

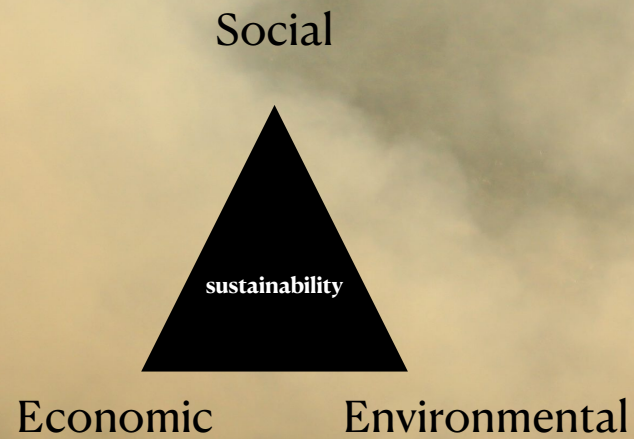
How rational is rational choice theory?

Towards a Global Commons

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Amazon forest



JUSTICE underscores social sustainability

INSTITUTIONALISM/ Coordination/ Governance/ Meta governance

Smoke billows during a fire in an area of the Amazon rainforest near Porto Velho, Rondonia State, Brazil, Sept. 10, 2019. REUTERS/Bruno Kelly

**How to interpret the role of
neoliberal ideology on emerging
trajectories / breaking points of
~~planetary~~ regeneration?**

Paraphrasing Ostrom (1998)

*You would not be watching this lecture if
it were not for some of our ancestors
learning how to undertake
collective action to solve social dilemmas.*

Imagined Orders



Juval Noah Harari

Enable humans to trust each other because they believe in the same stories and follow the same rules, even if they don't know them. This enables humans to cooperate with strangers on a colossal scale.

The State

Money

Religion

Institutions

Capitalism

Justice

Ideology

A narrative produced by the dominant classes that explains the world and legitimises relationships of exploitation and oppression, making them appear natural and universal.

Marx & Engels, The German Ideology (Capital a Critique of Politica Economy, 1846)



Marilena Chauí

Rational choice theory

Adam Smith's invisible hand



**The ‘unseen forces’ that
move the free market
economy:**

**Through rational individual
self-interest, the best
interest of society, as a
whole, is fulfilled.**



Adam Smith's invisible hand

“...HE INTENDS ONLY HIS OWN GAIN, AND
HE IS IN THIS, AS IN MANY OTHER CASES,
LED BY AN **INVISIBLE HAND** TO PROMOTE
AN END WHICH WAS NO PART OF HIS
INTENTION ...

...BY PURSUING HIS OWN INTERESTS, HE
FREQUENTLY PROMOTES THAT OF THE
SOCIETY MORE EFFECTUALLY THAN WHEN
HE REALLY INTENDS TO PROMOTE IT.”

AN INQUIRY INTO THE NATURE AND
CAUSES OF THE WEALTH OF
NATIONS, 1776.





Neoclassical economics (Milton Friedman & Chicago School)



Free market fundamentalism

What if economists ran the world

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/33g3EThMBqC4FDvo4jXVA3?si=o6f58215f4c64cf1>

14:25

Rational Choice Theory asserts that political and economic behaviour are best explained through the application of a supposedly ‘value-neutral’ assumption which posit man as a self-interested, purposeful, maximising being”.

Petracca, M. P. (1991). The Rational Choice Approach to Politics: A Challenge to Democratic Theory. *The Review of Politics*, 53(2), 289–319. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1407756>

**“Rational choice theory supports and
perpetuates a political life
which is antithetical to important
tenets of normative democratic
theory”.**

Petracca, 2009

**“Rational choice theory offers an
incoherent account of
democratic citizenship
and produces a political system which
shows a constant bias
against political change and pursuit of the
public interest.”**

Petracca, 2009

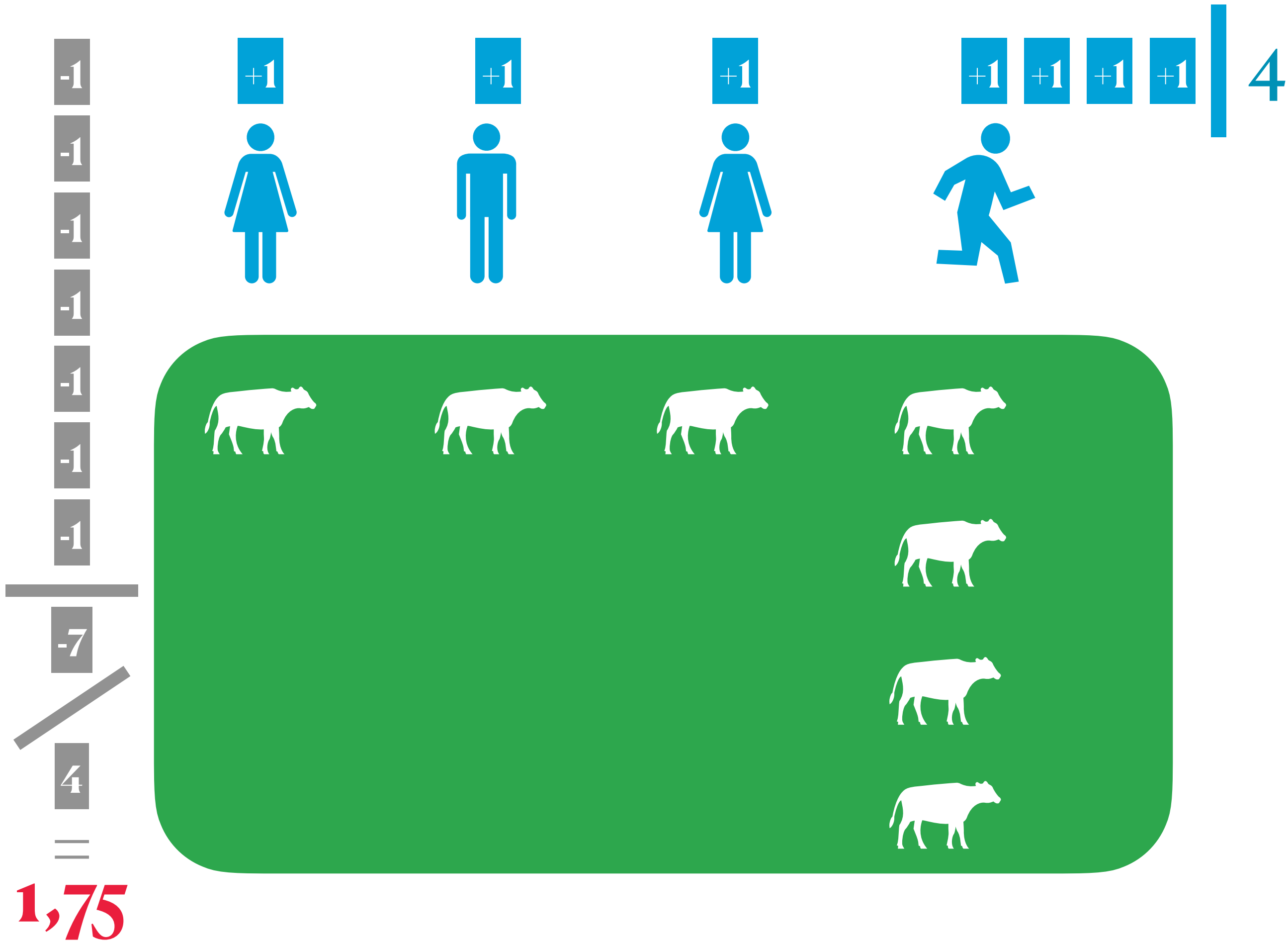
**Renunciation of
Public reasoning,
Public justification
And erosion of the
Public Sphere**



<https://karsh.org/margaret-thatcher-2/>

...You know, there's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look after themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves and then, also, to look after our neighbours." – in an interview in Women's Own in 1987.

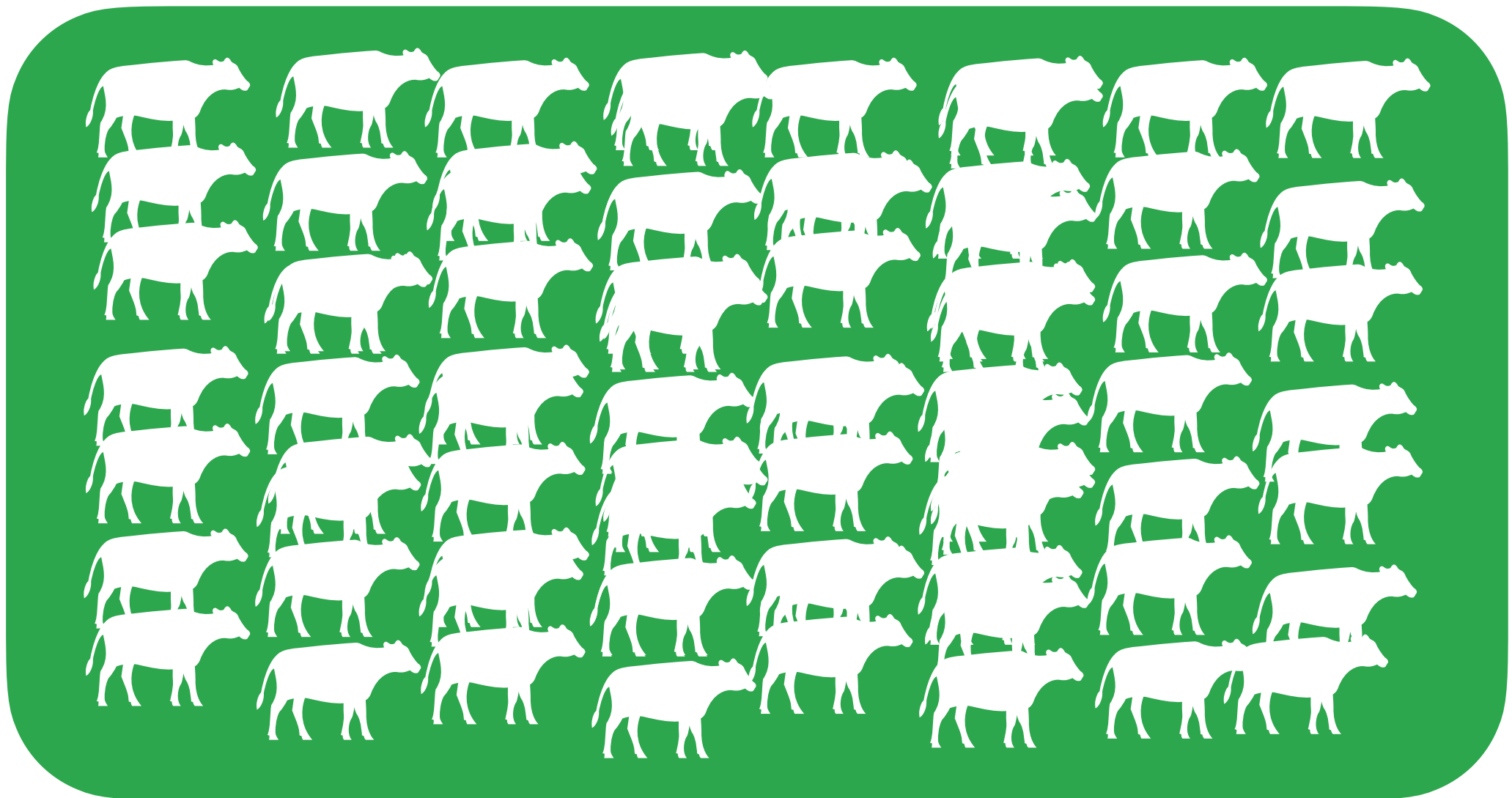
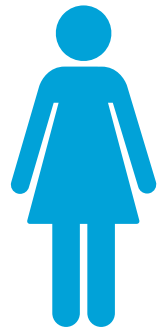
Sustainability

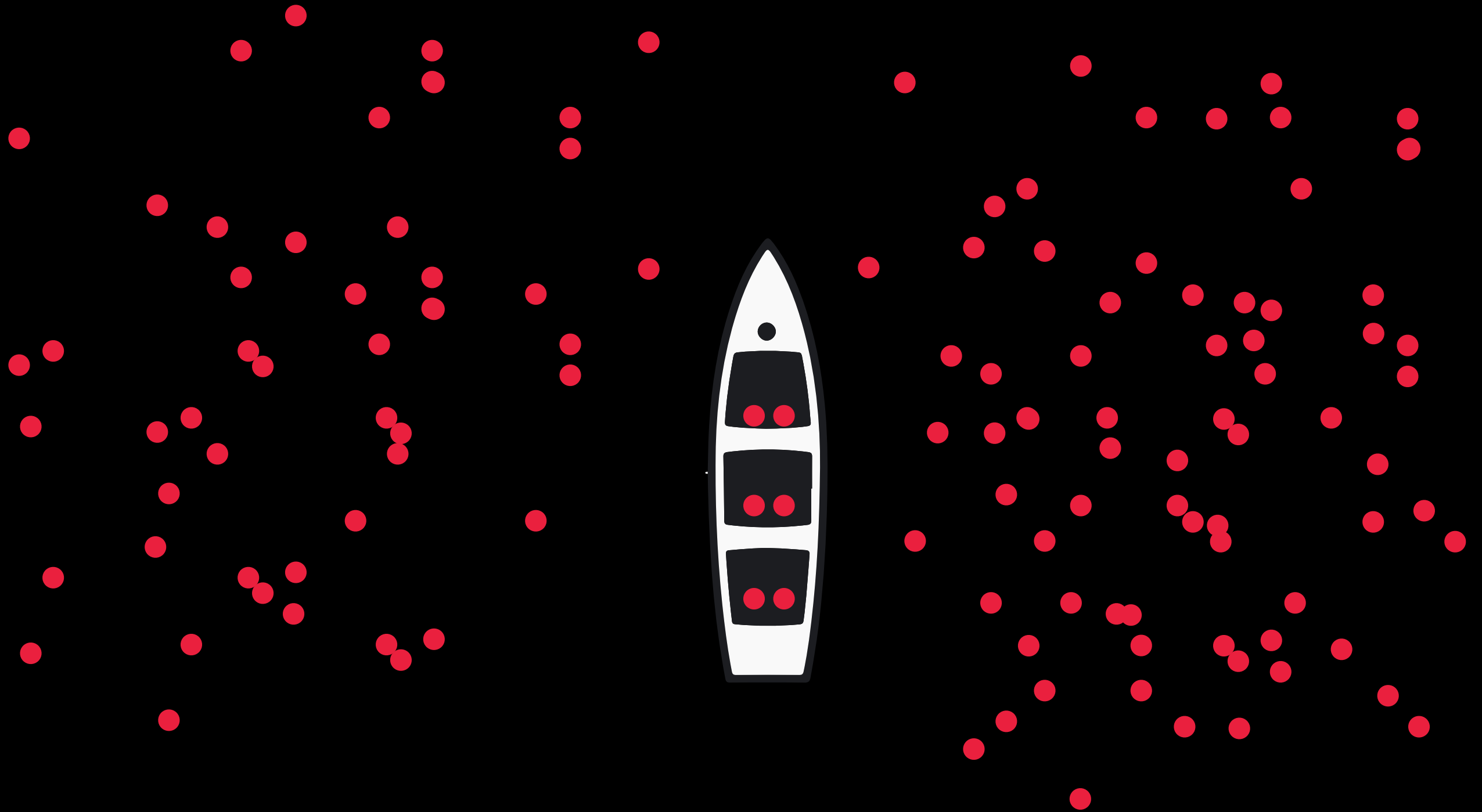


BIG INCENTIVE for the farmers to put
more cows to graze in the field
(Because it maximises **individual** profit)

LITTLE INCENTIVE for them to control
the number of cows
(Because the **negative utility** and **negative externalities** are shared)

Collapse of the commons



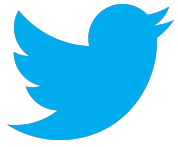


The life boat hypothesis

A misleading metaphor

**Incompatible with the
creation of public goods
(and a public sphere)**

**Incompatible with the
preservation of life on
this planet.**



Jason Hickel  @jasonhickel · 1d

Imagine what economic theory would look like if the basic unit of behavioral modelling wasn't an abstract, bourgeois male individual but a mother.

[HTTPS://TWITTER.COM/JASONHICKEL/STATUS/1326455726190055425](https://twitter.com/jasonhickel/status/1326455726190055425)



Jason Hickel  @jasonhickel · 32m



In an era of ecological breakdown, there is nothing “rational” about maximising profit.



4



91



284



[HTTPS://TWITTER.COM/JASONHICKEL/STATUS/1460907875694432261](https://twitter.com/jasonhickel/status/1460907875694432261)



Communicative planning
Networked governance
Public rationality



Not only needs (self interest) , but also...
values, conscience, freedom, ethics, moral
feelings, and codes, which determine how
societies are organised.

Challenges to behavioural and psychological aspects of rational choice. Ostrom: reciprocity, reputation, and trust can help to overcome the strong temptations of short-run self-interest.

Intra
generational
justice



Inter
generational
justice

Sustainability studies start to conceptualise our
planet as a big commons



The big boat hypothesis

If we are in one boat, how are we going to share the resources available? In this perspective, the market seems like an exceedingly corrosive formula.

[HTTPS://XLR8R.COM/PAGE/948/?SEARCH](https://xlr8r.com/page/948/?search)



**Special case to be made
for the preservation of
the environment **beyond**
the satisfaction of our
needs and the
preservation of our living
standards.**

Responsibility towards other species and the planet due to our **incommensurable power in relation to the planet and all living beings.**

This is our “duty of care**” towards the planet.**

Humankind, as a powerful presence on Planet Earth, has a **duty of care towards the planet and its biological systems.**

By extending rights to nature, we are in fact extending our own freedoms, including the freedom to meet our own needs.

“sustainable freedom”

the preservation and expansion (where possible) of the substantive freedoms and capabilities of people today, without compromising the freedoms and capabilities of people in the future.

(Sen, 2009, pp. 252-253).



Our big commons

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Thank you for listening

Questions?

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