Philosopher Alex Broadbent wrote recently that the development of the Potential Outcomes Approach (POA) for representing causal claims has prompted a “methodological revolution” in epidemiology. He, Jan Vandenbroucke and Neil Pearce have just co-authored a scathing piece in the Int J Epi warning that the causal inference “movement” seeks to (1) restrict study designs to RCTs; (2) dismiss race, gender and genes as causes; (3) consider only interventions that are currently humanly feasible; (4) wrongly discredit past studies; and (5) damage teaching. Responses to this egregious set of allegations have emerged quickly from the so-called revolutionaries. Lyle will summarise arguments from both sides of the debate and present his own perspective, which focuses on whether the research question and study design are off-the-shelf or made-to-order.

Lyle Gurrin is a teaching and research academic in biostatistics who is a CI and, in one case, PI on several large, international, multidisciplinary studies of health and disease in both early life (infant food allergy, childhood adversity and wellbeing) and later years (hereditary haemochromatosis, men’s health). He promotes the sound practice of statistical reasoning by teaching short courses and classes of postgraduate students, and has methodological interests in the analysis of longitudinal and correlated data. He has an emerging profile in the world of causal inference, but neither he nor the methods he’s developing are revolutionary.