



circular economy; blindspot or systemic change



UCL Green Economy Society  
London  
15<sup>th</sup> October 2015

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# Blindspotting: what are we missing?

How could we talk about circular economy for 50 years...

...without it happening for real?

How do millions of people & initiatives for global problems...

...so far solve none of them?



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## 2 topics: circular economics; system change Then: open questions & discussion

Lemming strategy for circular economy

How to get 'circular economy 4real'  
in any economy or globally

Lemming strategy for global  
challenges

Systemic change, planet levers



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# Streetlight effect

We tend to look for solutions where the light shines



# Streetlight effect

...not from over here!

We look for solutions  
from our viewpoint



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# Lemming vs blindspot viewpoints

Circular economy hasn't happened after 50 years of trying to start. Should we just keep trying or explore possible blindspots?

Circular economy is a big opportunity.

Everyone should get on with doing it in their sector.



# Why Circular Economy?

Solve the rubbish problem  
Solve the pollution problem  
Solve the climate problem  
Solve the marine debris problem  
Solve the ecosystem problem  
Solve the toxics problem

...

Solve the linear economy  
problem



# How to get circular economy?

Change how the whole  
system works

1. Focus on subsystems (of stuff, issues, geographies, organisations...)
2. Set targets
3. Seek improvement
4. Initiatives, taxes, rules
5. There's no silver bullet





# What is waste?

‘Ecological waste’ is used resources accumulating in land, air or water ecosystems.

Waste is stuff we want to get rid of.  
It's solid.  
This means we can get rid of it by incineration!



# Waste management vs precycling

Waste management: 'managing' waste after disposal.

Most attention and cash goes to disposal to land and air.

Precycling: action to stop waste before disposal.

“What can we do now to stop resources ending up dumped into ecosystems?”

Precycling is the circular economy vision translated into practice.

Households, communities, businesses and governments can all precycle.

Every product can be precycled in some way.





# Change is binary

Shoes are either precycled or  
prewasted

Resources end up as either new  
resources or ecological wastes

The incentives to determine this are  
either in place or not

We have either circular economy or  
junk economy

# How to get everyone to precycle everything?

Harness the power of markets

Harness the power of the circular economy movement.

We want more circular economy projects to get more circular products and more circular business models..



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# Design choices for circular economy

Design the resource logistics  
Government responsibility  
Targets for % change  
Act within sectors/issues  
Limit capitalism

Design the economics  
Producer responsibility  
Step change  
Act across economy  
Fix capitalism



# How to design waste out of economics?



- Financial incentives guide waste vs precycling decisions
  - The externalities of linear economy lead to linear decisions
  - Conventional approaches to externalities are limited
  - Instead we can extend the practices of producer responsibility and insurance
1. Waste-risk: the risk of a product ending up as waste in ecosystems
  2. Make producers responsible for the waste-risk of their products
  3. Producers 'insure' against their products' waste-risk
  4. Premiums are spent to cut waste-risk everywhere

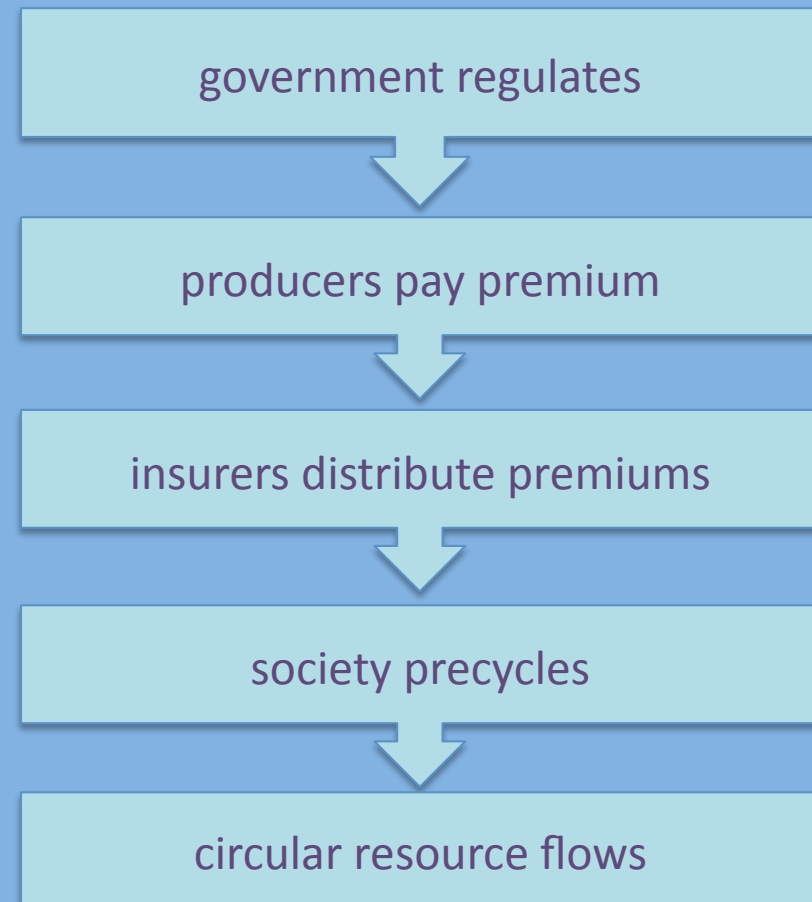


# Case study: kettles (or any product)



High waste-risk  
Higher premium  
Less competitive

Low waste-risk  
Low premium  
More competitive



# Advantages

## The standard approach:

- Uses widely accepted language and habits of thinking
- Based on decades of experience
- Preferred by businesses with high waste-risk, eg fossil fuels

## The precycling approach:

- Simpler; 1 economic tool that's compatible with existing tools
- Better for government; achieve more with less rule-making
- Better for business; minimal admin, full freedom of choice
- A future for both civilisation and GDP growth (by decoupling)





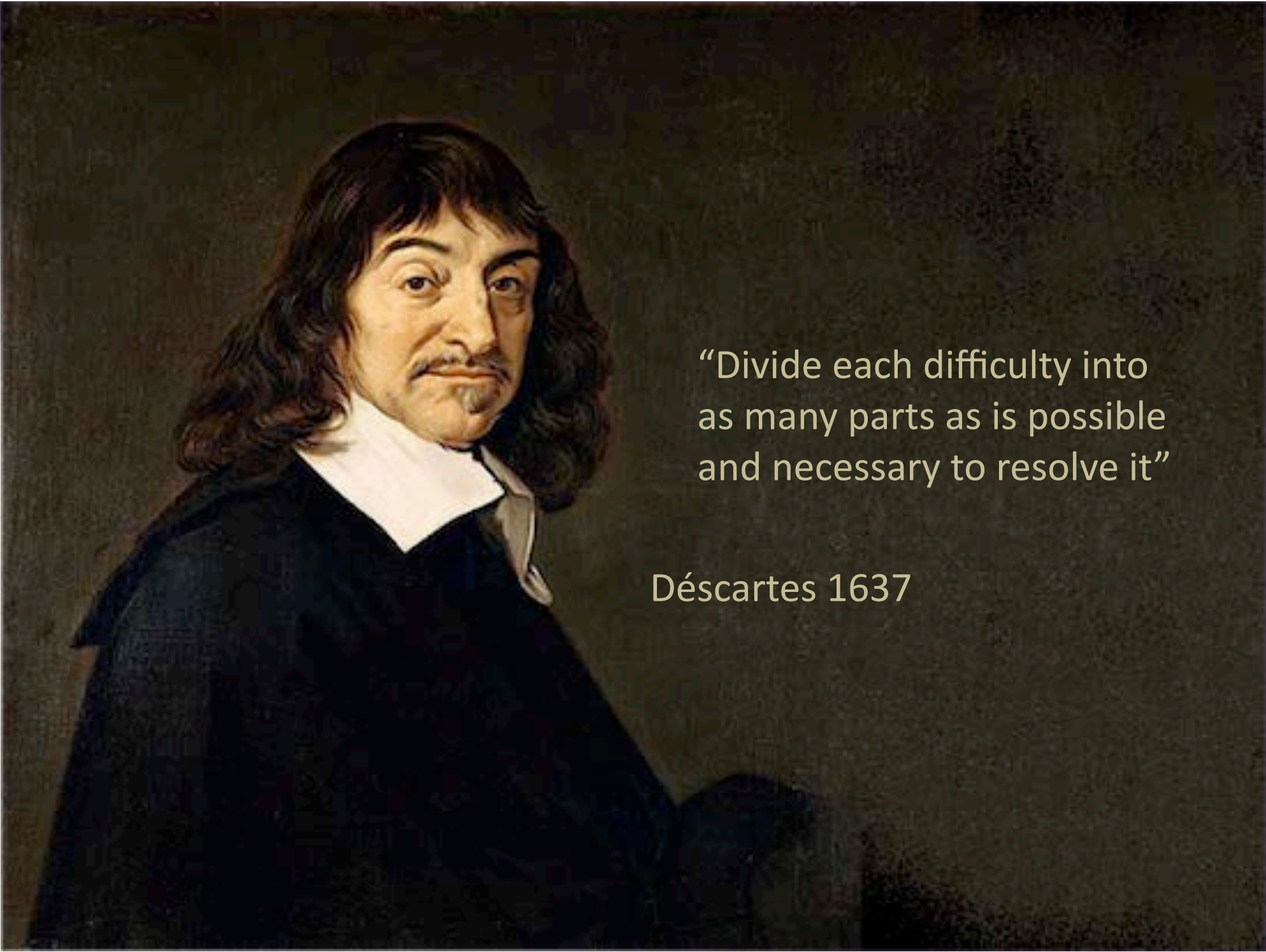
# How to really solve global problems?

Let's try new thinking, to make systemic changes such as circular economy.

We've put in so much effort for so long to get to where we are now.  
Let's keep going.



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A portrait of René Descartes, a French philosopher, mathematician, and scientist. He is depicted from the chest up, wearing a dark, high-collared garment. He has long, dark, wavy hair and a small, neatly trimmed mustache. The background is a dark, textured grey.

“Divide each difficulty into  
as many parts as is possible  
and necessary to resolve it”

Déscartes 1637

# Reductionism has been triumphantly successful

“Here be dragons”  
(warning on uncharted  
areas of ancient maps)

Underpins modern society  
Makes complexity manageable  
Allows problems to be ignored  
Enables systematic problem-solving  
As problems worsen, we need it  
even more to stay hopeful and  
avoid feeling overwhelmed



What lies beyond reductionism?

Unknown

Unmanageable

Unrealistic



photo credit flickr.com Jeremy Brooks



# How do we see the world?



This is how we solve big problems



The missing method

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“

...all the threads are interwoven  
everything leads to something else...

”

First lady 'Lady Bird' Johnson 1970



<- restorative

<- zero impacts

## Map of 3 ways to manage complexity

scale of ambition



<- 2: lemming in action



<-1: lemming in denial

scale of system 23

A reducible world looks and feels more manageable

I choose how much complexity to embrace.  
Every small change adds up.  
We celebrate any improvement in anything.  
We manage things with systematic plans.



An irreducible world only feels unmanageable

- One meta-problem in one complex system
- Smallest viable unit of change is the paradigm (eg the choice between linear and circular economy)
- Restorative goals
- Can manage as a whole system



# 2 bucket system model of global problems

Bucket of problems  
(lost ecosystems, carbon concentrations, accumulated pollution, conflict, debt, failed states, corruption, exploitation, herd thinking, stranded assets...)

Everyone

Bucket of resources (ecosystems, wealth, cooperation, creativity, climate stability, trust, democratic participation, financial stability...)

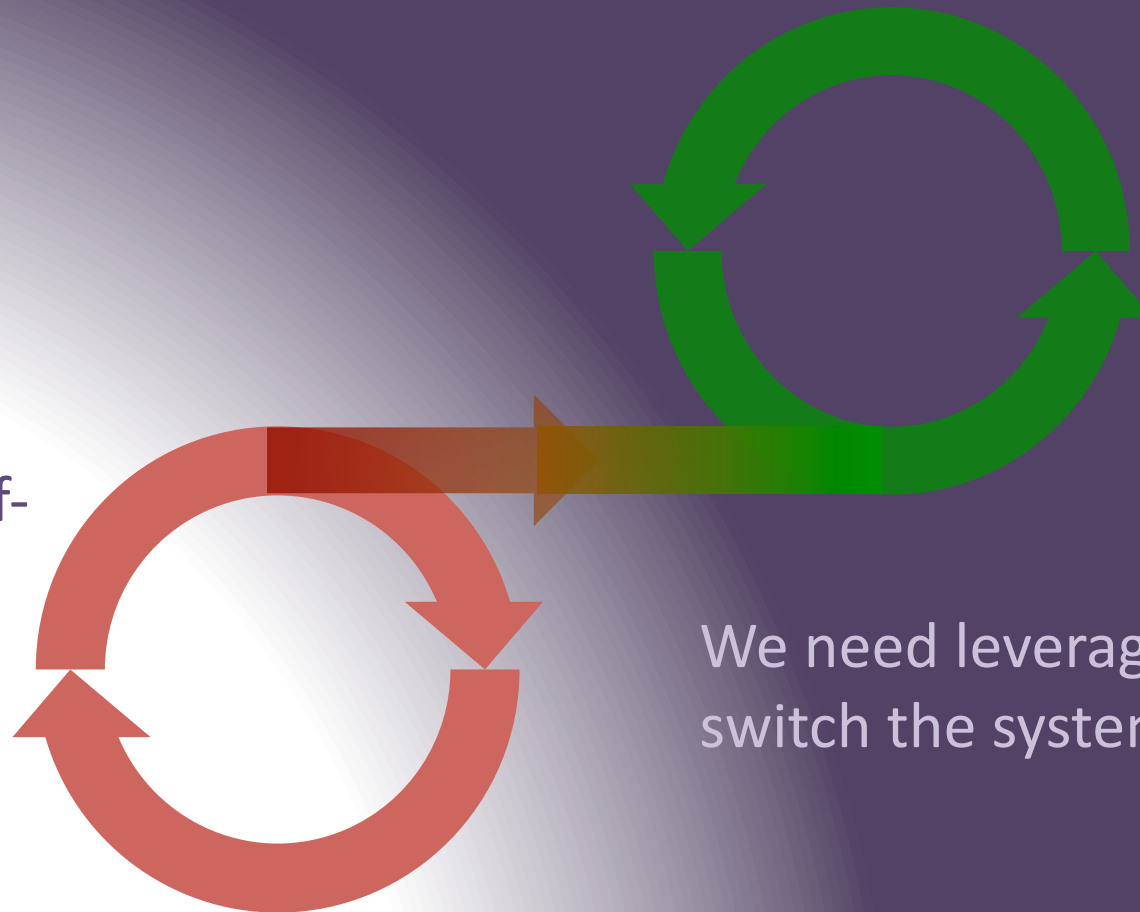
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Self-reinforcing problems are wicked  
But solutions could also self-organise

a future  
restorative  
system  
would be  
self-  
organising  
...and self-  
reinforcing

today's  
destructive  
system is self-  
organising  
...and self-  
reinforcing



We need leverage to  
switch the system



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# Leverage

New policy -> new incentives and mindsets ->  
new patterns of connectedness -> new system ->  
new outcomes

Photo credit [flickr.com/photos/mattkieffer](https://www.flickr.com/photos/mattkieffer)  
Reference: [blindspot.org.uk/about/#papers](https://blindspot.org.uk/about/#papers)





# Lever 1

**How ambitious?**

**Default: reduce a problem**

**New: reverse all problems**

Image courtesy of shutterstock.com

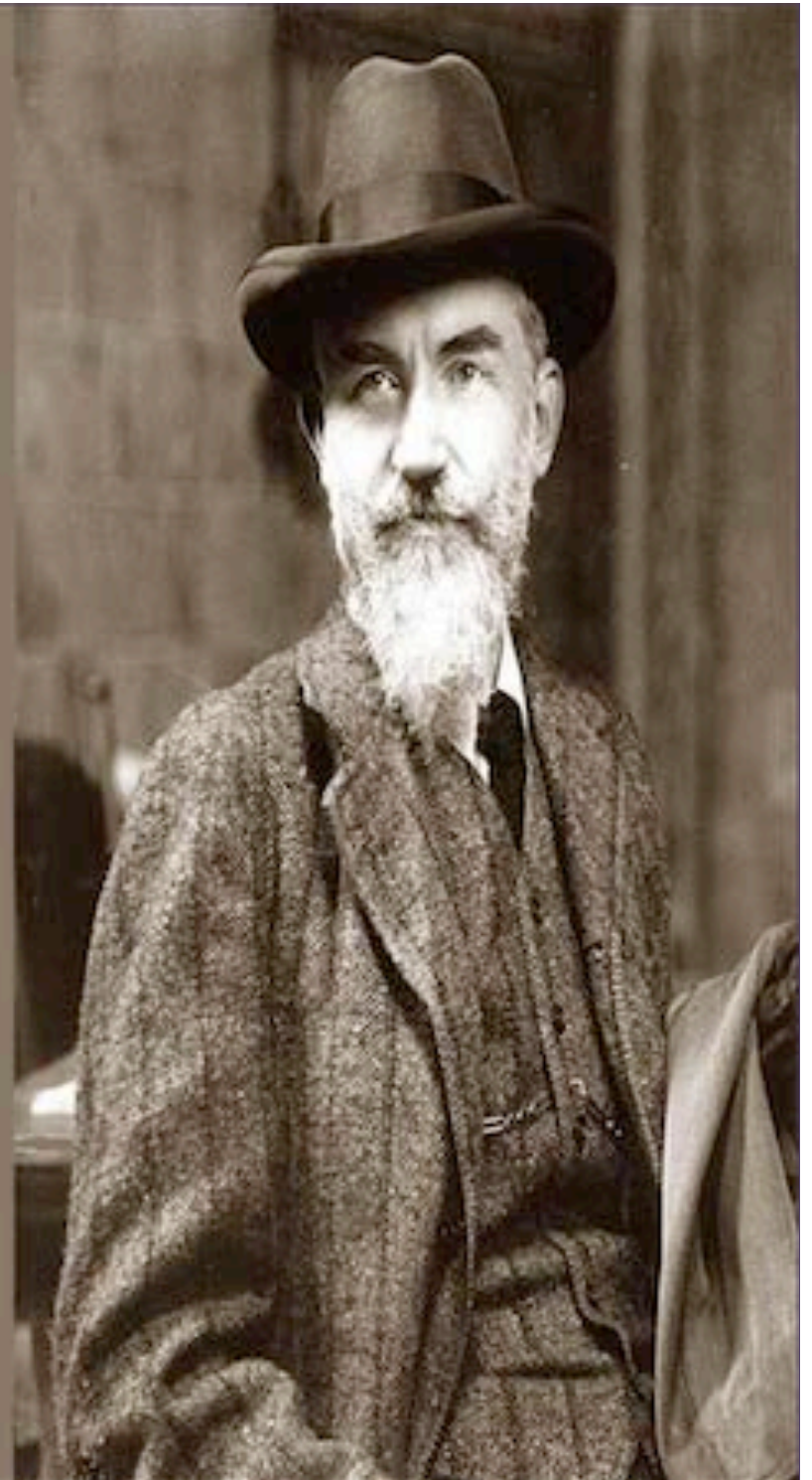
“

What we want to see is the child  
in pursuit of the knowledge not the  
knowledge in pursuit of the child

”

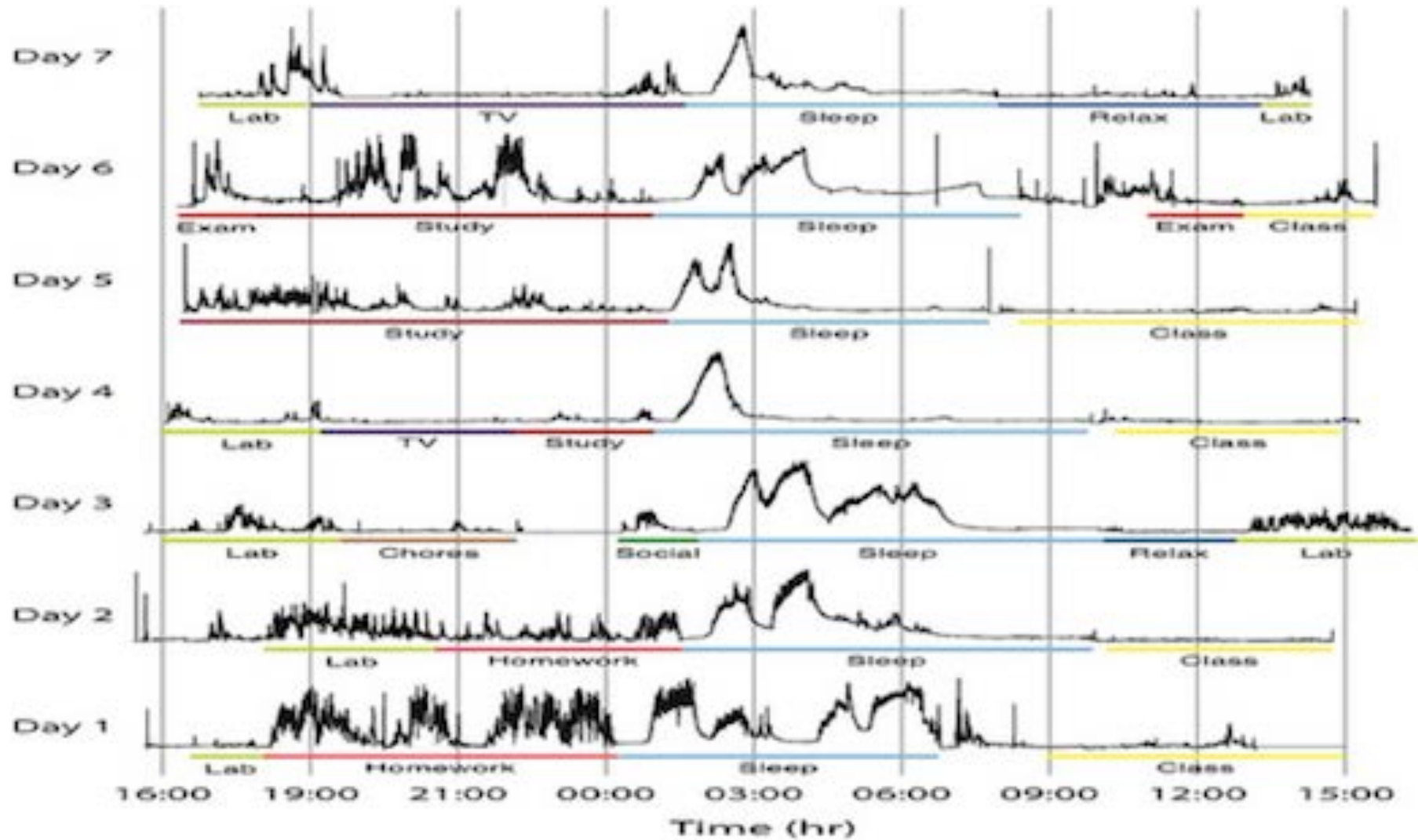
George Bernard Shaw

# Lever 2





# Classes cause the least brain activity in a student's week



# Lever 3

How to handle resources?

Default: linear

New: circular



**How to seek security?**

**Default: prepare for conflict**

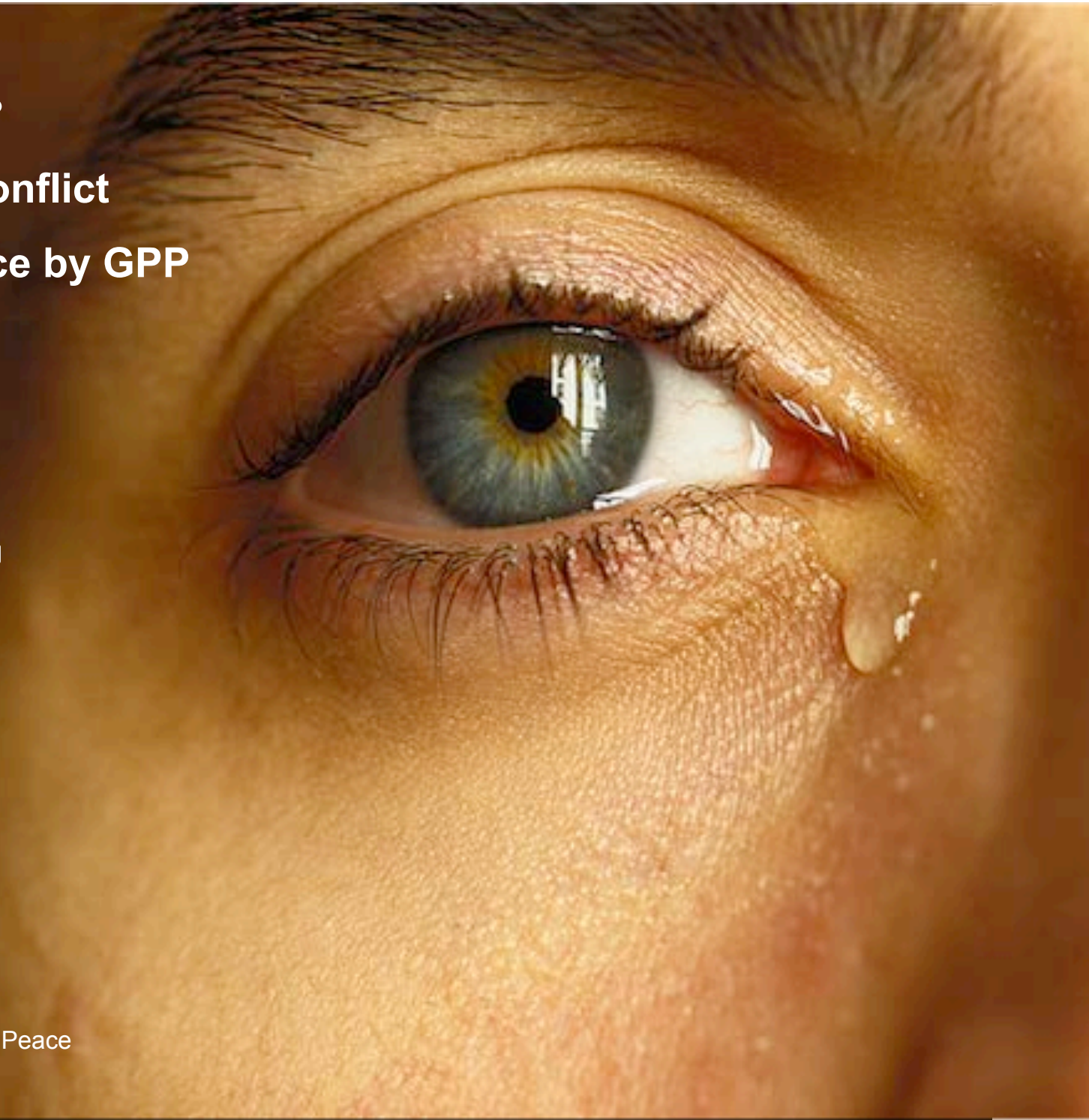
**New: reverse arms race by GPP**

**global security goal**

# Lever 4

Photo credit: flickr.com Remi\_P.

Reference: Institute for Economics and Peace





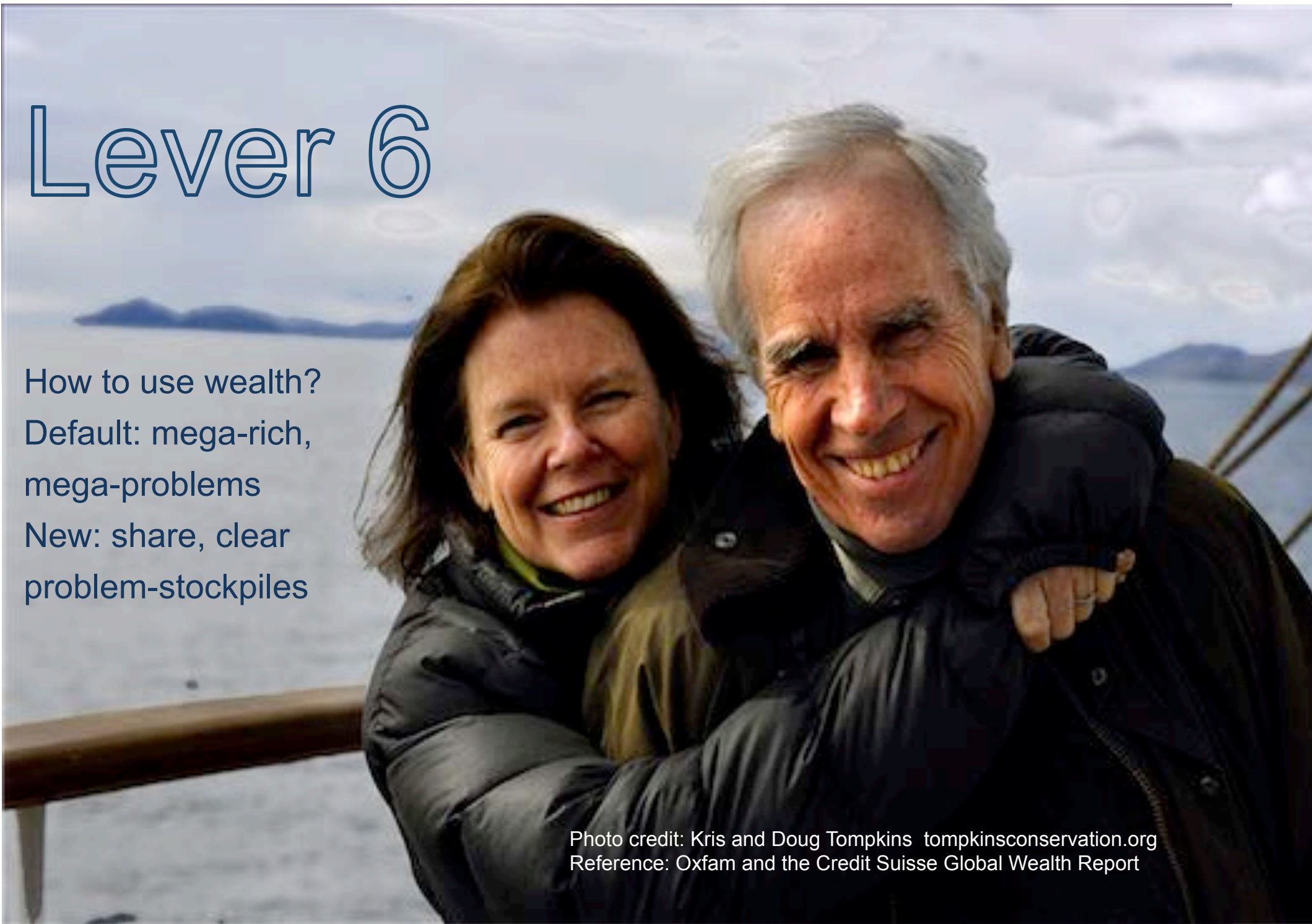
# Lever 6

How to use wealth?

Default: mega-rich,  
mega-problems

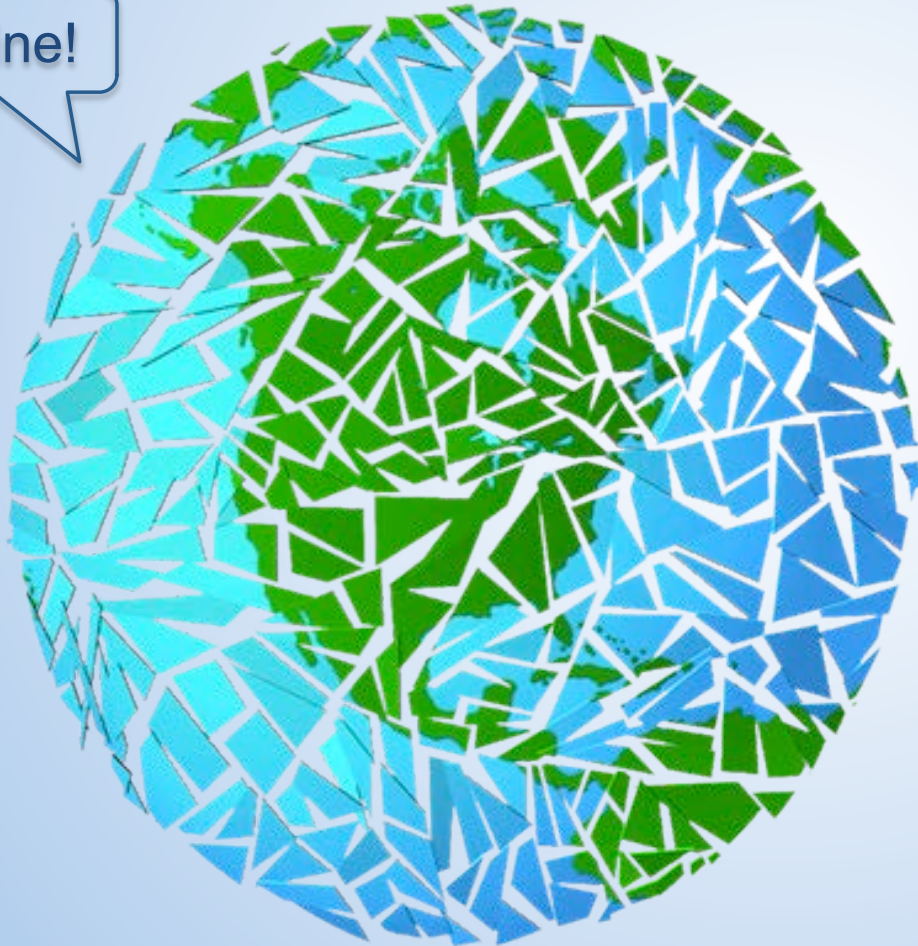
New: share, clear  
problem-stockpiles

Photo credit: Kris and Doug Tompkins [tompkinsconservation.org](http://tompkinsconservation.org)  
Reference: Oxfam and the Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report



# Lever 5

It's mine!



How to get on with nature?

Default: the Earth belongs to us

New: we belong to the Earth

image courtesy of shutterstock.com

# Lever 7

How to create money?

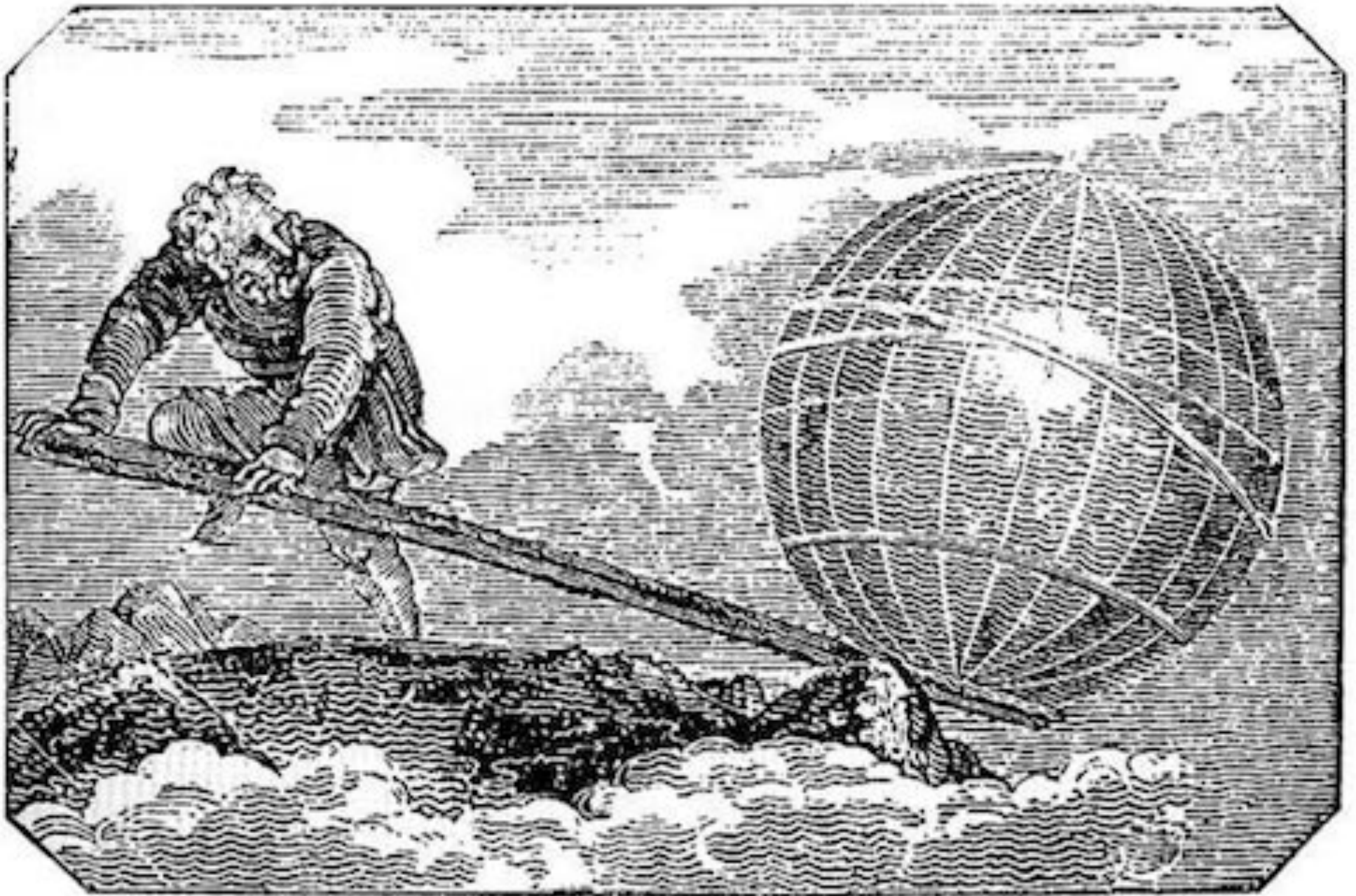
Default: create money as debt

New: create money publicly,  
end austerity & poverty

Image courtesy of shutterstock.com  
Reference: [positivemoney.org](http://positivemoney.org)



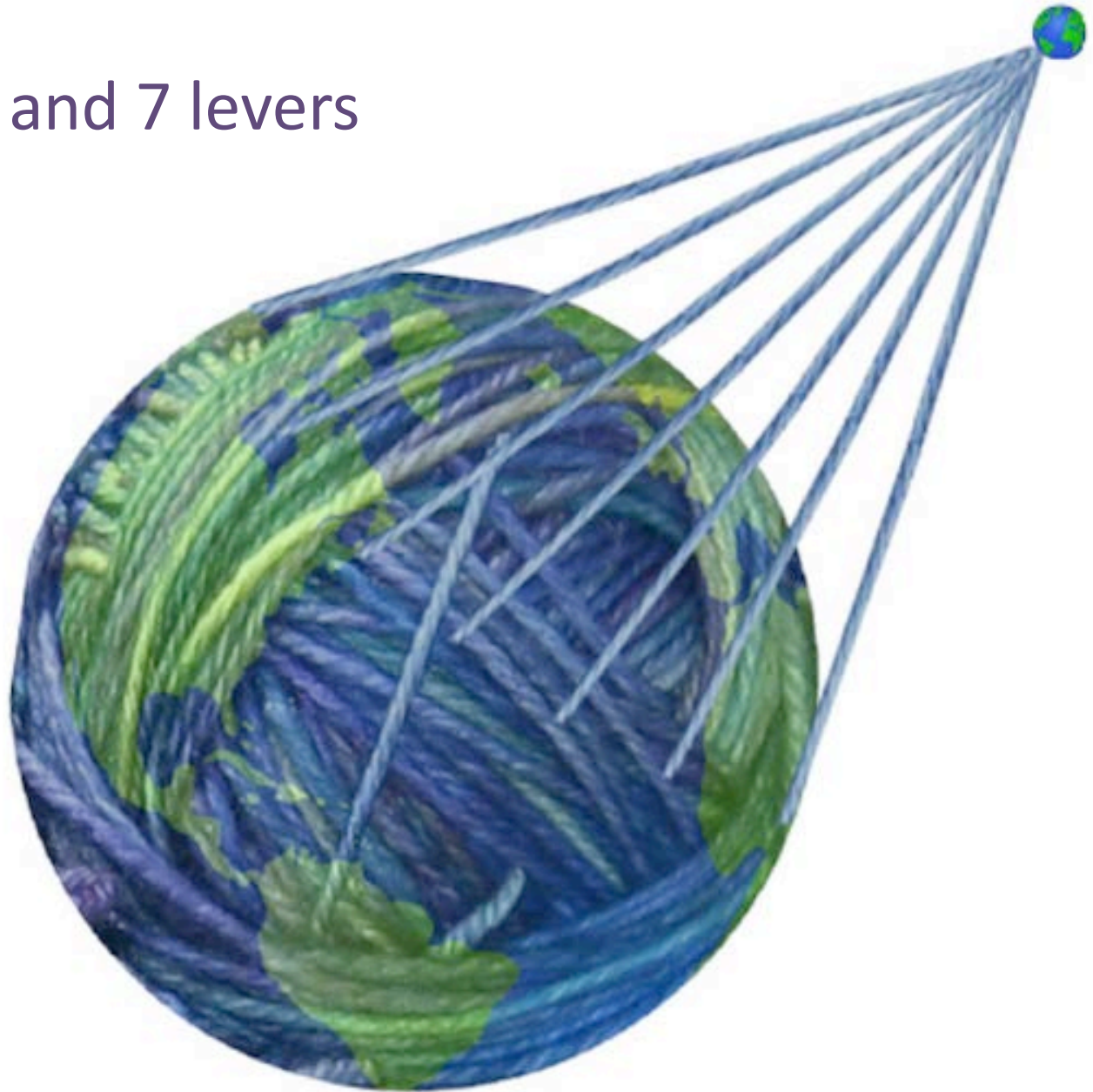




# A place to stand and 7 levers

The planet levers connect deeply with global complexity and to each other, like levers in a lock.

Unlocking one piece requires unlocking the whole.





Today every  
planet lever is  
set in the  
wrong position

...so global  
problems are  
set to worsen.



If all planet  
levers are  
shifted in time

...we could still  
unlock a  
secure future  
for everyone

Image courtesy of shutterstock.com

# Seven Policy Switches for Global Security

Published by NATO Science Programme/Springer

1. From incremental to restorative whole-system goals
2. From prescribed to curiosity-led learning
3. From growth via linear economics to circular economics
4. From preparing for conflict to prevention of conflict via GPP
5. From exploitive ownership to instituted guardianship
6. From rampant inequality to mega-philanthropy
7. From bank-created to public-created money supply

My blog with links to each policy switch: <http://blindspot.org.uk/seven-policy-switches>

TEDx: <http://tedxbradford.com/events/curiosity-and-progress/james-greyson/>

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