

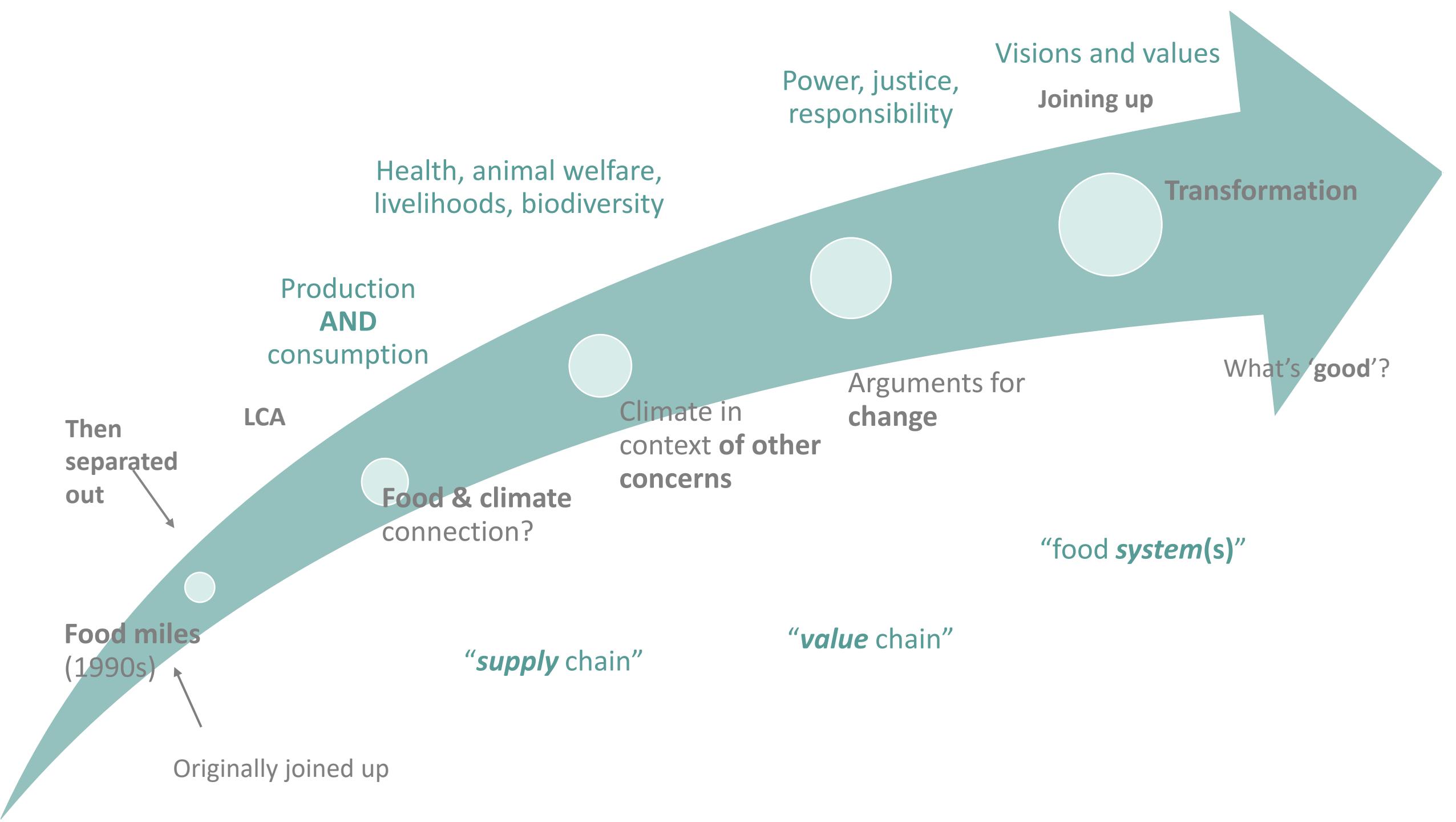


# Talking about talking about food

**Tara Garnett**

**Exeter – 3 November 2022**

- Personal views on evolution of thinking about food
- Current state of disagreements
- Ideas about change
- Focus: debates about meat



# Where are we today?

- “The food system is broken...”
- But is it?
- How broken?
- What’s broken?
- Says who?



# What do we talk about when we talk about food?

## Problems

- Climate change
- Biodiversity
- Water
- Soils
- Nutrition and health
- Poverty & access
- Jobs and livelihoods
- Justice/inequality/power
- Trade and economics
- Animal ethics
- .....

## Approaches

- Agroecology / sustainable intensification
- Taxes
- Regulation
- Green finance
- Labels and certification
- Public procurement
- New tech / trad practices
- Civic action
- Dietary change
- Education
- .....

What do we really talk about  
when we talk about food?

Different truths /  
different ideas about  
evidence

What's  
fundamentally the  
problem

The locus of  
responsibility

What do we talk about  
when we talk about  
food?

Us - nature

Boundaries – need /  
greed

Beliefs about freedom

# What's really the problem?



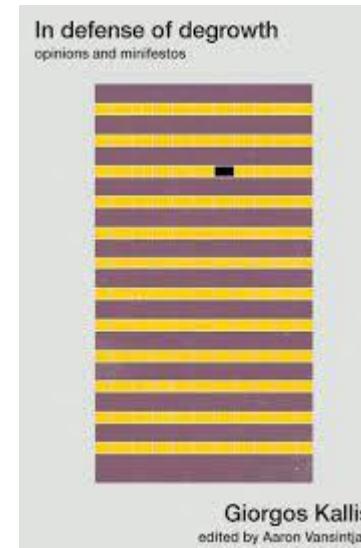
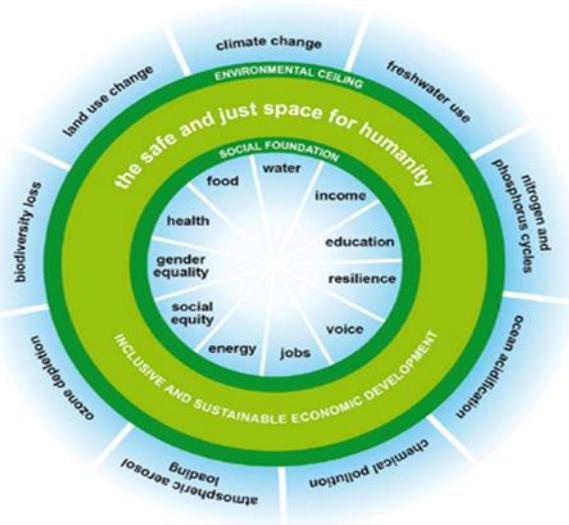
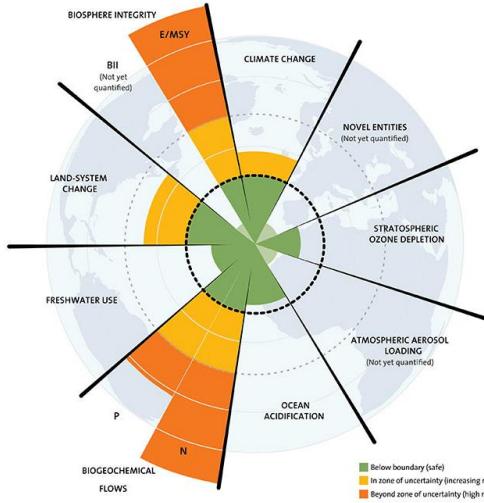
Innovative/technical  
insufficiency

Greed



Inequality

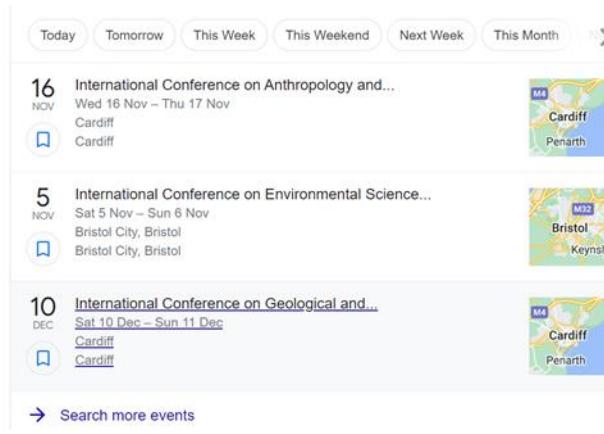
# Need / greed in relation to planetary boundaries



# Necessary / greedy. Who gets to decide? And who's the 'we'?



Is the metric  
Impact?  
Pleasure?  
Class?



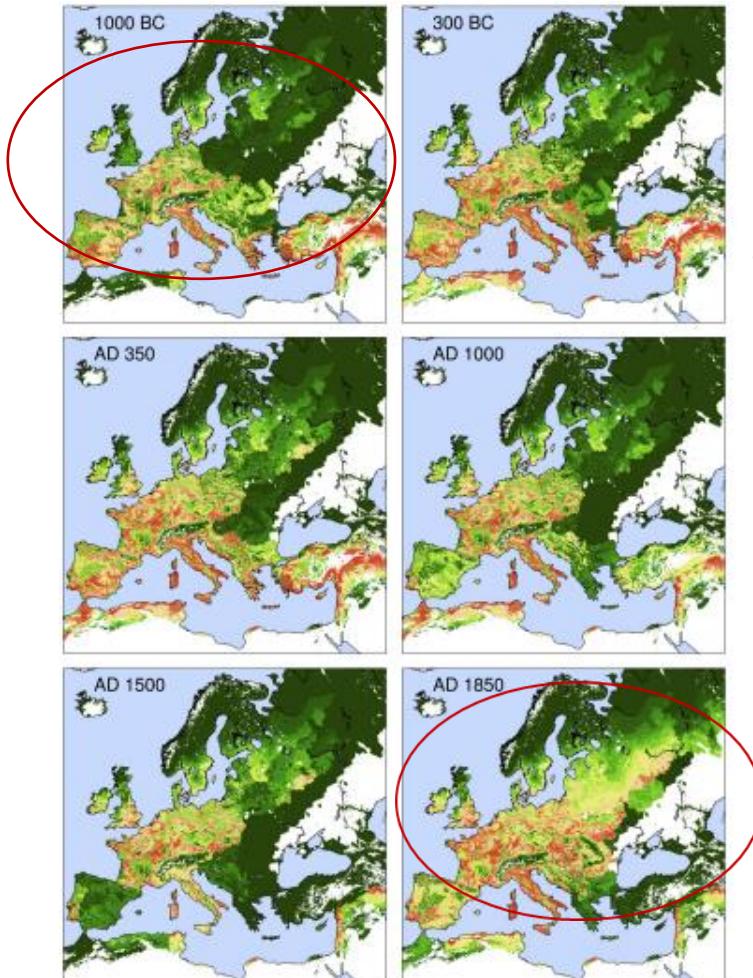
# Freedom – to, from, in?



(Why) should we work with nature?

# What's nature & how are we to it?

Which nature? When's nature?



Kaplan et al (2009) Quaternary Science Reviews 28 3016–3034

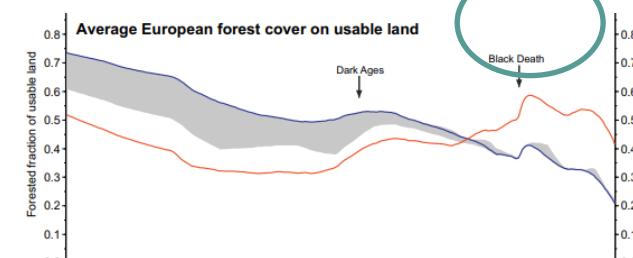
Are we (good for) nature?



Whose (idea of/ ownership of) nature?

Danish billionaires plan to rewild large swath of Scottish Highlands

Scotland's largest private landowners want to reverse years of land mismanagement, says adviser



Do we need to do 'unnatural' things to achieve more 'natural' outcomes?

Which (bits of) culture & when?

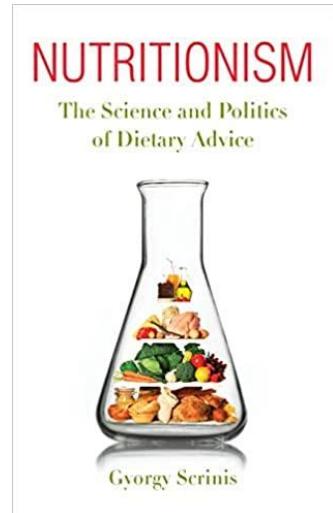


# What's true & whose knowledge counts?

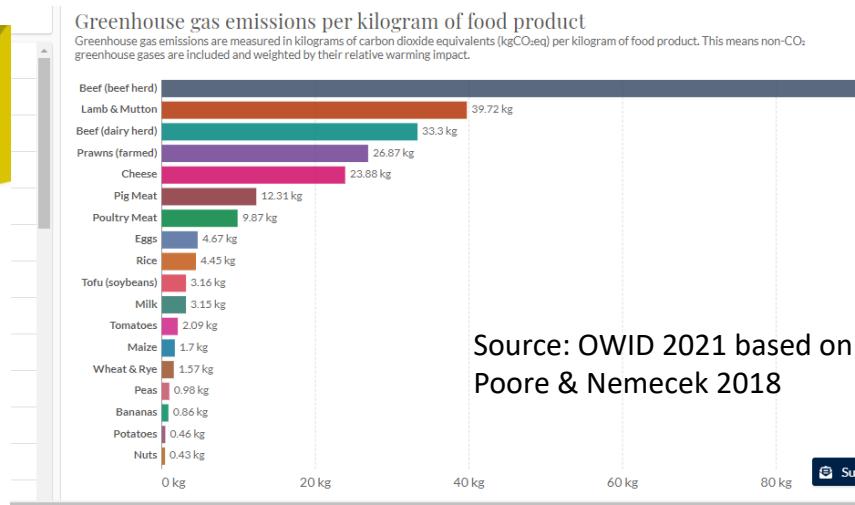
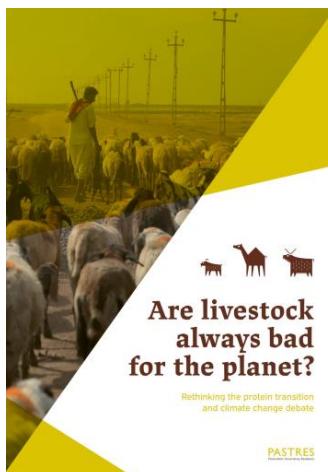
## Splitting / lumping



You want to reduce the carbon footprint of your food? Focus on what you eat, not whether your food is local



## Context, goals



Source: OWID 2021 based on Poore & Nemecek 2018

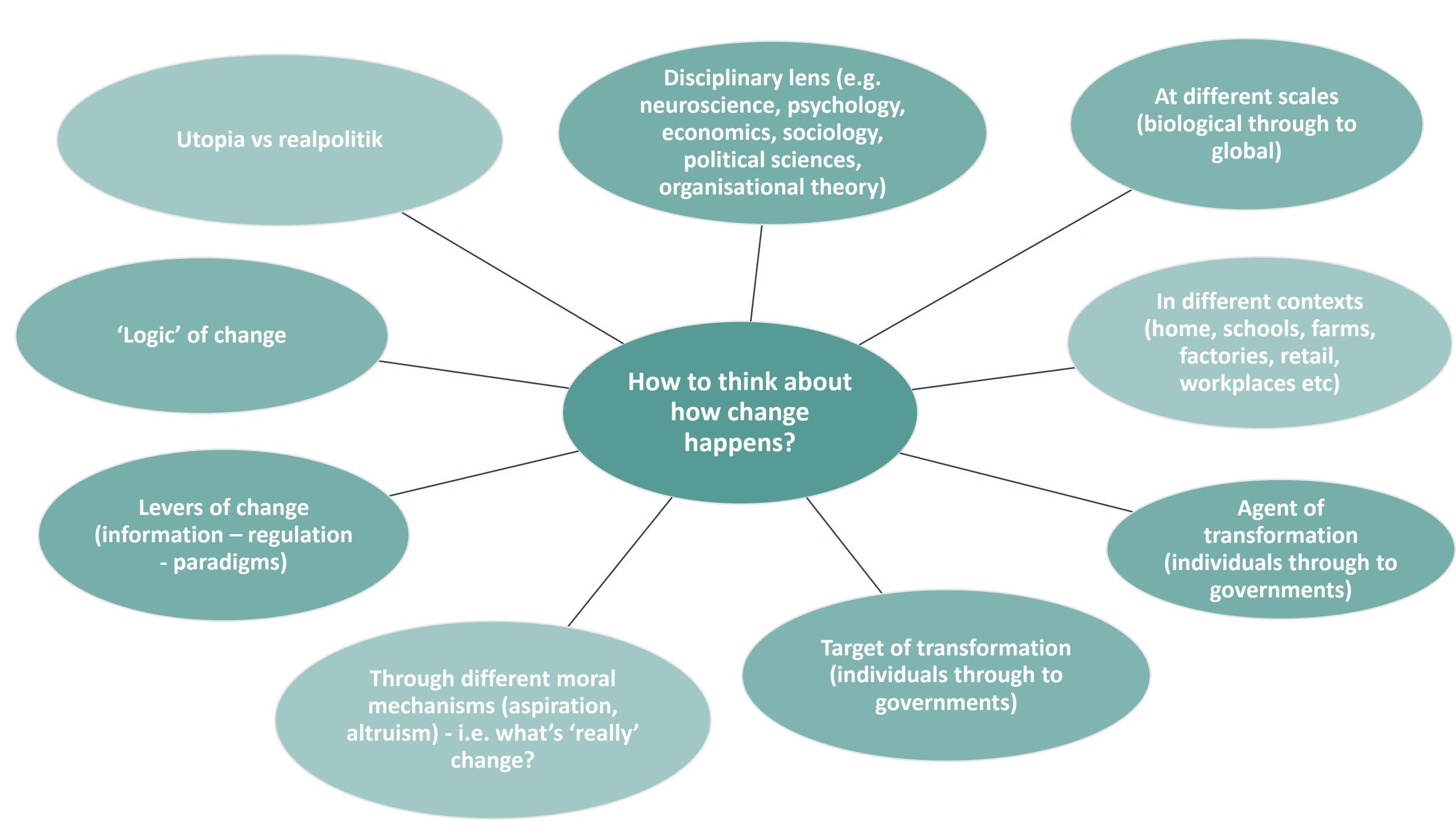
The nature of evidence;  
truth at different scales  
'science'





Onwards  
Transformation  
HOW?

To what / in what / by whom  
does change happen?



Financial institutions



The media



Corporations



# Agent of transformation?

The 'citizen' / civil society



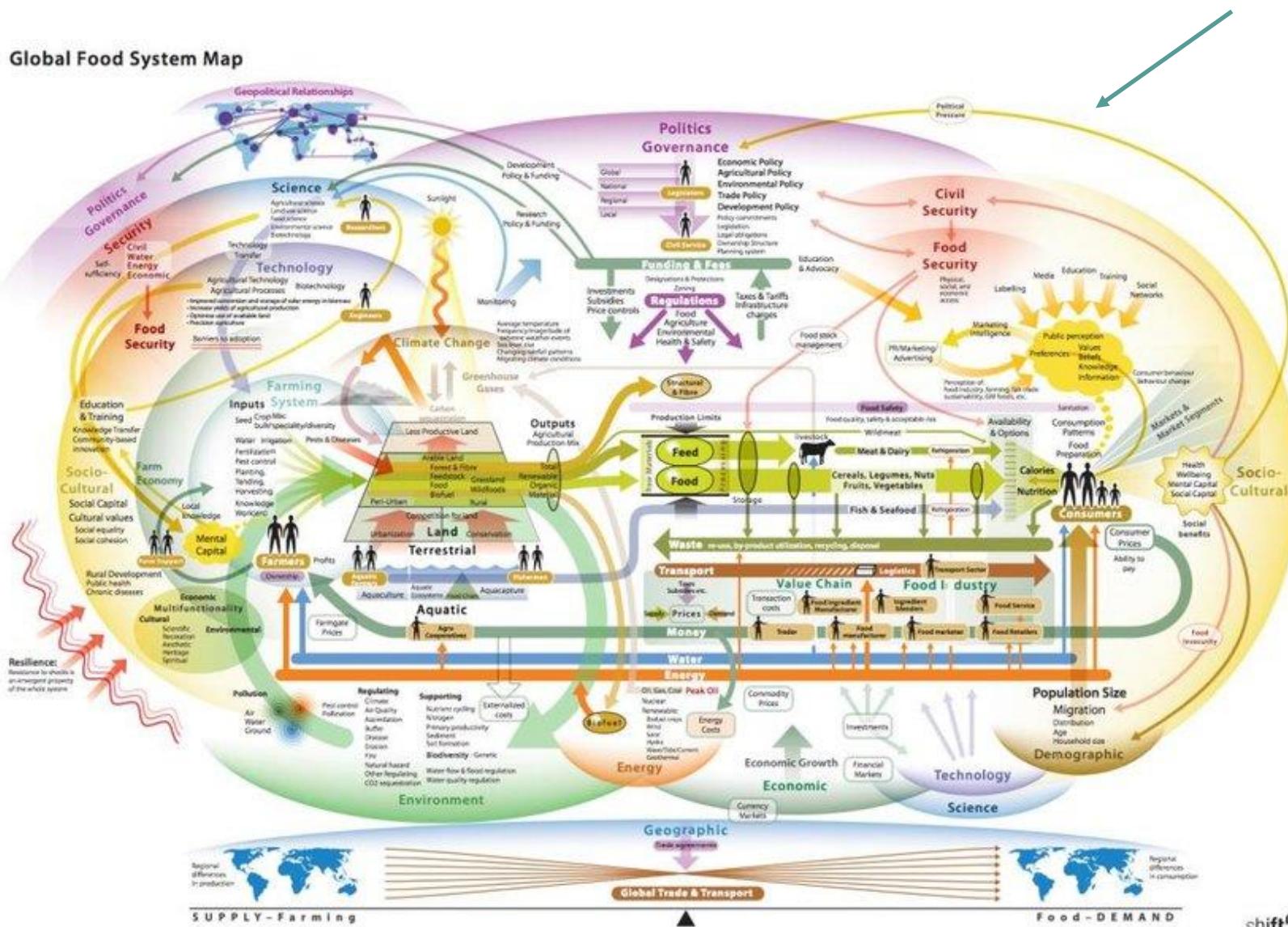
The 'consumer'



Government institutions (various levels)



# Everything, everywhere, all at once!



Financial institutions & capitalism



The media



Corporations



fa1810717 FreeArt

# Target of transformation?

The 'citizen'



The 'consumer'



Government institutions (various levels)

Legal frameworks



# ‘Logic’ of transformative change

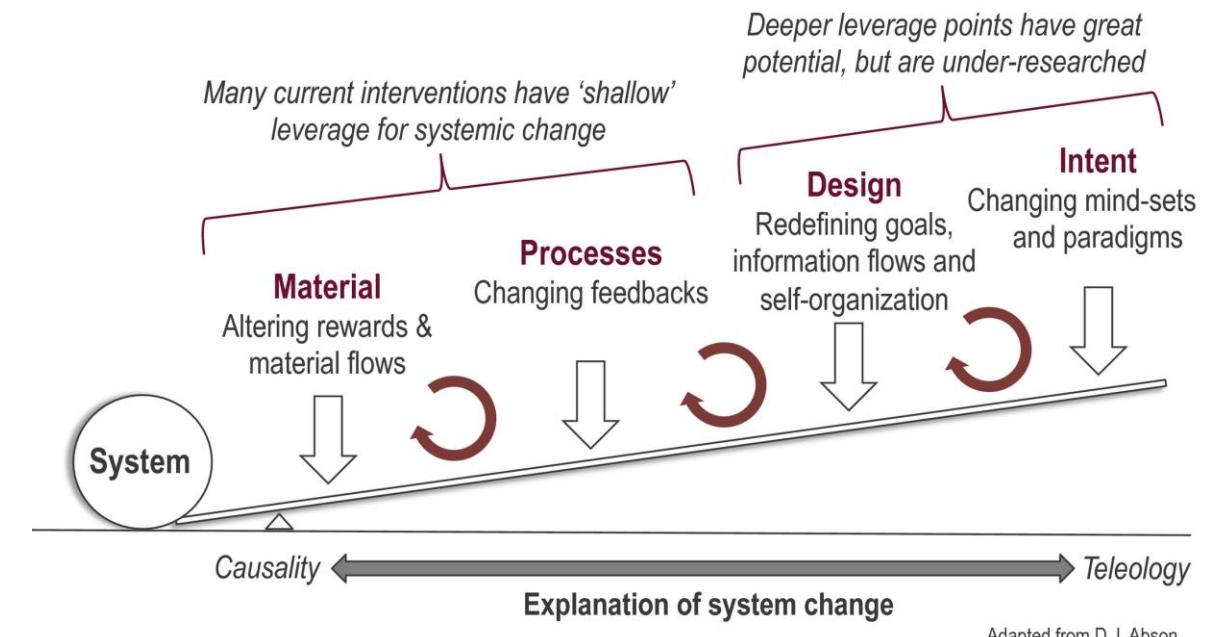
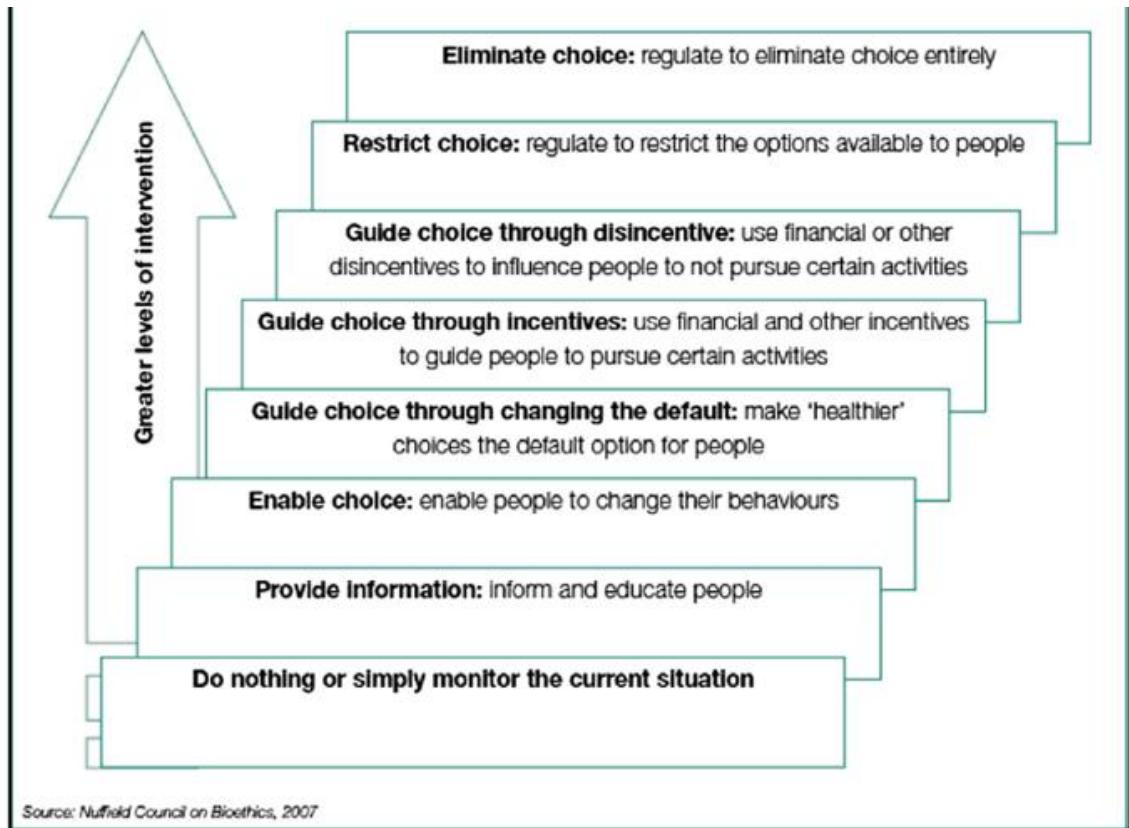
- Knowledge → change
  - People are good / selfish
  - People are rational / irrational
  - People are powerful/powerless
  - People (i.e. individuals) are important / irrelevant
  - People make conscious choices / people are creatures of impulse/habit/context
- Emotions → change
- (Dis)Incentives → change
- Change → change

# Moral lens

- Focus on extrinsic values
- Focus on intrinsic values
- Views on which one ‘works’ – and which one **really** works



# Levers of intervention



Source: Nuffield Council on Bioethics (2007)

Source: Fischer & Riechers (2019 adapted from Abson et al, adapted from Meadows (1999) )

# Utopia or realpolitik?

Q 1: what is Utopia

Q 2: Is it is it too risky to go for it?)

- Go for what we really want – or avoid what we fear?
- Easy wins or radical systemic change
  - Lock in & moral hazard vs ‘the best is the enemy of the good’
- Top down / bottom up?
- Precautionary vs proactionary principle?
- Act today or bet on the future?
- Polarise or collaborate?
- **Think! Hurry!!**

# How 'ought' transformation to happen?

- What change is **legitimate**?
  - 'Governments should govern' vs 'the risks of the nanny state'
  - 'Empower' the individual **vs** 'stop blaming the individual'
  - 'Harness market mechanisms' **vs** 'markets are inherently self-serving'
- What change is **actually change**?
  - 'Incremental change is feasible' **vs** 'incremental change is a sticking-plaster solution'
  - 'Systems change is necessary' **vs** 'systems change is hopelessly vague'

The example of meat

Win-win balanced offering OR meagre fundamentalism?

Which is radical  
& which is  
status quo?

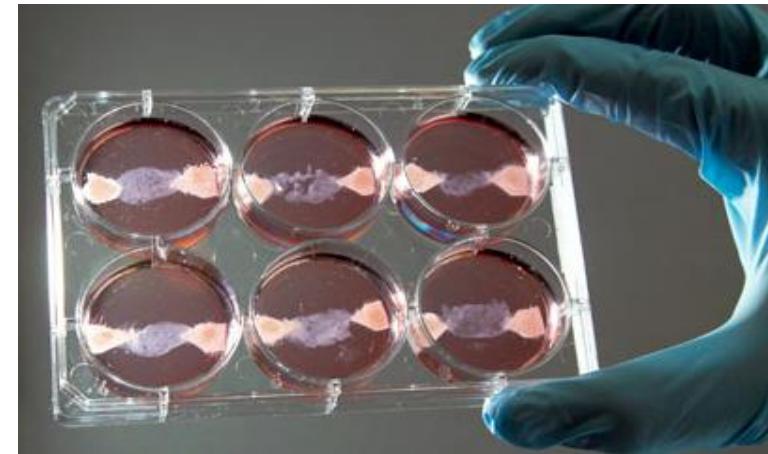


Miraculous something from nothing or  
space guzzling bag of wind?



Garnett T  
(2015) Gut  
Feelings &  
possible  
tomorrows

Techno-solution OR further alienation from  
nature?



Ultra efficient OR inhuman & a waste of grain?





**Scale project**  
The global-local  
debate



[www.tabledebates.org/scale](http://www.tabledebates.org/scale)



**Power**  
Who controls  
protein's future?



**Explainers**  
"Building blocks"  
and "chapters"

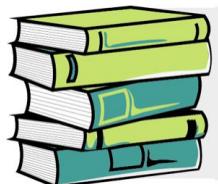
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