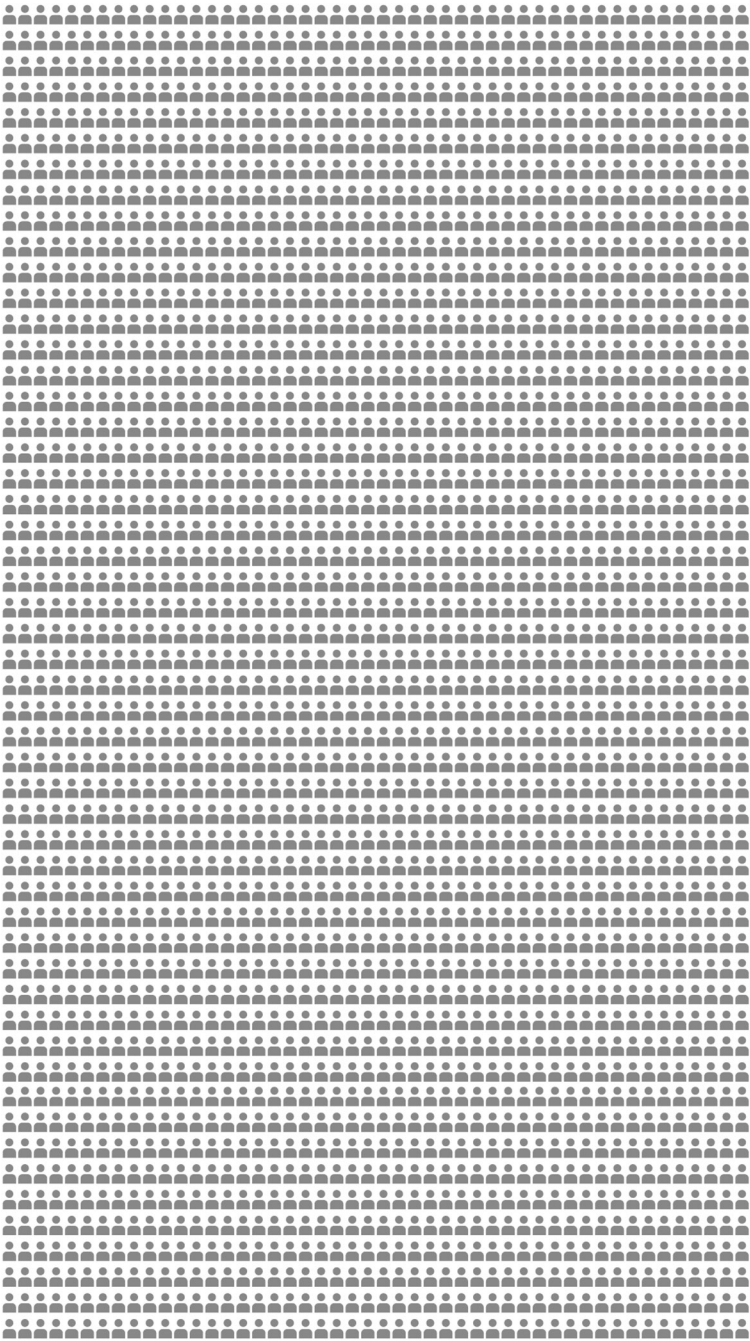
How many people Rob Mather helped

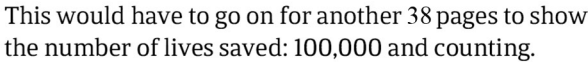
When Rob organised the swim for Terri:

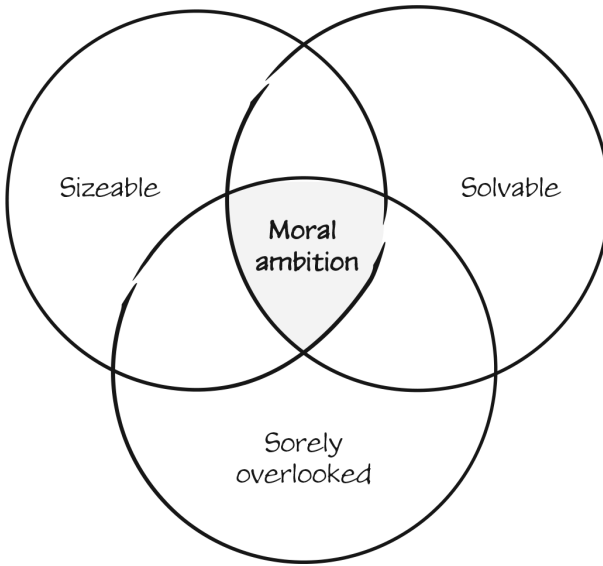


When Rob took on malaria:







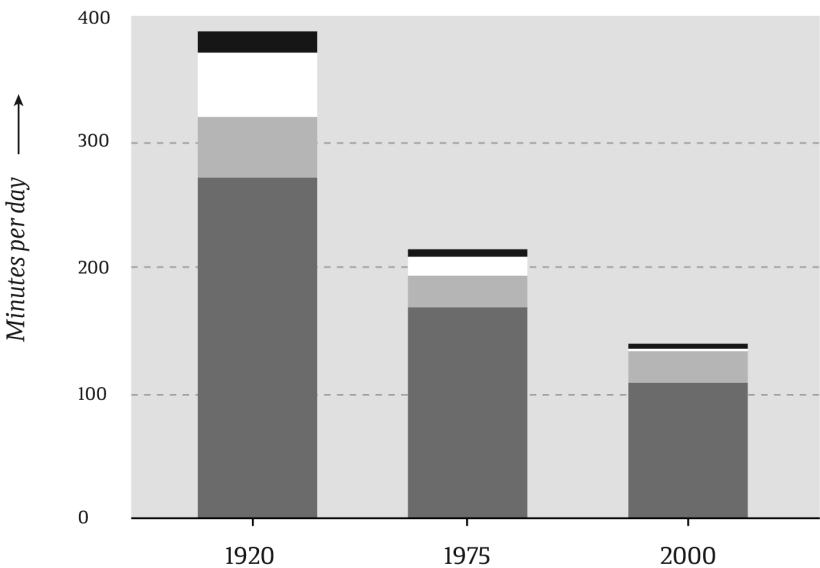


What do all these problems have in common? They're sizeable, they're often super-solvable, and they're sorely overlooked – the three S's, if you will.

The engines of liberation

Time spent on household work by rural women in the US

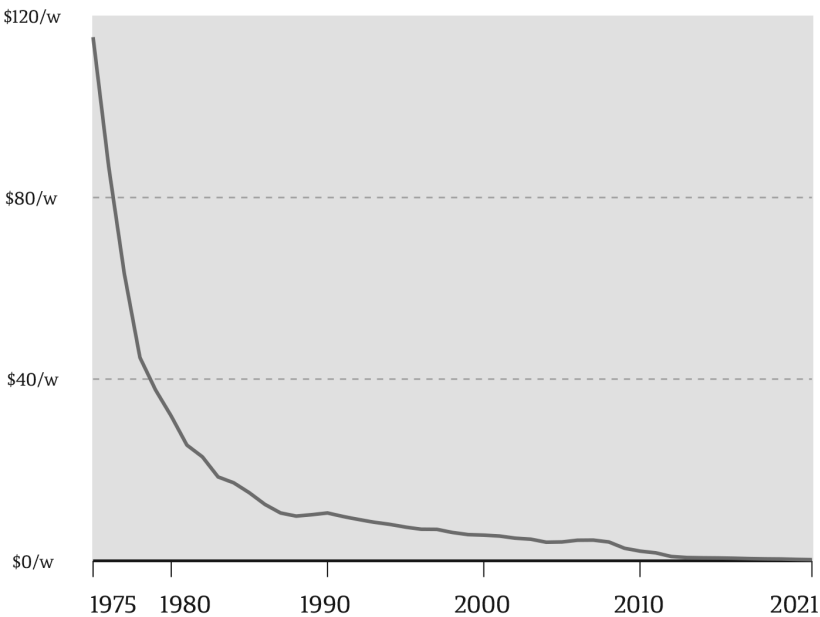
- Cooking, tidying, cleaning
- Doing laundry
- Knitting, sewing, mending
- Gathering wood, fetching water, etc.



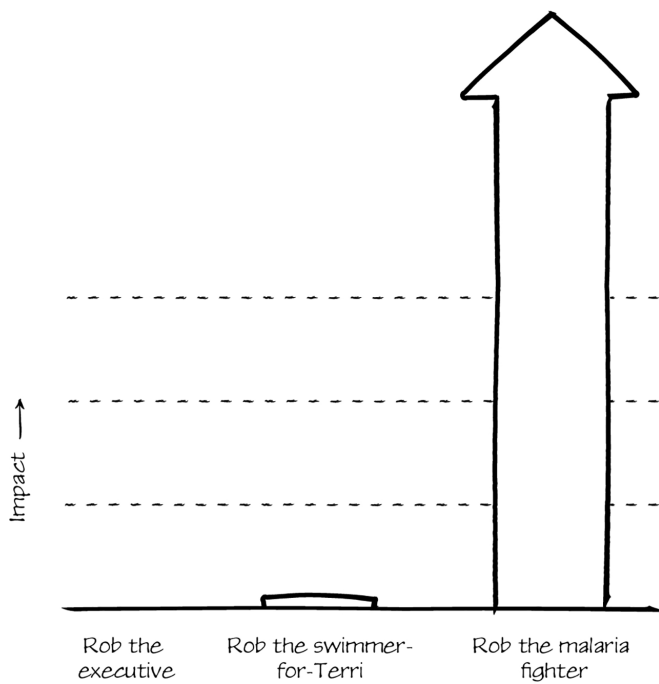
Source: Gershuny and Harms (2016)

Cheap, cheaper, cheapest

The price of solar energy in US dollars per watt, adjusted for inflation

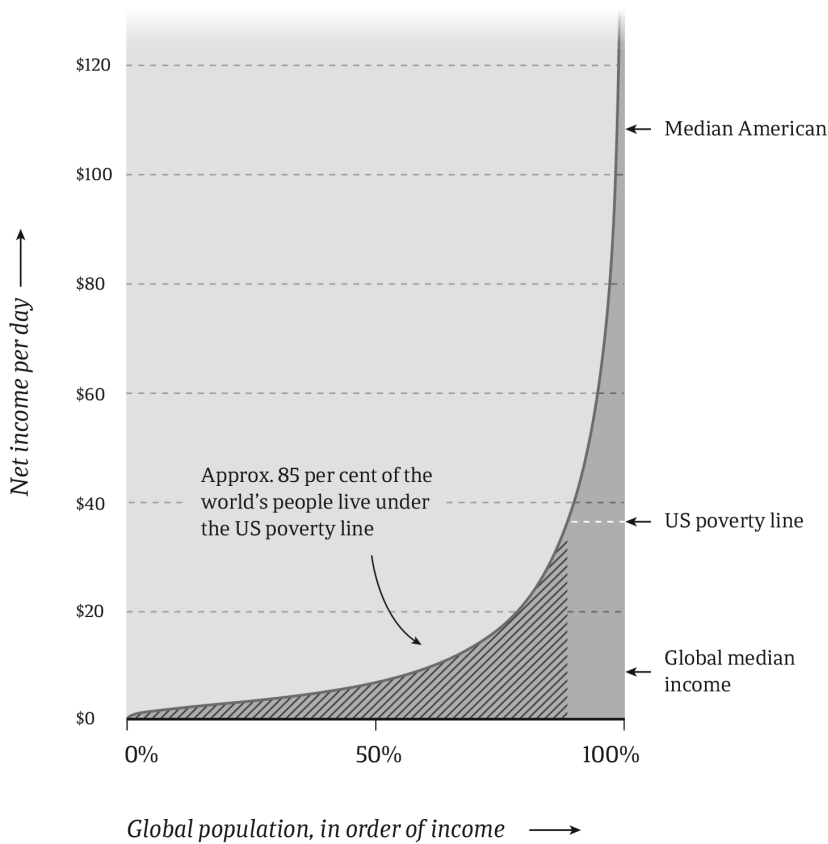


Source: Our World in Data



Global income distribution

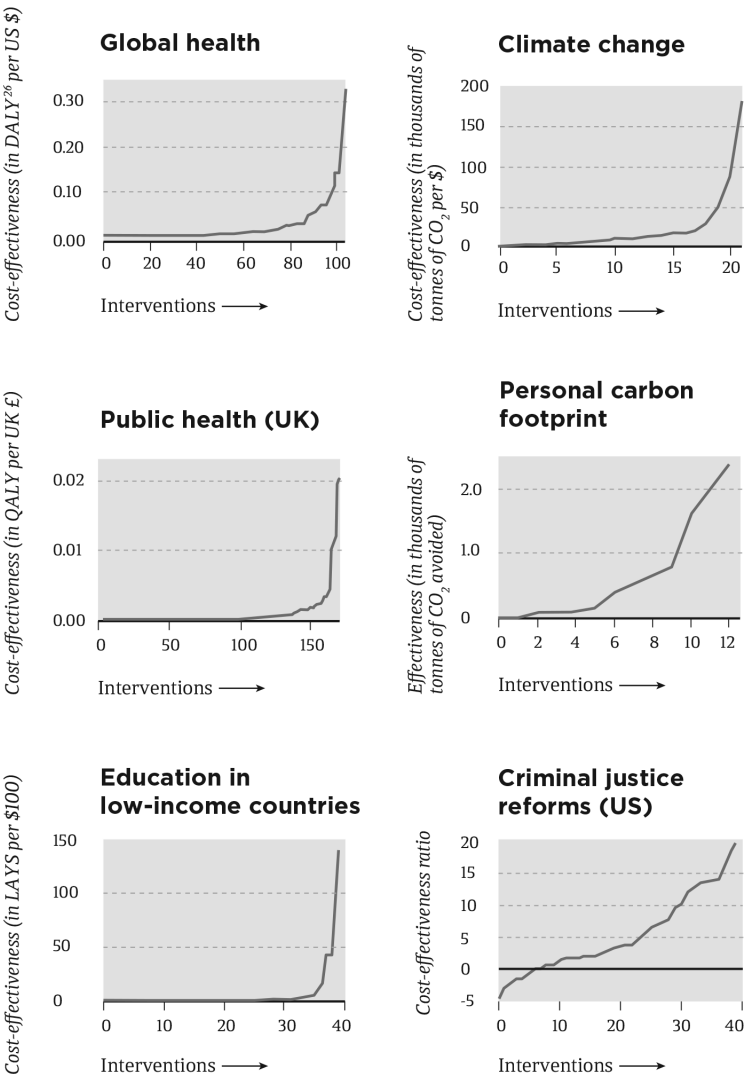
Net income per day in US dollars
(adjusted for cost-of-living differences)



Source: Our World in Data

The best interventions are far more effective than the rest

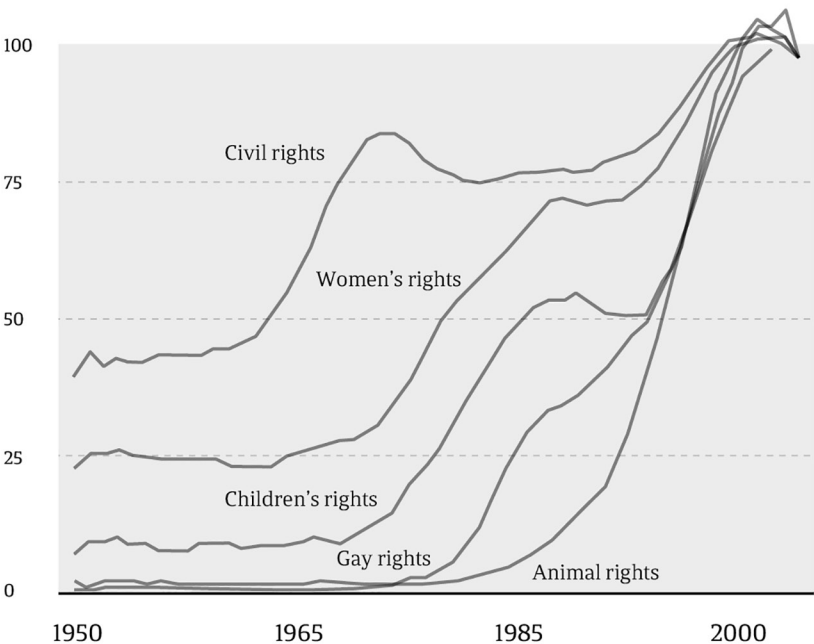
Government and NGO interventions (grouped by topic), in order of cost-effectiveness



Source: Todd (2023)

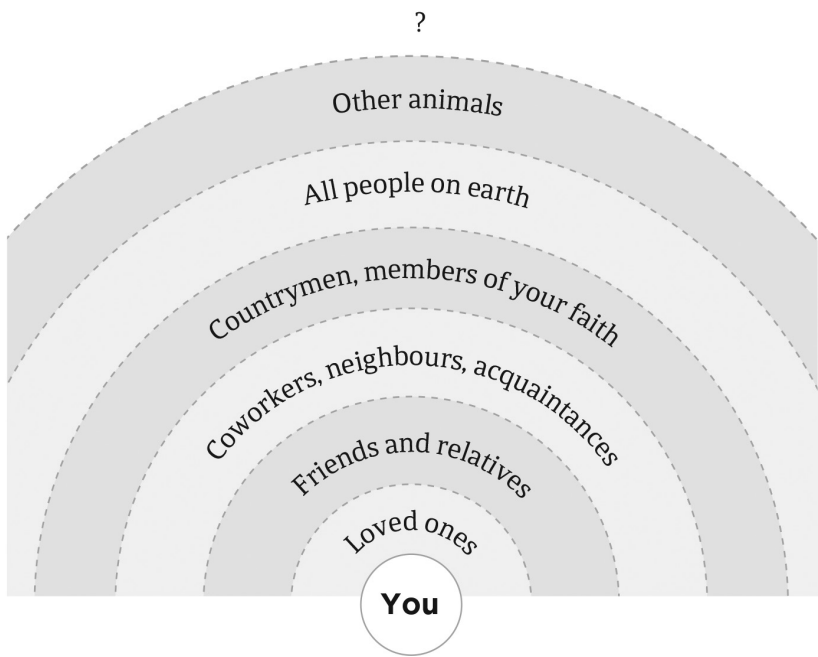
The revolution in our thinking on rights

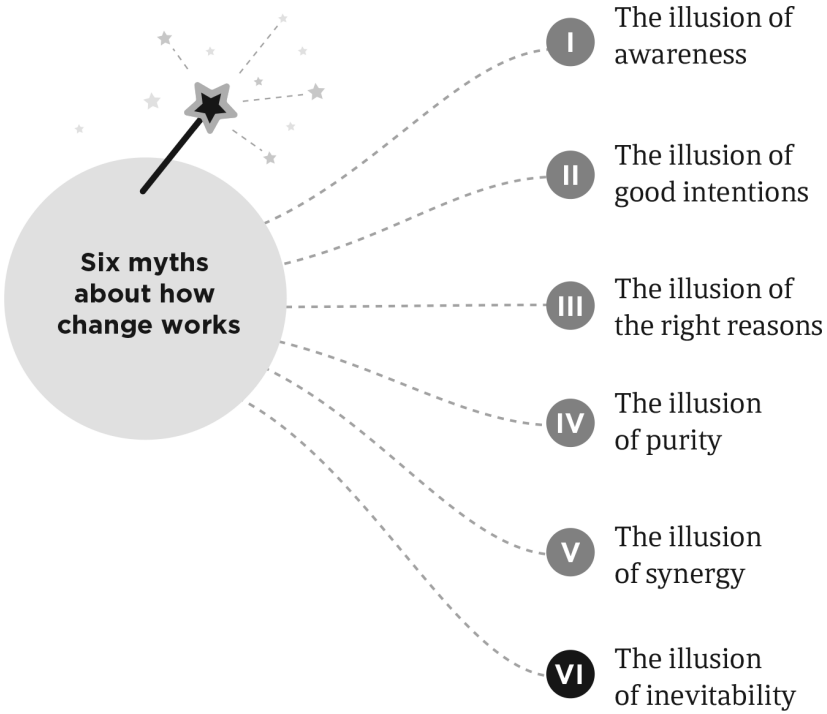
Books in English containing these terms,
as a percentage of the 2000 levels



Source: Bookworm, Steven Pinker (2011)

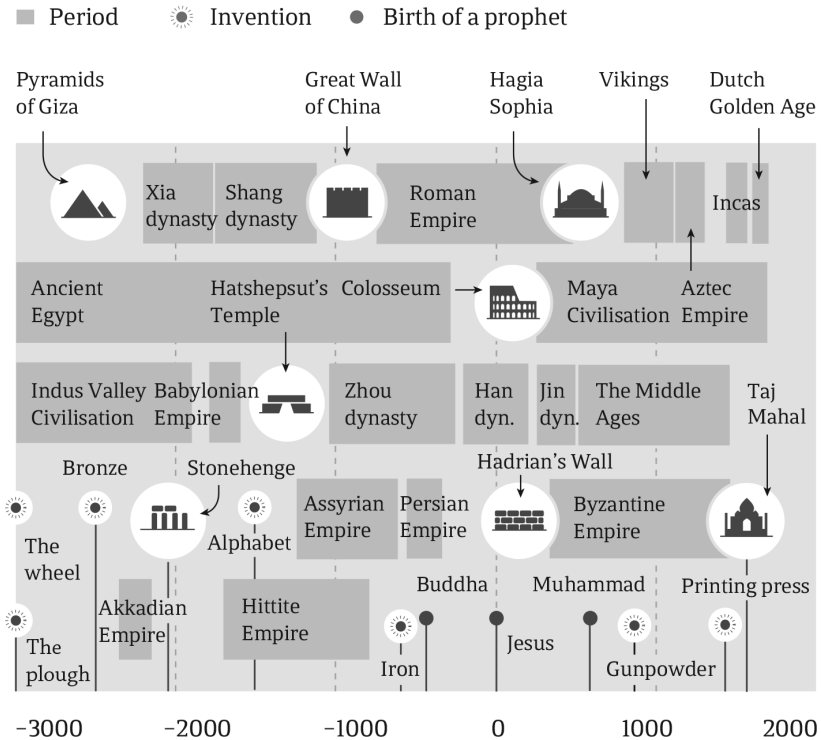
**What’s the next step in expanding
your moral circle?**





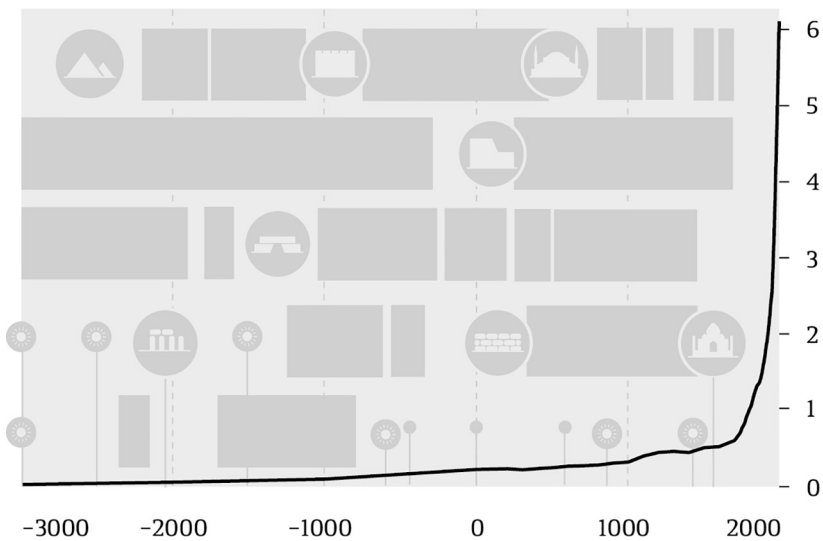
What was the most important thing to happen in human history?

A rather arbitrary selection of contenders



Humankind takes off

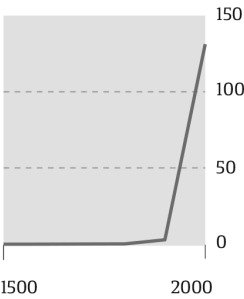
— Global population (in billions of people)



Source: Our World in Data

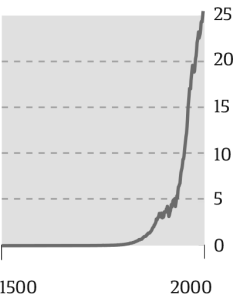
War-making capacity

*of armies through the ages
(relative measure)*



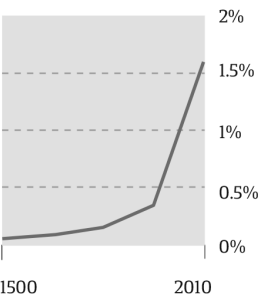
Carbon emissions

in billions of tonnes

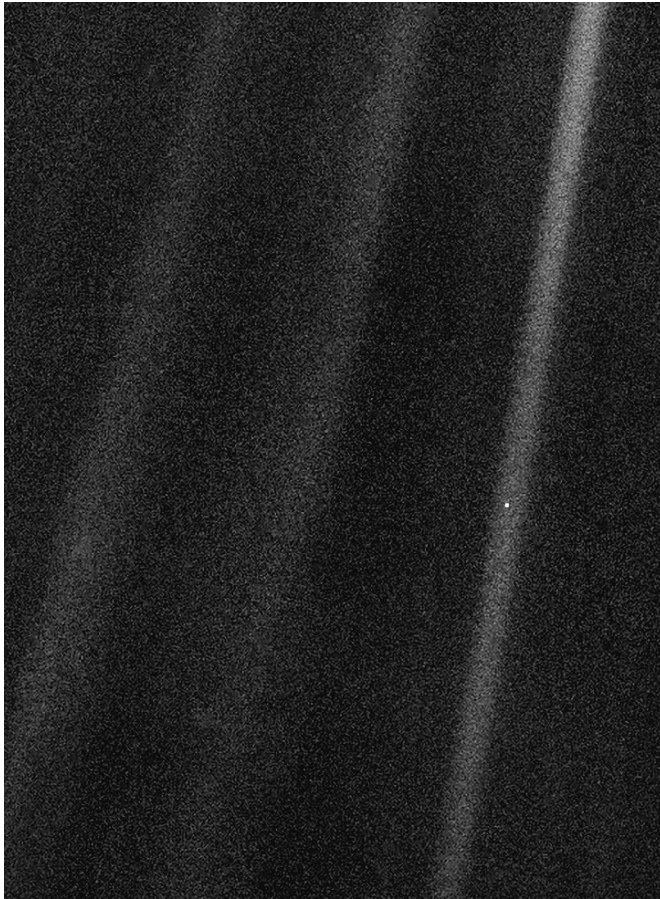


Vertebrate extinction

*Extinct species, as a percentage of
all vertebrate species (cumulative)*



Sources: Ian Morris (2013), Our World in Data, Ceballos et al. (2015)



That last Voyager photo became world famous. On the grainy image, the earth is but one-tenth of a pixel, a pale blue dot in a sea of darkness.