UNIVERSITY OF SURREY

CUSP
elaborating visions
exploring possibilities

The Care Economy

Tim Jackson

The Goetheanum
Dornach
5th October 2026

UKRI Economic and Social Research Council

UNIVERSITY OF SURREY

CUSP
elaborating visions
exploring possibilities

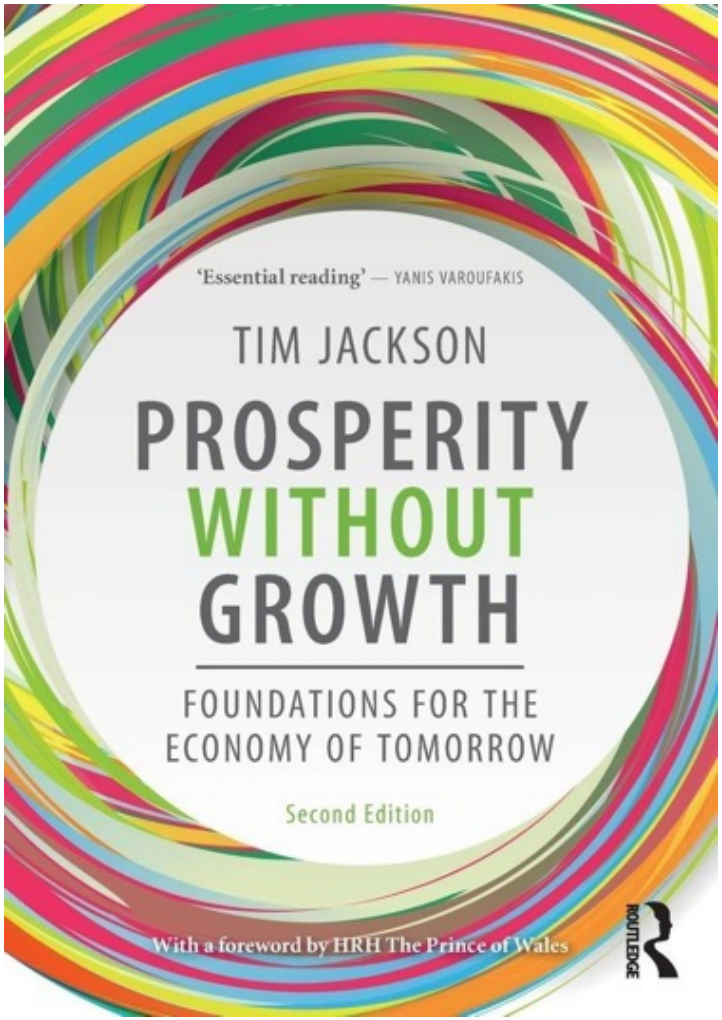
‘Never looked for, always there.
Cursed and flattered, I am Care.
Have I never crossed your path?’

Goethe 1832

UKRI Economic and Social Research Council

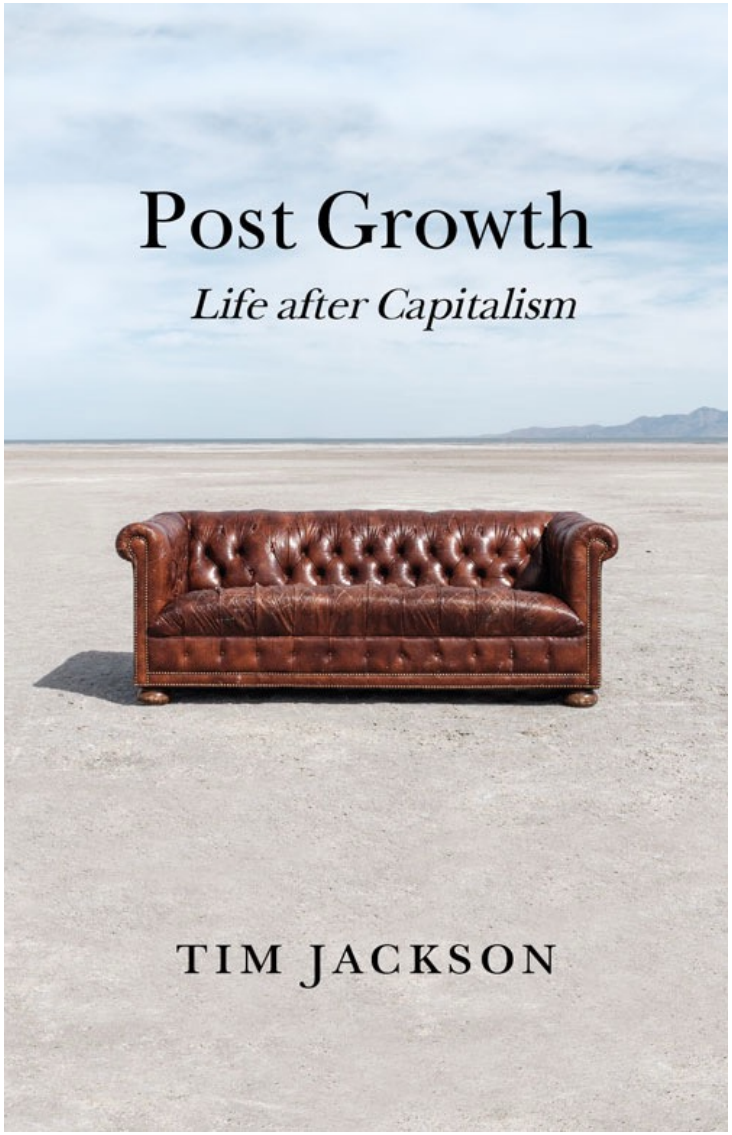
What is Prosperity?

- What can prosperity possibly look like on a finite planet?
- Can we ‘decouple’ economic growth from ecological impact?
- What does an economy that works for people and planet look like?



What is Prosperity?

- What can prosperity possibly look like on a finite planet?
- Can we ‘decouple’ economic growth from ecological impact?
- What does an economy that works for people and planet look like?



What is Prosperity?

- What can prosperity possibly look like on a finite planet?
- Can we ‘decouple’ economic growth from ecological impact?
- What does an economy that works for people and planet look like?

Prosperity as health

‘The first wealth is health.’

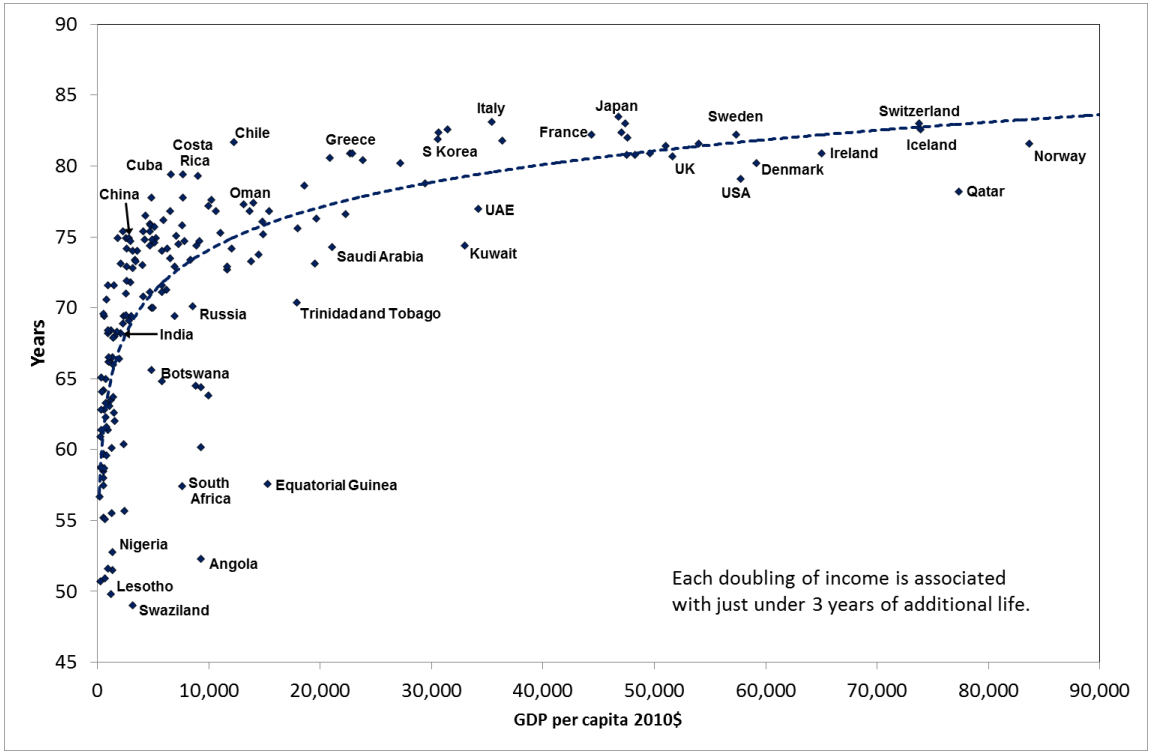
Ralph Waldo Emerson

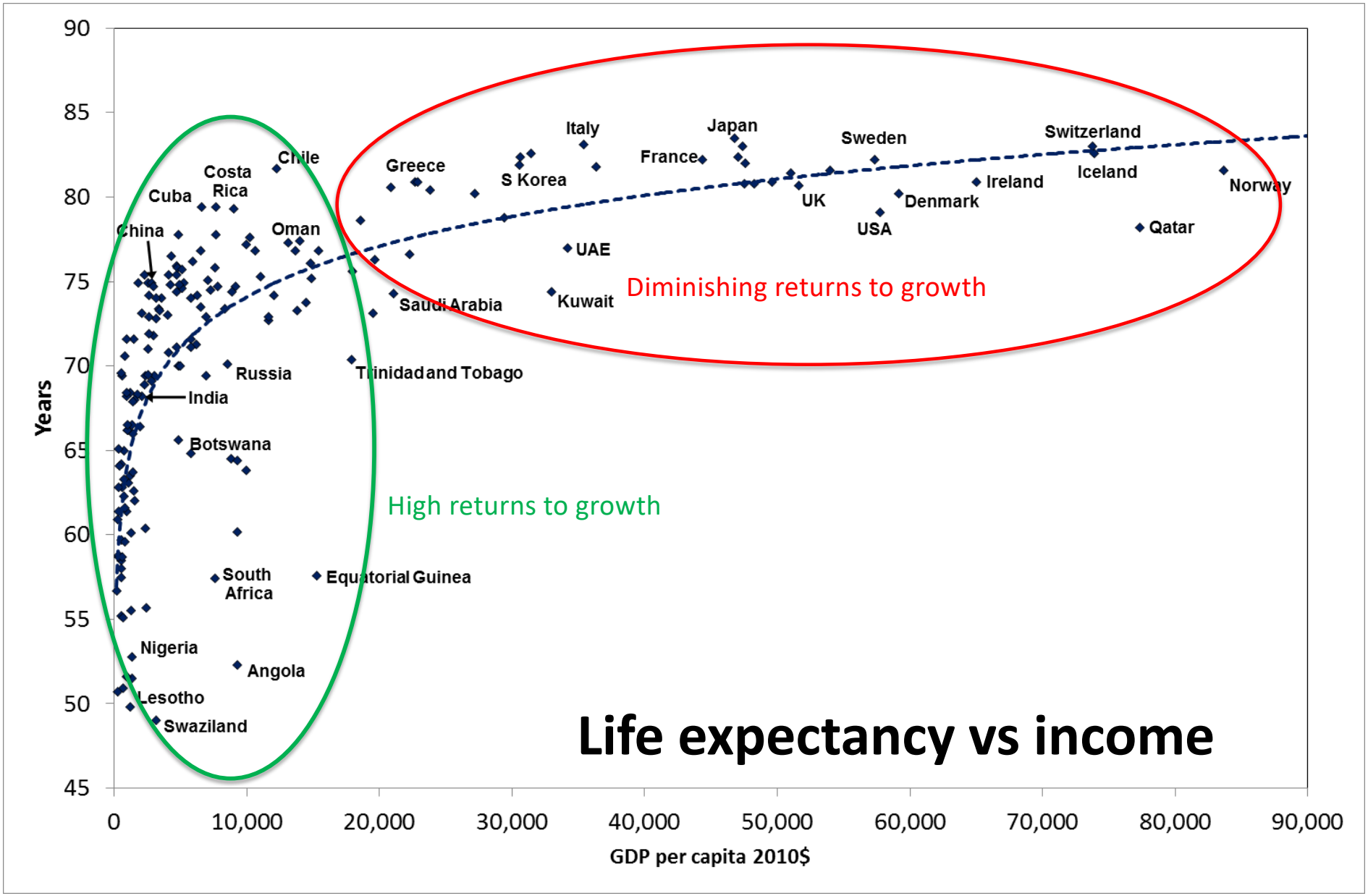
‘There is no wealth but life.’

John Ruskin

‘I went looking for wealth and found it was my health.’

Rumi

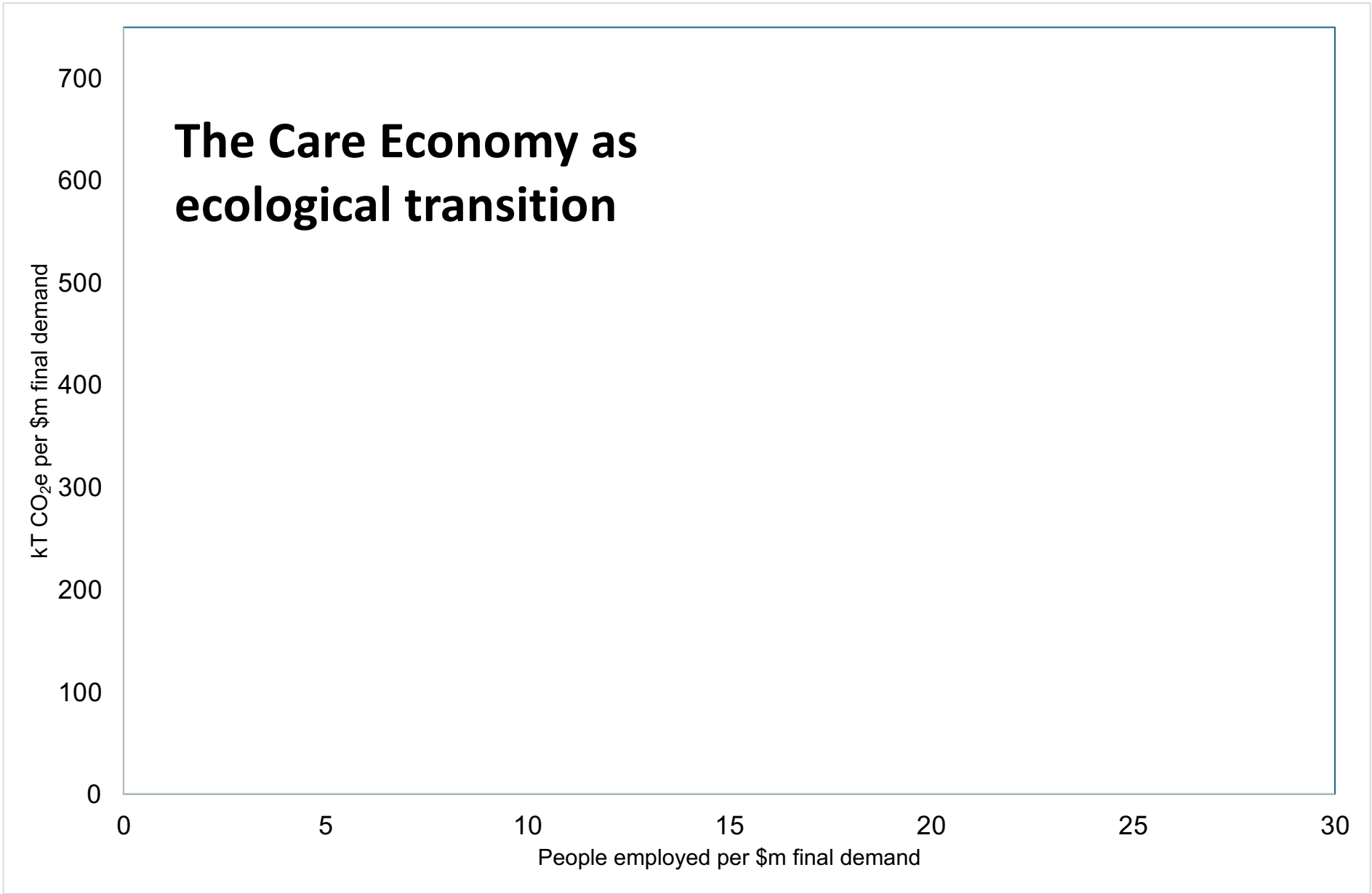


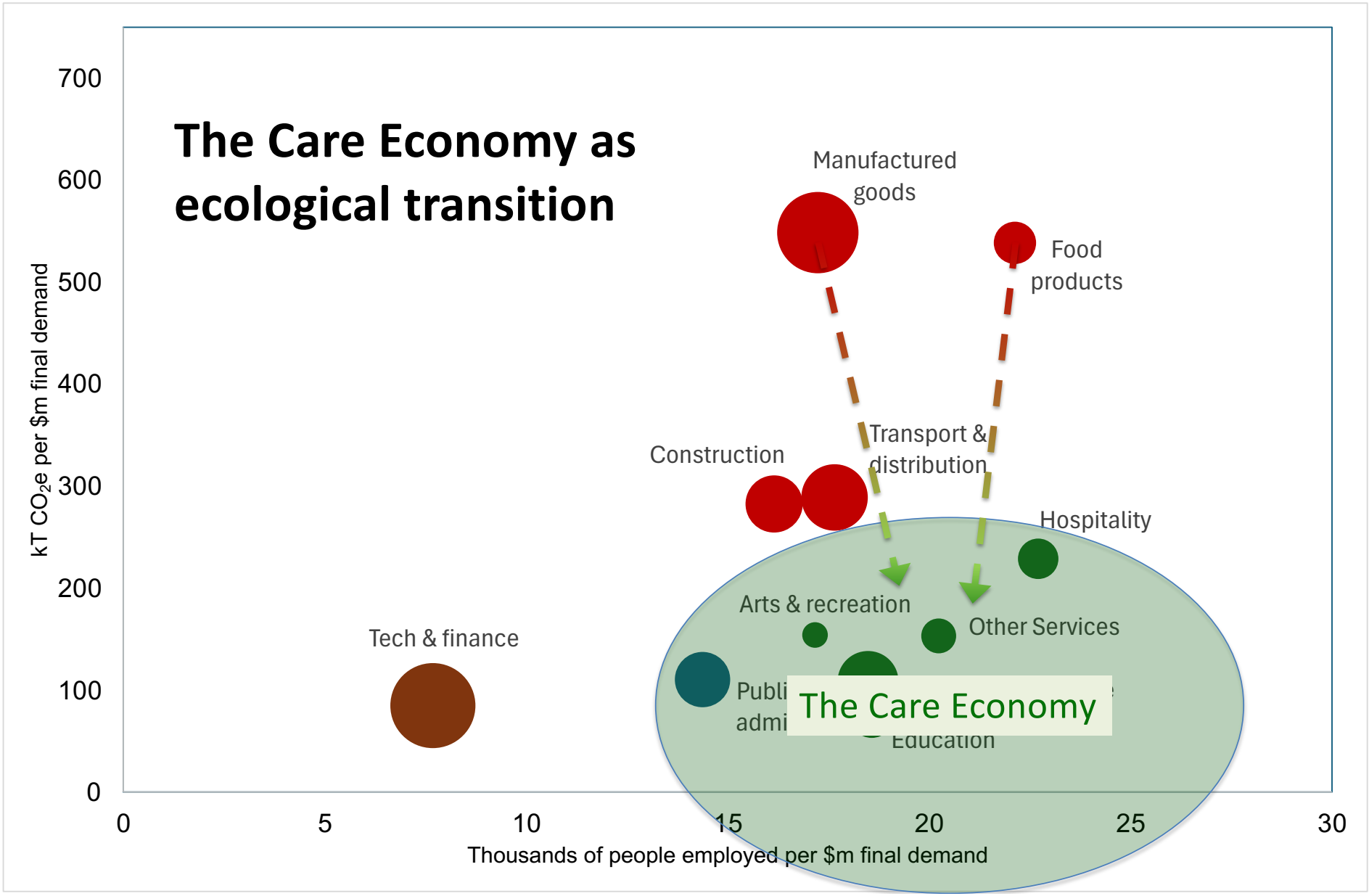

Life expectancy vs income
Years
GDP per capita 2010$
90
85
80
75
70
65
60
55
50
45
0
10,000
20,000
30,000
40,000
50,000
60,000
70,000
80,000
90,000
Chile
Costa Rica
Cuba
China
Oman
Russia
India
Botswana
South Africa
Equatorial Guinea
Nigeria
Angola
Lesotho
Swaziland
Greece
S Korea
Italy
France
Japan
Sweden
Switzerland
Iceland
Norway
Ireland
UK
Denmark
USA
Qatar
UAE
Kuwait
Saudi Arabia
Trinidad and Tobago
High returns to growth
Diminishing returns to growth

Economy as Care

Care as: ‘an activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue and repair our “world” so that we can live in it as well as possible’.

Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto 1990

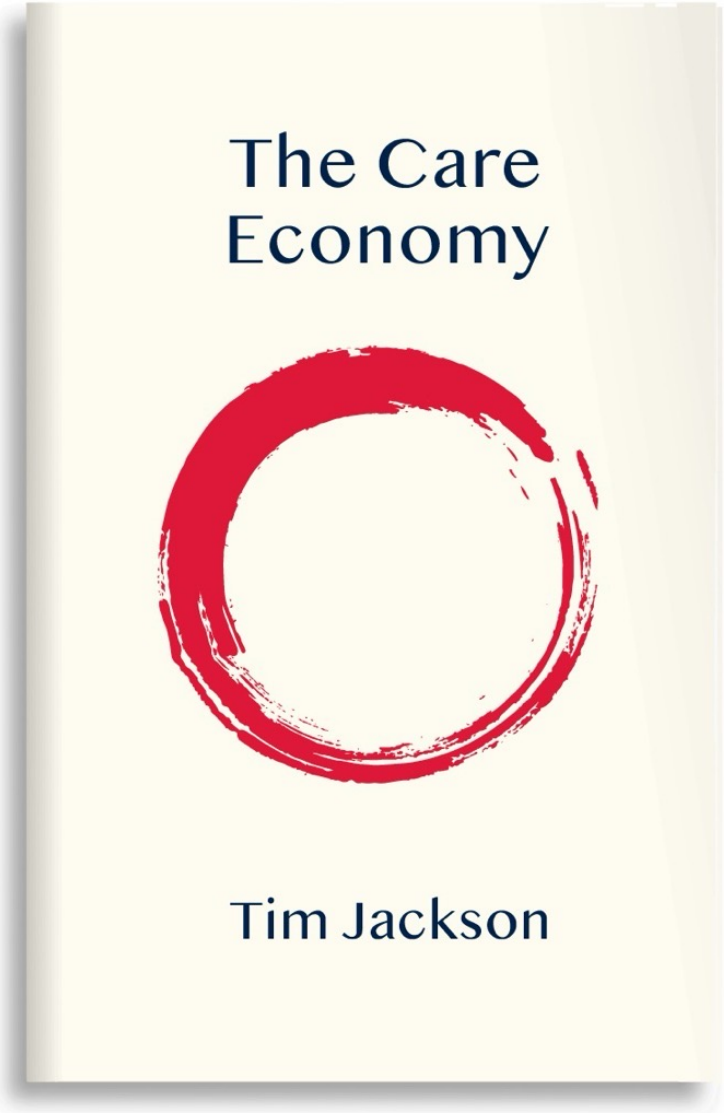

The Care Economy as ecological transition
700
600
500
400
300
200
100
0
kT CO_2e per $m final demand
0
5
10
15
20
25
30
People employed per $m final demand


The Care Economy as ecological transition
Manufactured goods
Food products
Transport & distribution
Construction
Hospitality
Arts & recreation
Other Services
Tech & finance
Publi
admi
Education
The Care Economy
kT CO_2e per $m final demand
Thousands of people employed per $m final demand
0
100
200
300
400
500
600
700
0
5
10
15
20
25
30

The Care Economy

- Prosperity as health
- Economy as care

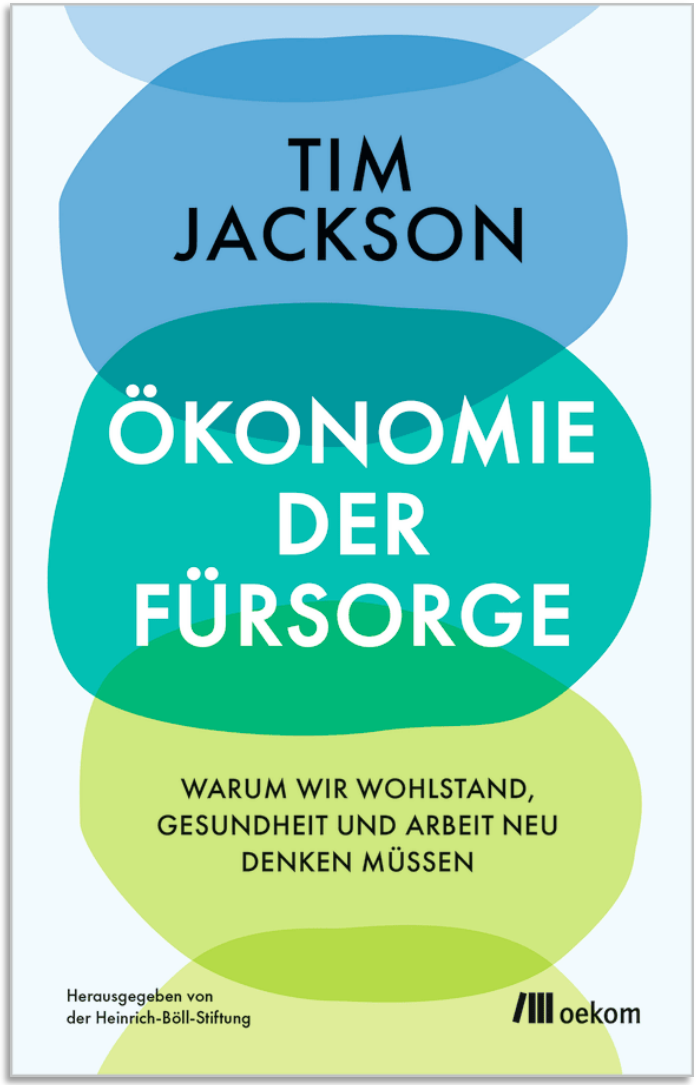
- The care economy as ecological transition



The Care Economy

- Prosperity as health
- Economy as care

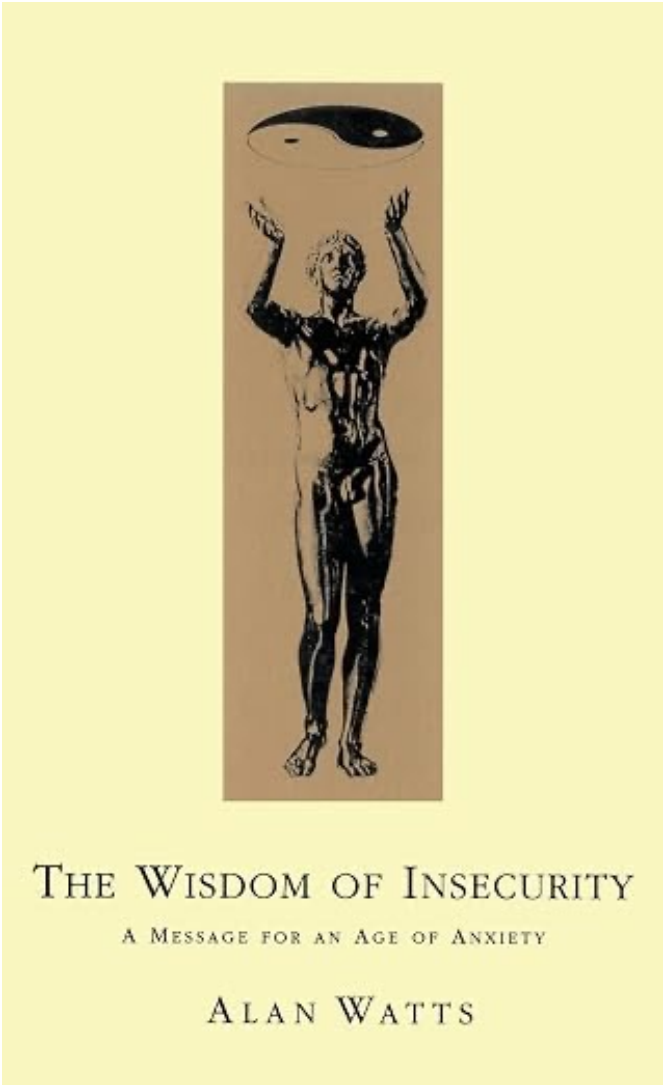
- The care economy as ecological transition



What shall we do about it?

‘The question “What shall we do about it?” is only ever asked when we don’t understand the problem. If a problem can be solved at all, then to understand it and to know what to do about it are the same thing.’

Alan Watts 1951



The Myth of Care

(Gaius Julius Hyginus ~100CE)

‘Never looked for, always there.
Cursed and flattered, I am Care.
Have I never crossed your path?’

Goethe 1832

The Goddess Care (Cura)

The Gods of Health

- Asclepius (father): ancient Greek god of medicine and healing;
- Hygiea (daughter): ancient Greek god of health, cleanliness and sanitation.

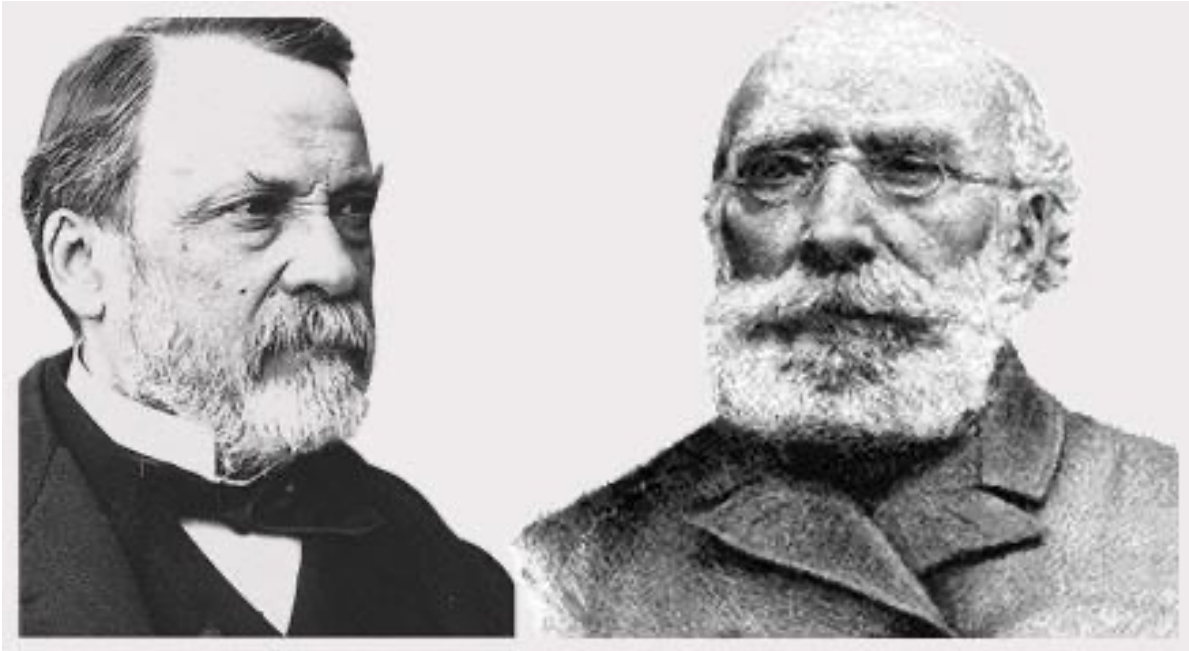
Asclepius

Hygeia

Pathogenesis

- Germ theory: germs cause disease (Louis Pasteur); kill the germ: remove the disease

- Terrain theory: disease occurs when the terrain (the internal environment) is weakened (Antoine Béchamp).

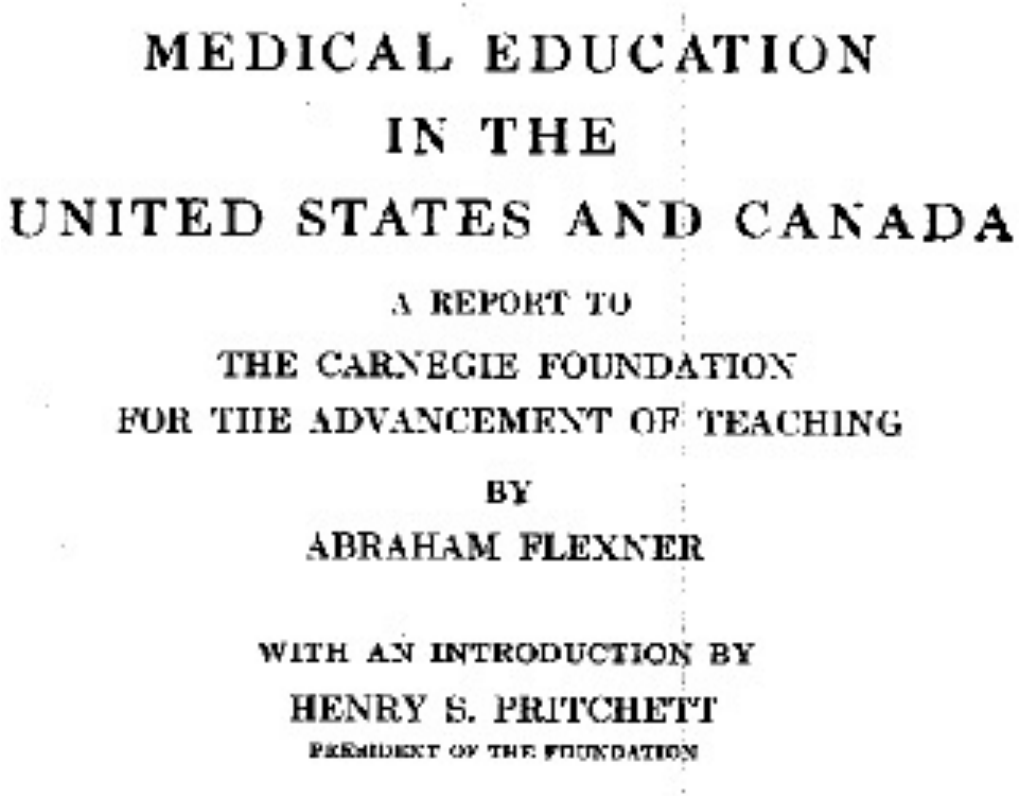


Louis Pasteur (1822-1895)

Antoine Béchamp (1816-1908)

The Flexner Report (1910)

- Extolled scientific [lab-based] rigour;
- Professionalised modern medicine;
- Outlawed naturopathy;
- Funded by Carnegie and Rockefeller.



MEDICAL EDUCATION
IN THE
UNITED STATES AND CANADA

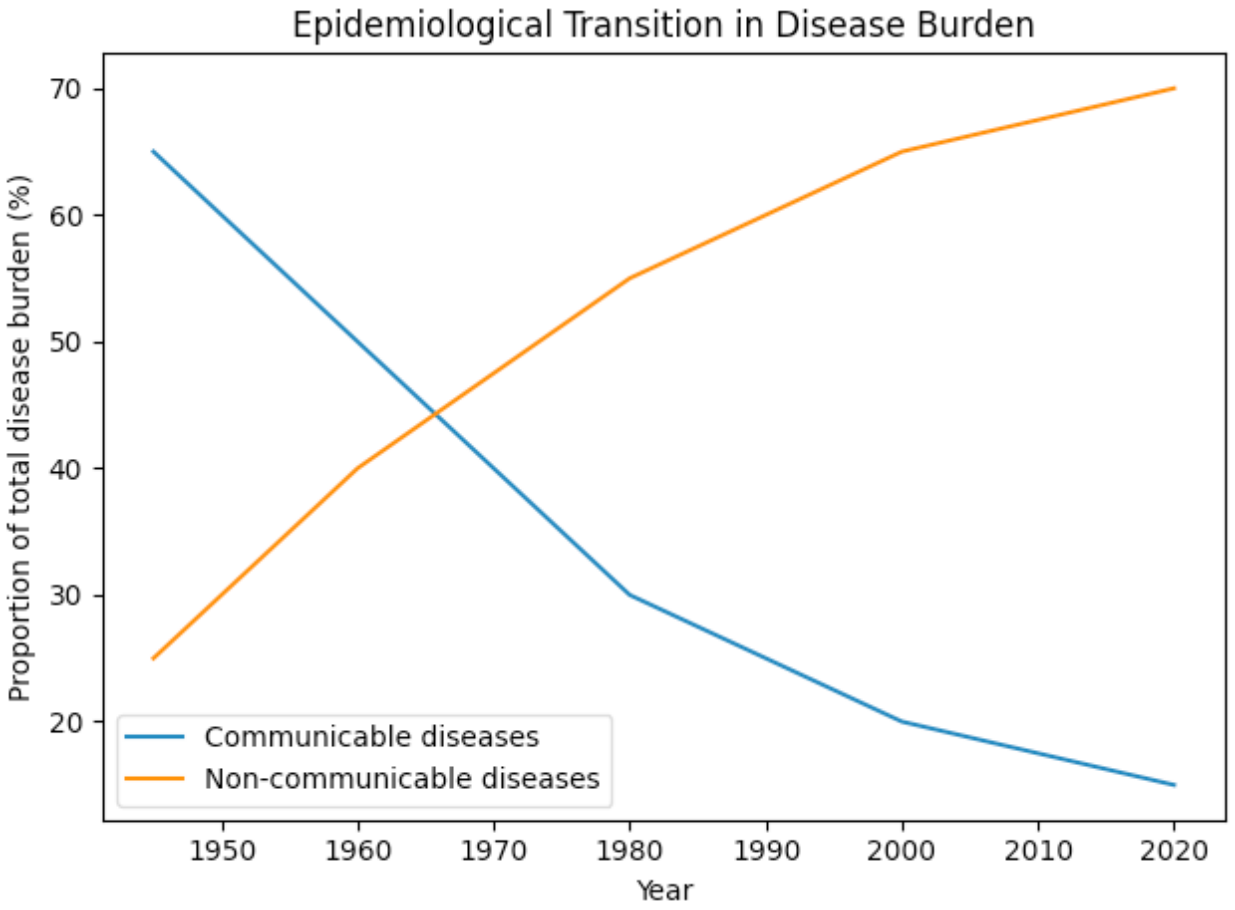
A REPORT TO
THE CARNEGIE FOUNDATION
FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF TEACHING

BY
ABRAHAM FLEXNER

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
HENRY S. PRITCHETT
PRESIDENT OF THE FOUNDATION

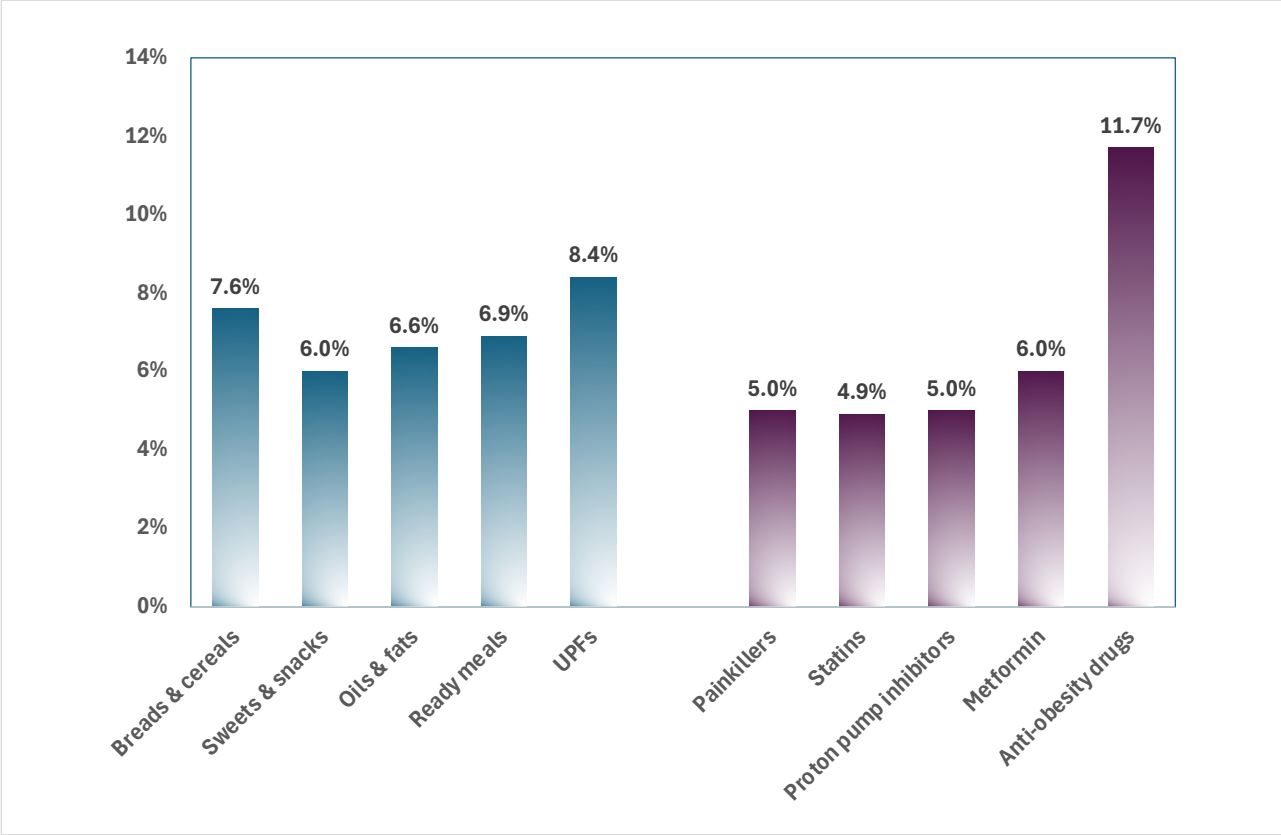
Epidemiological Transition

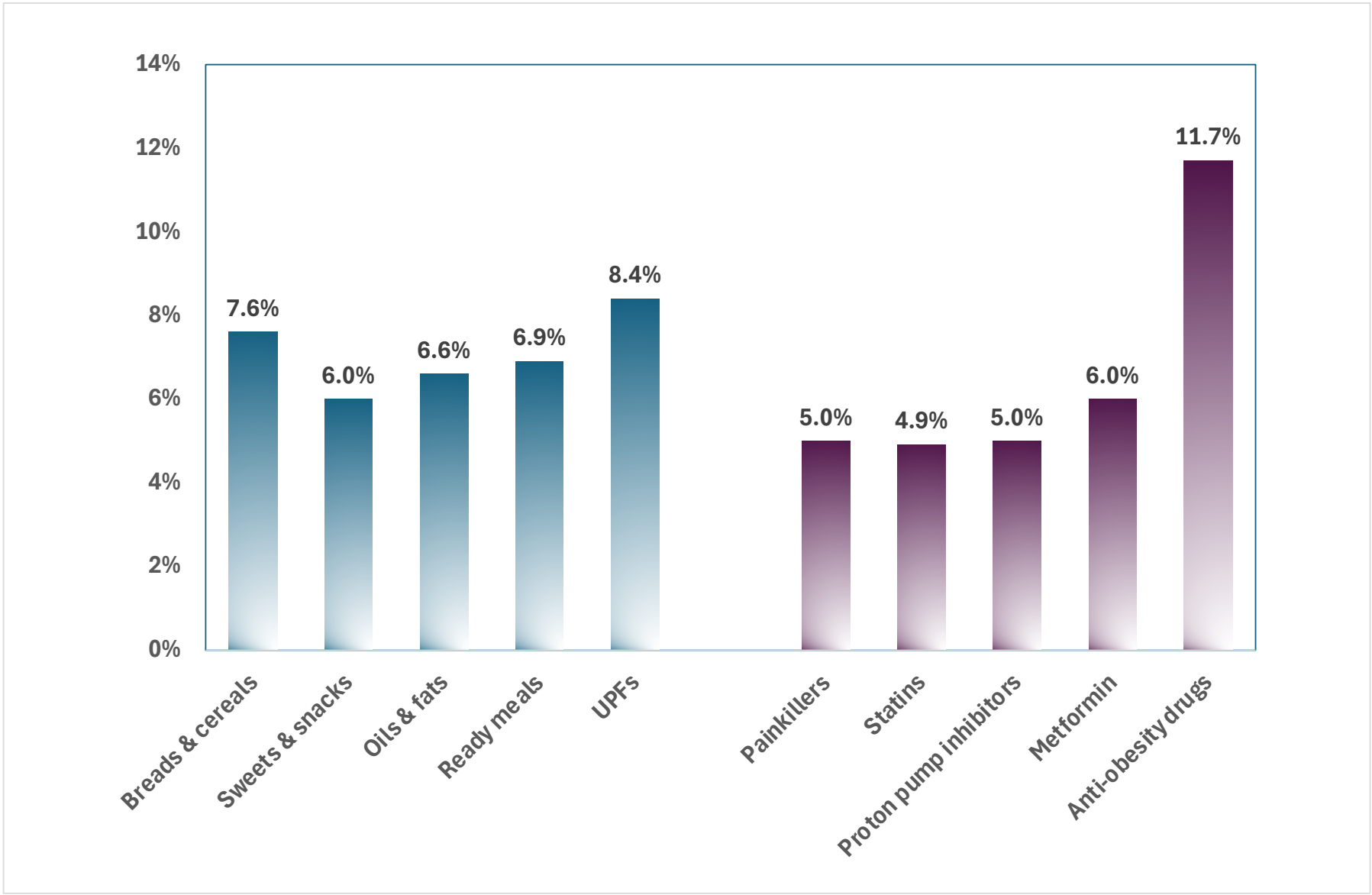
- A decline in infectious diseases (causes disputed);
- A rise in non-communicable diseases (causes at least partly clear);



The Careless Economy

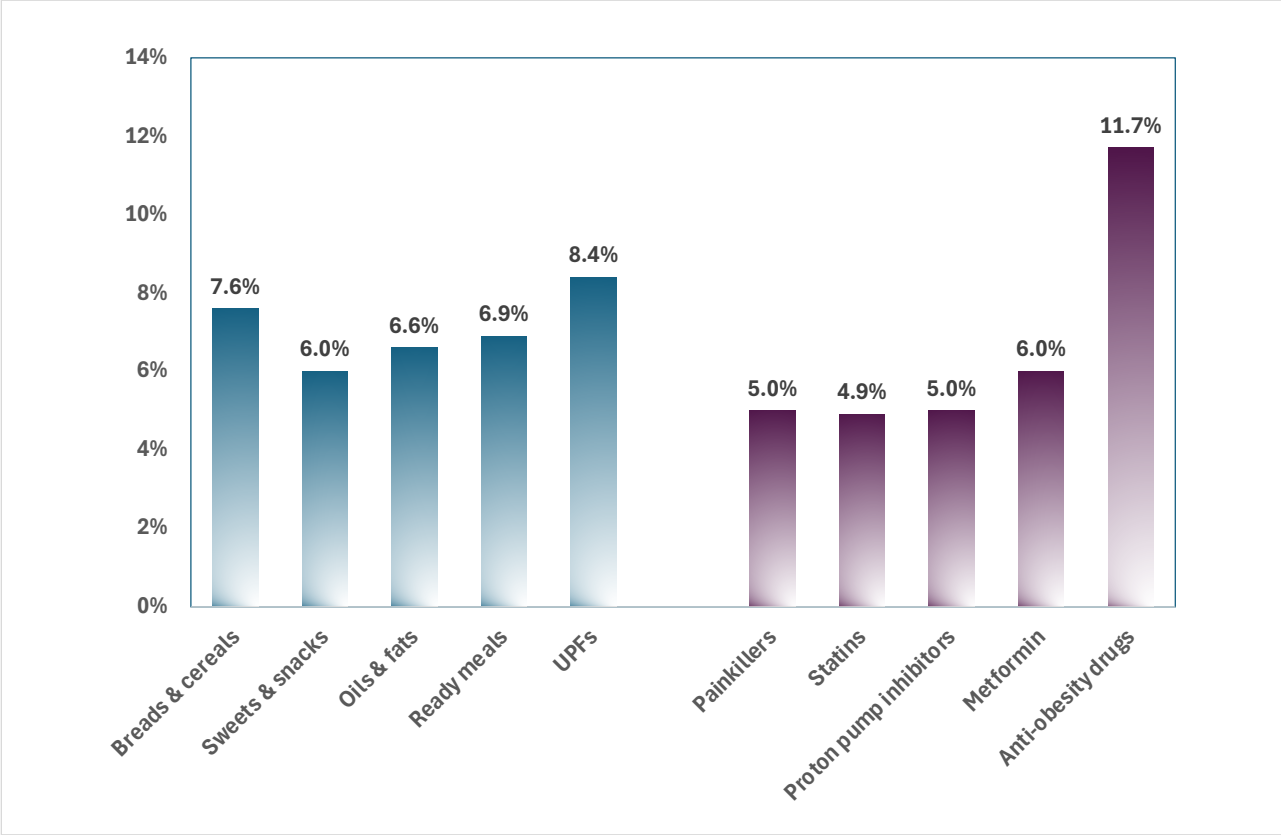
- The lure of growth




14%
12%
10%
8%
6%
4%
2%
0%
7.6%
6.0%
6.6%
6.9%
8.4%
5.0%
4.9%
5.0%
6.0%
11.7%
Breads & cereals
Sweets & snacks
Oils & fats
Ready meals
UPFs
Painkillers
Statins
Proton pump inhibitors
Metformin
Anti-obesity drugs

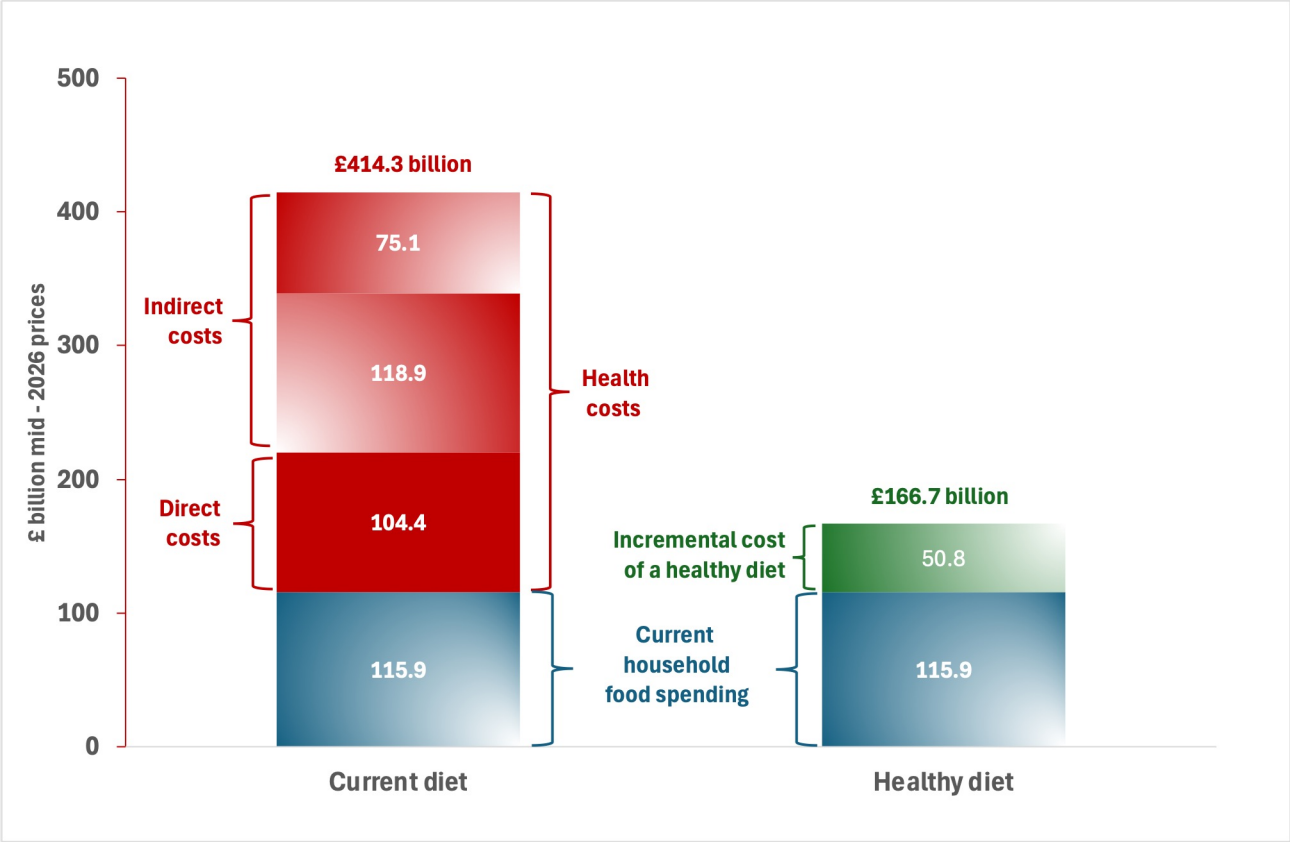
The Careless Economy

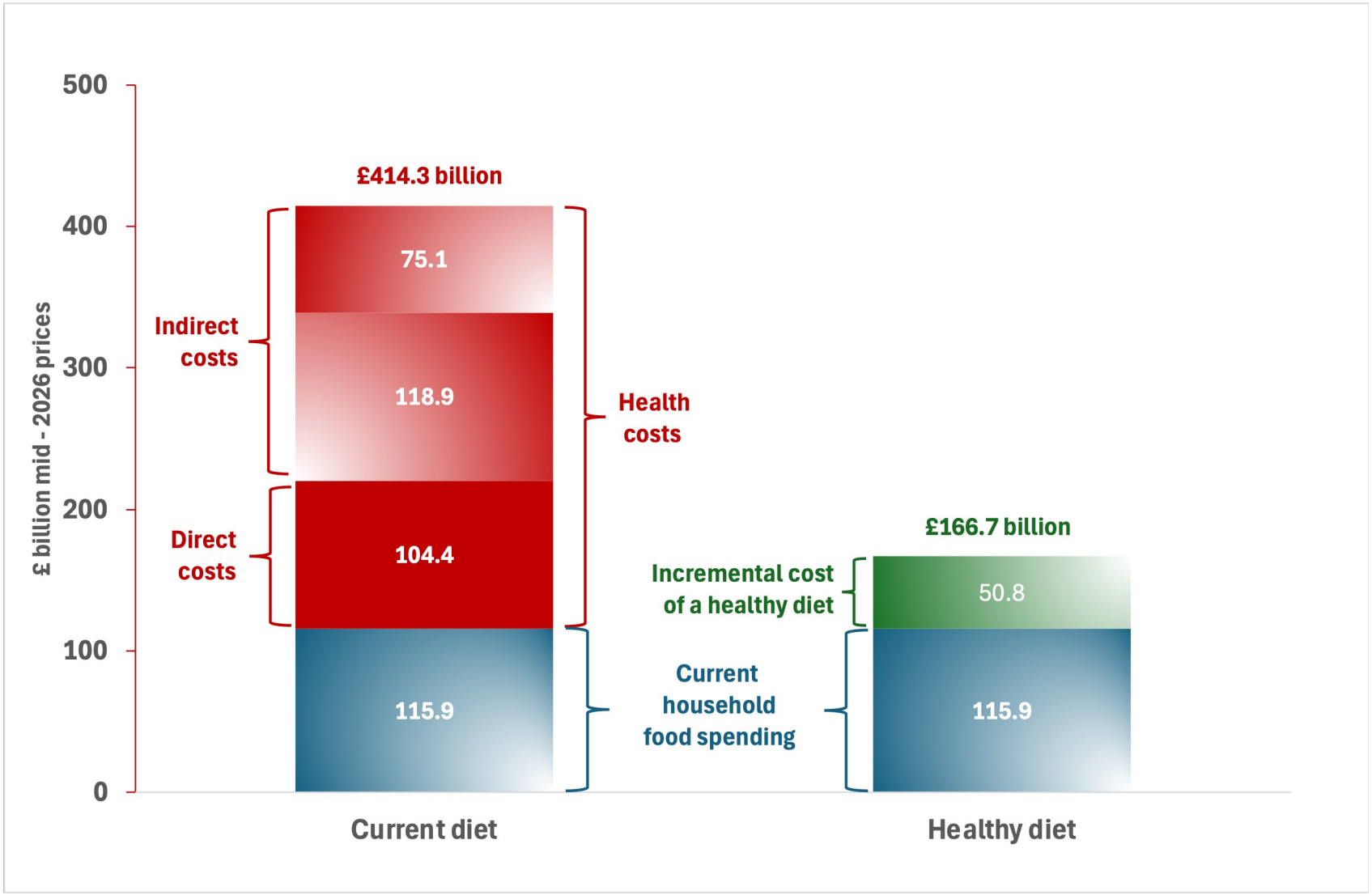
- The lure of growth



The Careless Economy

- The lure of growth
- The hidden costs

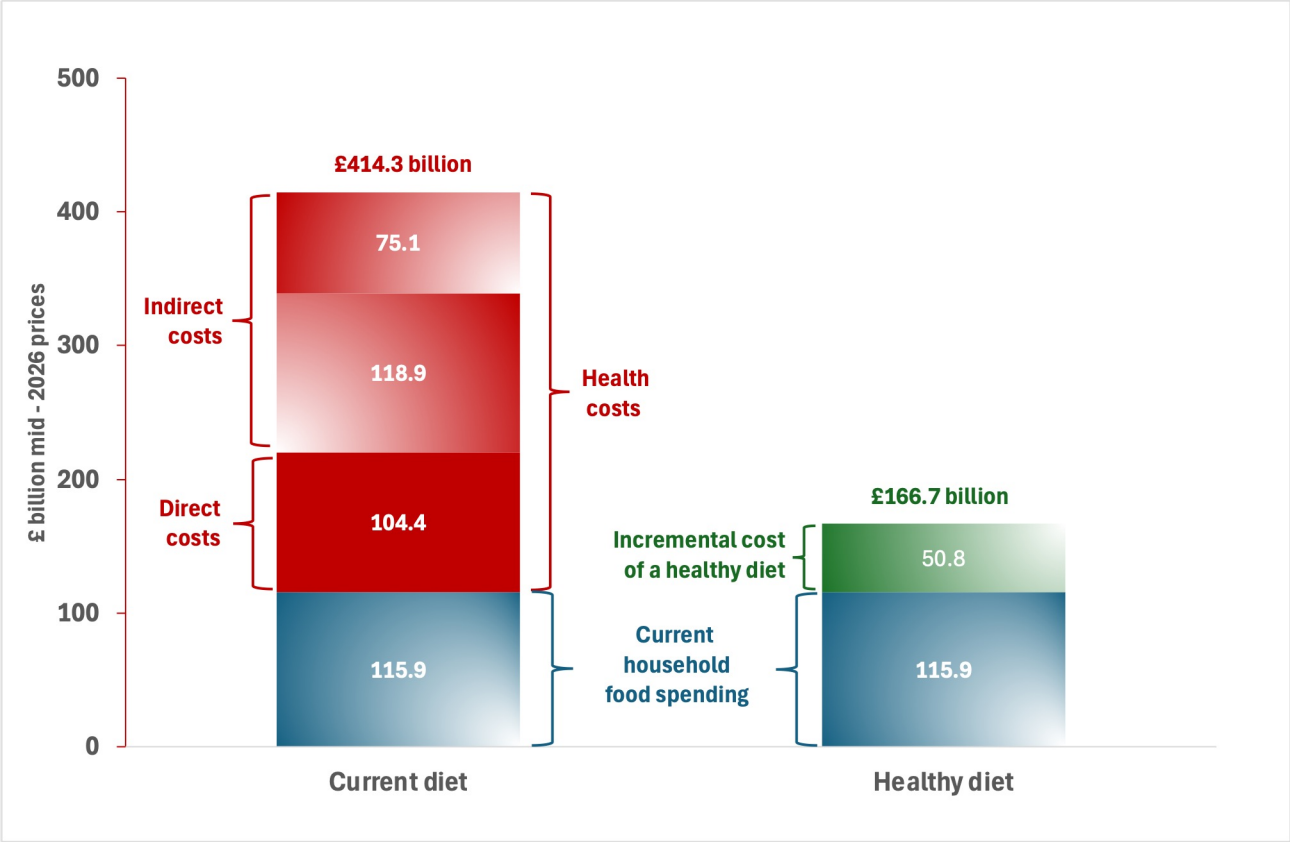



500
400
300
200
100
0
£ billion mid - 2026 prices
£414.3 billion
75.1
118.9
104.4
115.9
Indirect costs
Direct costs
Health costs
£166.7 billion
50.8
115.9
Incremental cost of a healthy diet
Current household food spending
Current diet
Healthy diet

The Careless Economy

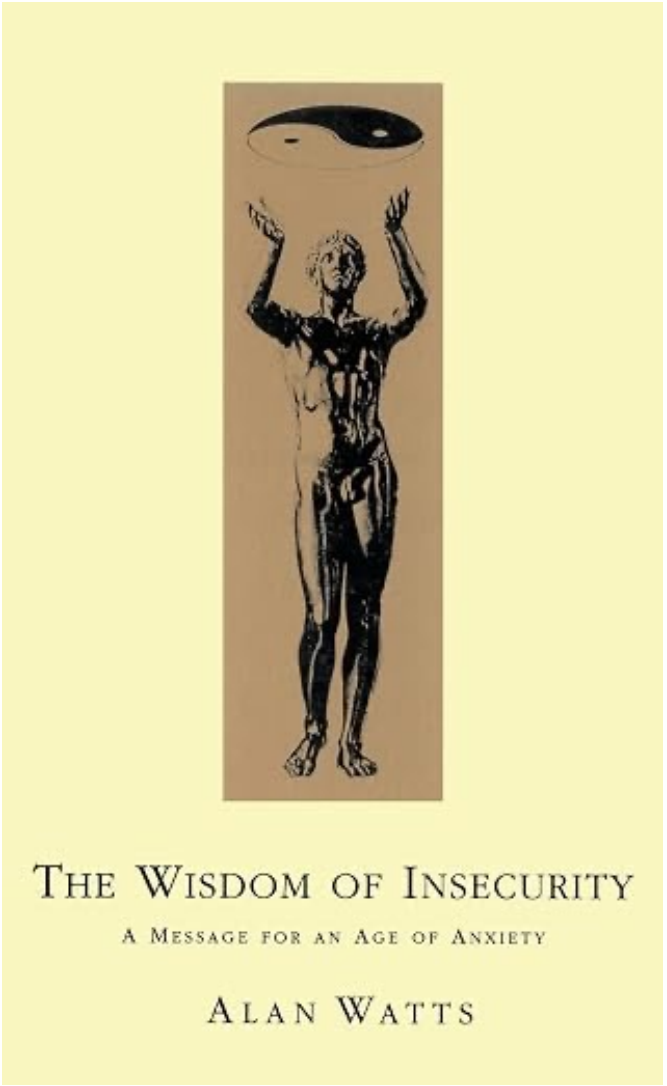
- The lure of growth
- The hidden costs

- A false economy



What shall we do about it?

- Care takes time and ‘time is money’
- Care is gendered
- Care is subjugated to growth
- Care is corrupted by capitalism (and patriarchy)
- Care is eclipsed by violence



Violence as care's nemesis

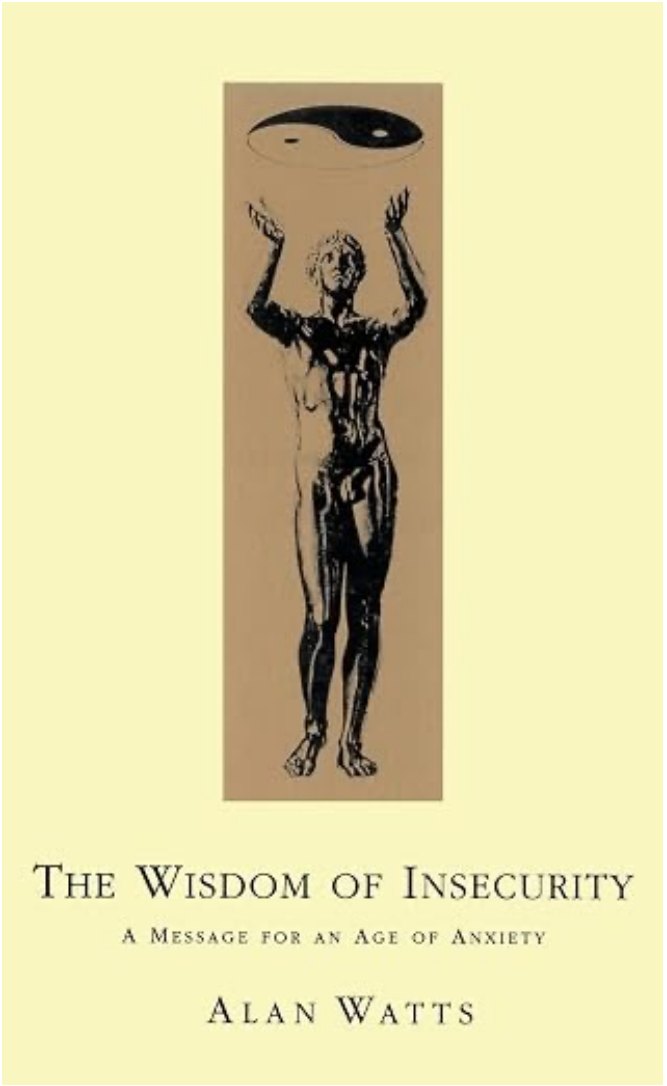
'It is almost impossible to analyse care without addressing its nemesis: neglect, abuse and violence – and vice versa.'

Kathleen Lynch 2022

The Battle of Solferino 1859

What shall we do about it?

- Care takes time and ‘time is money’
- Care is gendered
- Care is subjugated to growth
- Care is corrupted by capitalism (and patriarchy)
- Care is eclipsed by violence
- Care is moralised



Does the moon care?

Does the moon care?

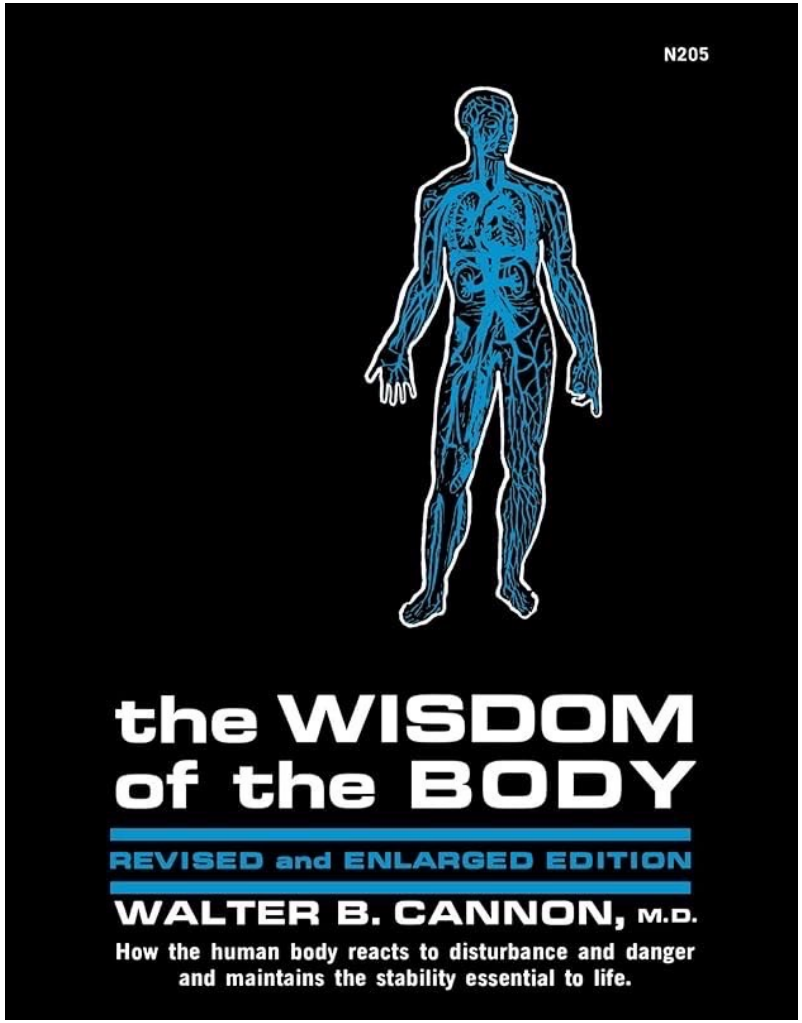
- Constant attention
- The continual regulation of balance

- Essential provision of the conditions for life

Health as balance

‘All the vital mechanisms… always have one purpose, that of maintaining the integrity of the conditions of life within the internal environment.’

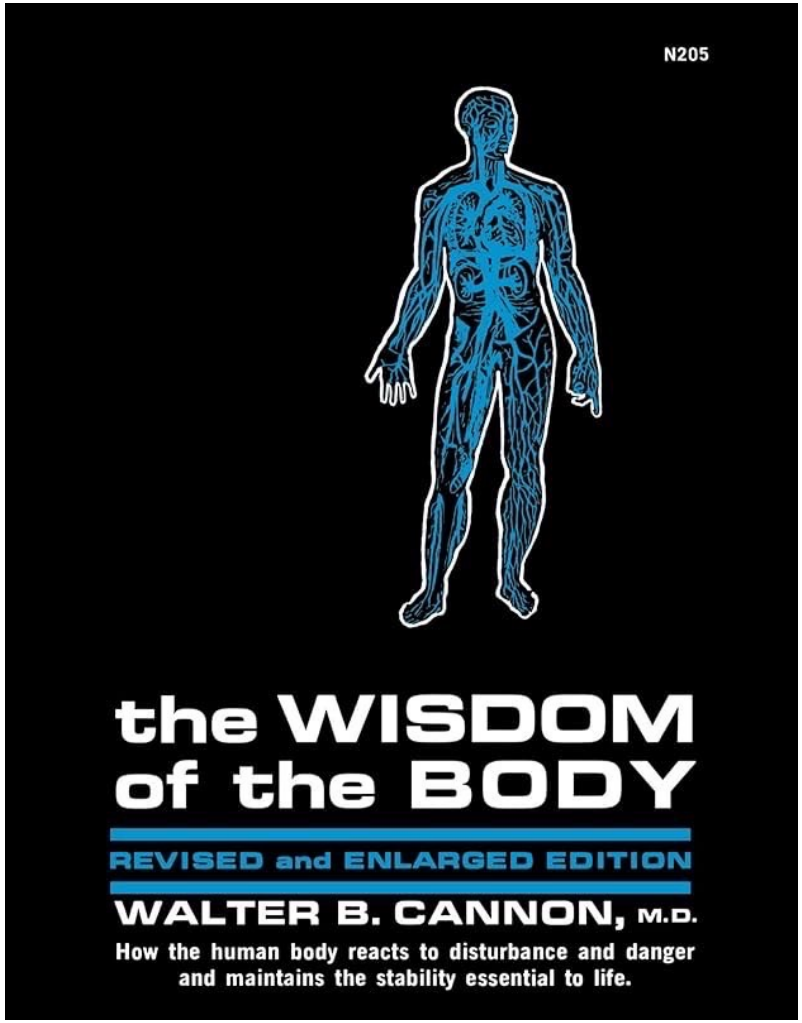
Claude Bernard, 1878



Health as balance

- Homeostasis: return to set point
- Allostasis: shifting of the set point

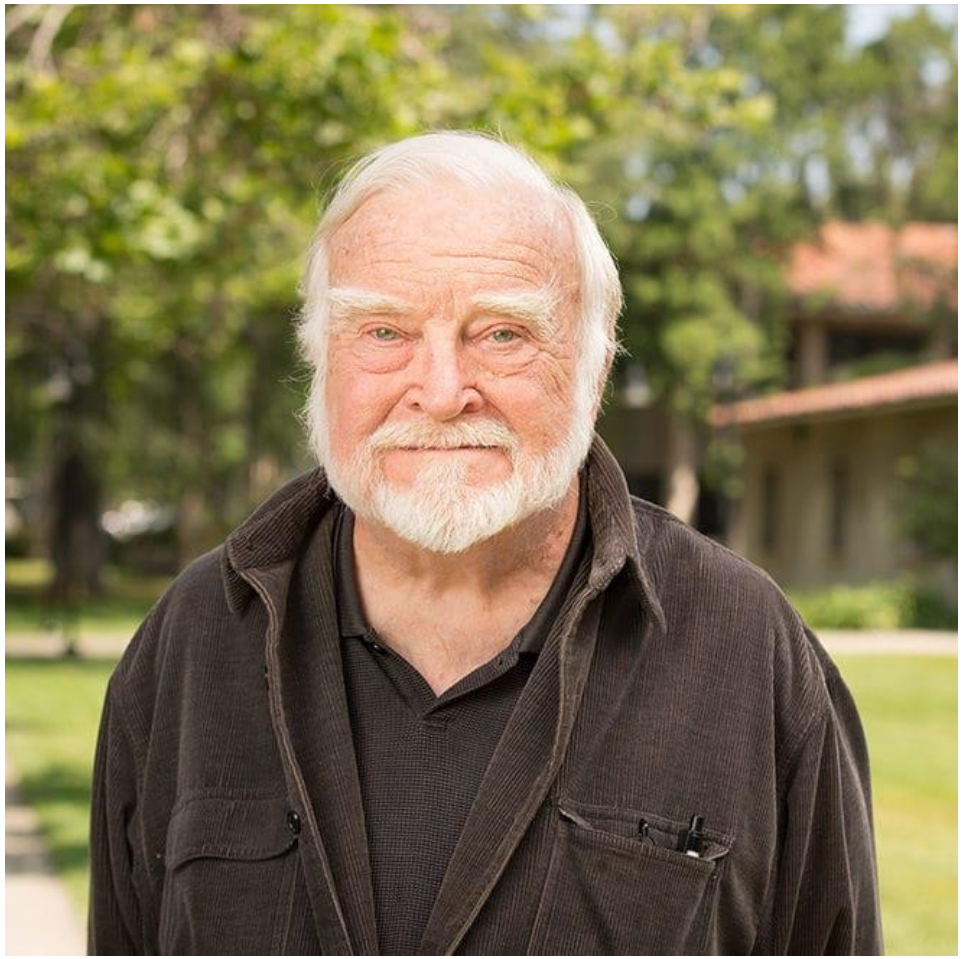
- Homeodynamics: balance is not the absence of challenge but the ability constantly to respond to it



Living in Flow

Flow is a state of optimal experience characterised by:

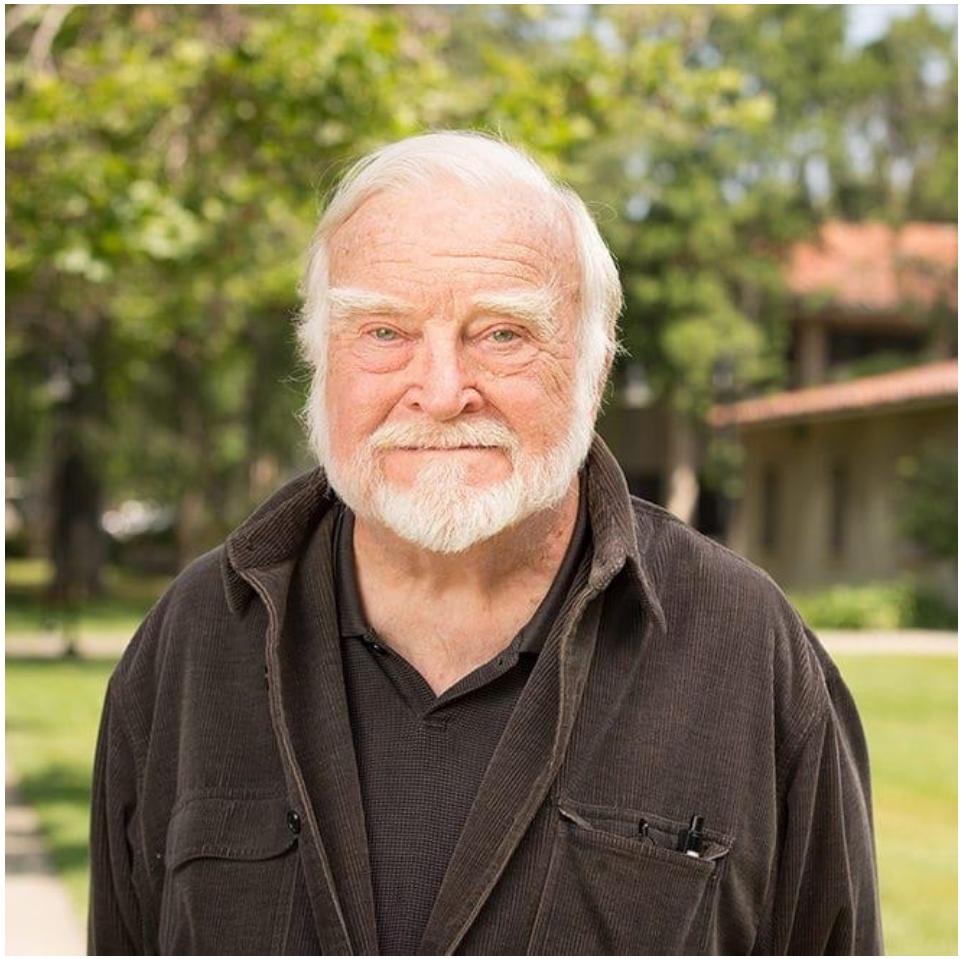
- Total immersion in task
- Loss of awareness of self
- Skill and challenge in balance



Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi 1934 - 2021

Living in Flow

- Craft and creativity
- Physical activity
- Social engagement
- Intimate relationships
- Contemplation



Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi 1934 - 2021

Does the moon care?

Care is not a moral luxury

Care is a ***restorative force***: a fundamental organising principle of organic life in:

- Cosmology
- Physiology
- Psychology
- Society

Does the moon care?

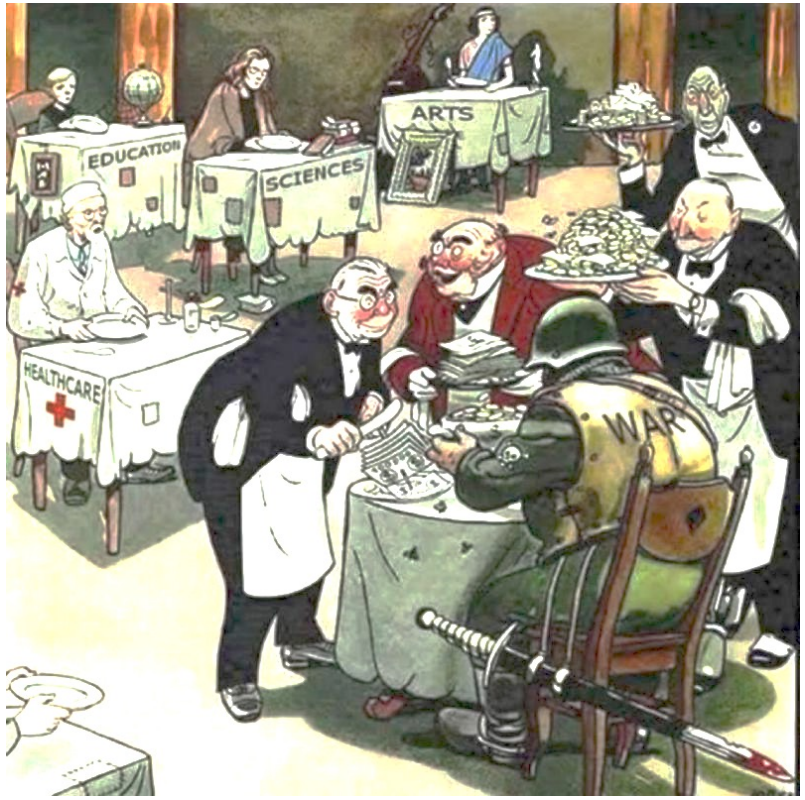
BUT…

Does the moon care?

Care is not just diminished and neglected in the economy it is constantly distorted and weaponised for profit.

A dangerous endgame

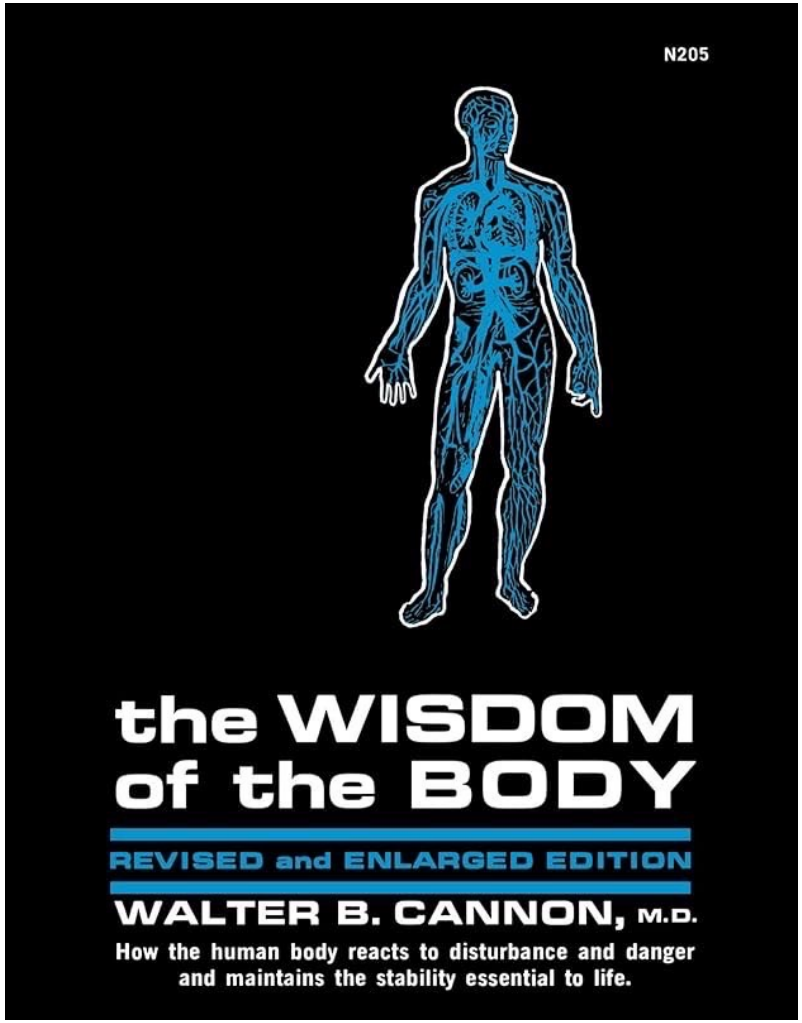
- EU4Health: €5.3 billion between 2021 and 2027
- Re-arming the EU: €800 billion by 2030
- The US has spent more than $8 trillion on wars since 2001.



What shall we do about it?

‘Might it not be useful to examine other forms of organisation – industrial, domestic or social – in the light of the organisation of the body?’

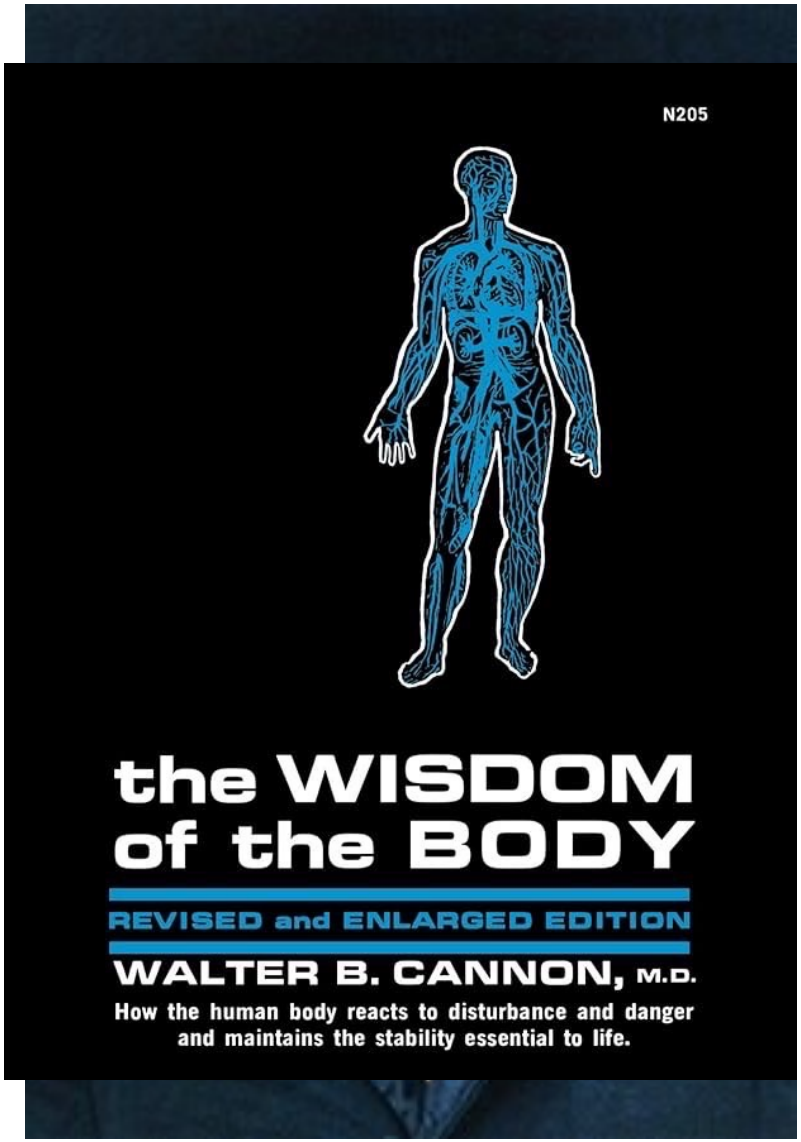
Walter Cannon 1932



What shall we do about it?

- Care as attention
- Care as a restorative force
- Care as investment
- Care as an unpaid debt

- Care as quintessential for life
- Care as freedom



‘Never looked for, always there.
Cursed and flattered, I am Care.
Have I never crossed your path?’
Goethe 1832

Thank you for your attention!