

# The Great Simplification

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Nate Hagens (00:00):

Greetings. Regarding last week's Frankly, I didn't realize that people listening on iTunes and international countries might not get the metacognition attempt I had with those bleeps, so I will never do that again. That was an  $n=1$  experiment. This week, I would like to do a reflection on a Lord of the Rings theme. If, like me, you're in your fifties or forties or sixties or younger or older, the Lord of the Rings four books along with the Hobbit might have had an influence on your upbringing, not from a moral-philosophical standpoint, but it was an escape to another world with morals, and good guys, and bad guys, and epic stakes.

(00:59):

In many ways, it was prescient in an allegory for our modern society. There were many archetypes in the Lord of the Rings: Gandalf was the leader, Aragorn and Frodo were the hero, Legolas was the warrior, Gimli was the industrialist and such. So today, what I'd like to talk is about the various archetypes in modern society and how these archetypes are probably not suited for the archetypes we're going to need in the future. And what does the Fellowship of the Ring metaphorically mean for our culture? What is the Fellowship of the Ring Metacrisis style? That's what I'd like to riff on today.

(02:08):

So first of all, our modern archetypes, there's lots of them, but let's just look at some main ones. There's the Banker or Investor that uses an optimal forging theory dynamic as a biological organism coupled with a culture with lots of energy surplus. It is a respected profession, finance is overlaid on top of energy, materials, technology, and ecology. Another is the Worker. Around the world, there are billions of 9:00 to 5:00 workers that combine with machines and energy to create products. They don't make a lot of money. In fact, the correlation between money supply and income is incredibly correlated to the top 1%, and the bottom half have basically been flatlined the last few decades. I digress. The third category of archetype is the Technologist. Better and better chips, and innovation, and efficiency, and inventions have continued widening the straw and propelling growth forward in a naive progress sort of way. Technologist is an archetype.

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Next, we have the Barker. In a society full of energy surplus near the last stage before the energy surplus gets dissipated or consumed in society is the salesmen and the salesmen add on 10% or 15%, which keeps them employed. So, we have salesmen or Barkers as an archetype riding the carbon pulse. Next is the Scholar, and we have academics, scientists, university professors around the world. Next would be the Warrior: we have military people in the United States, especially in the United States and around the world, young men and women that work for the Air Force, the Army, the Reserves, the Marines, and other foreign militaries. We have the Preacher, which is not a salesperson per se, but someone who evangelizes ideas often connected to religion, but not necessarily. We have the Consumer, which is those people especially in the global north that on the backs of energy surplus have created houses full of 60 or 70 items that need to plug in and have access to electricity, short-term stimulation, technology, iPhones, Disneyland trips, sporting events, vacations, et cetera.

(05:02):

The last archetype of modern society is the Elite, the 1% of people that are living high on the carbon surplus and their roles in modern society, irrespective of what they do. A lot of people still aspire to this archetype of being elite, except these nine archetypes are what has worked in the past, what our culture has aspired to and accepted and culturally advocated in the past 50, 70 years. We are now approaching either a Mordor economy where AI and the productivity straw widens our sucking up of ecosystems, services, planetary health, or we reach limits of productivity, and as our energy declines, we're going to have the name of this podcast, A Great Simplification, which is a reduction in energy and material benefits to most people. So where do these archetypes, these current archetypes morph to lead to under a likely scenario in coming decades? Well, the Banker may morph to a Hoarder where loss-aversion keeps those people from being pro-social and part of their community and tries to hold on to the excess claims on reality that they've accumulated.

(06:40):

The Worker, in a place where AI is getting more prevalent, energy surplus goes away and wealth inequality increases, the worker can become the Indentured or even the Slave in many places. Patrick Knodel on a recent podcasts told me that depending on the definition, we have more slaves today than anytime in human history on the planet. Technology, the Technologist used innovation in the past generation or two to

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invent devices that improve the human experience, but with AI and big data and the like, a good part of the technology space may morph into the Cyborg, a transhumanist merging of technology and humanity. In short, in an effort to save humanity from ecological and material limits, we may lose our actual humanity. The Barker, who lives on the energy surplus that powers salespeople going forward may morph into the Grifter, someone that doesn't have the ease of having a job as they did in the past and turns to whatever method they can to make ends meet.

(07:59):

The Scholar could morph into the Farmer as we need a lot more people working on the land and generating real surplus as opposed to a deputy dean for student affairs or some esoteric PhD that's not really contributing to what the future will need. The Warrior: will all these military people instead of fighting other countries, be needed as an Enforcer to keep civilians and the peace? We recall the George Floyd situation: is that going to repeat and escalate? The Preacher, well, the preacher will always exist as an archetype in human cultures, maybe with a lowercase P and a smaller megaphone because they won't have access to their own AM radio station with the way the internet works today.

(08:58):

The Consumer may morph to the Addict where we still have access to goods and services and stability, but a lot of the things that gave us our short-term dopamine hits are no longer available, and that could be fine, but for the average person that might have some mental withdrawal symptoms. And lastly, the Elite. This morphs into a Wild Card. It could go two different ways. I almost thought of saying the Lokai, which was the Star Trek episode with the half black face and half white face with two different personalities. The Elite could go the way of the hoarder and just try and build bunkers around the world, and live off their historically-stored surplus, or the elite could play a huge role in a collective response to the Great Simplification. So these are the archetypes, just hypothetically how I see them potentially unfolding in coming decades.

(10:08):

But what are the archetypes that we need? What are the archetypes, knowing what we do about the system science of our world, what would be the nine archetypes that

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our future needs? First, the Ecologist, someone who understands the inner relationship of things, the inner relationship of humans to nature, to soil, to the biosphere, the inner relationship of academic topics and how they explain reality from a fundamental level. The Engineer, someone that has the scientific knowledge of building and blueprints and scaffolding and electronics, and how to actually look at a system from an engineering perspective in case hard decisions need to be made in that realm.

(11:06):

The Ancestor: we are all here as products of our successful ancestors, but what's happened now is all of our ancestors lived on an ecologically empty planet. We don't, and we are ancestors to what comes after, not only our species but other species as well, complex life. We are the ancestors of complex life in coming centuries and millennia. And so almost, this replaces the preacher in a way: it's someone that has sapience, has wisdom in addition to cleverness and looks at our impact of being good ancestors to the future. The Craftsman, I thought about saying the MacGyver, but some younger people might not know what that is, but someone who can build things with their hand using a variety of materials, perhaps not with the global supply chains and Home Depot and Walmart access that we have today, but a craftsman.

(12:15):

The Healer. Right now, we have doctors and nurses. I think in the future, the Healer is going to be an important archetype. We're going to have to get 80% of the health benefits using 20% of the plastics and overnight resources that we have today, and that's going to require more of a generalist sense in medicine, but also a lot more mental, physical, psychological resilience and wellbeing before people are sick, including potentially new food systems. The Stalwart, Sam Gamgee was such in the Lord of the Rings. There are people who are, and Carl Jung had one of his 12 archetypes if I recall was the regular person: we're going to need an anchor or a ballast or someone that just acts as a rock in the room to support others that is strong, and is just an even-keel temperament. The Warden or the Earth Warden: this is going to be someone who understands ecology but stands in defense of the natural world and the other critters we share the planet with, and that this is someone who lives in our communities as an archetype that actually prioritizes the health and

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protection of other species and our local ecosystems and watersheds and prioritizes that over monetary profits.

(13:52):

The Merrymaker, also could be jester or artisan or musician or something, but we need someone in our society that lifts us into joy with poetry and art and music and dance. And right now, we've got supernormal stimuli sort of access, but the Merrymaker isn't of the human quality and the way it was in the past. And finally, the Matriarch, some bastion of feminine wisdom that's more longer looking, more right brain centered than our current society. We need an archetype for the future that is akin to that. So, these archetypes of the future are not the Fellowship I had in mind because there are three timelines of the future. There's right now, our current business as usual, which is unsustainable and has a road closed sign in the future. There is the distant future. 20, 30, 40 years from now after we've navigated the bringing the ring to Mordor situation, which I'm going to talk about in a second. That's where these nine archetypes reside is in the future, and we need those people today as well. But this is not what's going to get us through the bend or break moment in coming years and decade.

(15:32):

So, there is a third timeframe, which is the next decade or so: what are the archetypes that we're going to need in our society to meet this incredibly difficult challenge of respecting our biosphere and having the human economy thrive, but not eat our home? So here in no particular order are some archetypes for the bend or break moment. The Silvertongue: we have a tribal temperament and social media has polarized and splintered all the various demographics in our society. We have so many single-issue, siloed analyses, and we're going to need an archetype to translate and act as a diplomat between these various factions. Otherwise, we have no hope. This is one of the dearly needed archetypes, and at high levels: in your community, but also at the UN and in Washington and abroad.

(16:50):

The Alchemist historically combines different chemicals into potions and formulas. The Alchemist during the bend or break moment understands our biophysical balance sheet and knows that we use money and technology as society markers for energy,

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materials, and ecosystem impact. And we are going to have a shrinkage on the former versus the latter. And the Alchemist is to be fluent in this and to prepare benign pathways for how that shrinkage occurs. The Disarmer, I think that I like that word anyways because we should disarm people with the truth and move to a different Overton window conversation, but that's not what I had in mind. We have over 12,000 nuclear warheads. Hardly anyone is focused on what's going on in Russia and Ukraine and Israel and Gaza other than the horrible loss of life, but this undergirds a huge instability in the way the world is in the coming decades. And unless we are able to take the non-military path, I don't see how this all doesn't end up in a conflagration. We need serious disarmament techniques. So, an archetype there is a peace activist if there's such a thing, or something more Machiavellian to reduce the risks of bright flashes.

(18:30):

The Muse. We need someone without a specific goal that acts as an inspiration as some little turbo-boost to other people with warmth and love and music and kindness, and that this is infectious and spreads that dynamic around more people in a time of increasing chaos and despair. The muse is going to be an important archetype. The Effectivist. Many trends in social and especially environmental space are getting worse, not better. In addition to the sharing of facts, demonstrations and social signaling that defines conventional activism, we need Effectivists: those humans who care more about end results rather than the social accolades, and make plans and execute the plans accordingly.

(19:29):

The Barber, we are in a biophysical way playing a giant planet sized game of musical chairs, and there are going to be haircuts, there's going to be triage needed, and we're going to need people that at local levels, at all levels that prioritize what we spend resources on, and some things are going to be dead ends, and some of our financial chits that represent reality in our minds may not actually ever be called into being spent on reality, and there's a difference between nominal and real reality as far as inflation. So, I think there are haircuts on the way, especially in the Global North, and to have an expert archetype understanding that and prioritizing it is something important.

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The Governess. It could be governor, I chose governess. Our ways of making decisions right now are not suited for what's ahead and we need different forms of making good decisions and I'm not an expert on that, but that archetype is deeply needed, the Governess. The Wellspring. For this fellowship that I'm describing here, there could be one who acts as just a central node of a power and energy and enthusiasm and support that when the others get beaten down or discouraged or slip up, there's always this pushing, this thread, this unity. Gandalf was this in the Lord of the Rings, but it doesn't have to be a powerful, charismatic person other than a really strong, deep-running ethic of a human being. And you know those people in your own community: we need more of them.

(21:39):

Last but not least, we need an archetype of the Catalyst. If we recall in the Lord of the Rings, Frodo was the hero, but even he was unable to take the ring to Mordor. It required Sam and Gollum, who was a tragic monster: they were Catalysts that changed the result of the story. And I think many of you may think, "What role can I play in what's coming?" You can be a Catalyst: you do your job, live with your family, enjoy your life, learn and pay attention to what's going on, and you never know when your actions could shift the larger story. The most important part of this little Frankly reflection I've outlined playfully some categories of archetypes, when I read the Lord of the Rings, I loved the magic swords and the dragons and the different species other than humans, but the really great feeling I had when I was reading it for three hours a night and didn't want to put it down, it was the feeling of camaraderie and fellowship.

(23:04):

These nine archetypes I just outlined have to work together, and we can't solve what's coming just solo. There's got to be little groups, little fellowships all around the world, and this is one of humans' superpowers. It's forming small groups of diverse skills and temperaments and attitudes and bells and whistles and collaborating towards a greater goal. The greater goal is how do we navigate the Great Simplification without a collapse, without a nuclear war, and without collapsing the biosphere. This is the largest David and Goliath, or I forgot the bard's name versus Smaug in the Hobbit. But we have to create these fellowships metaphorically on a societal level, and perhaps not so metaphorically in your own community and watershed. I hope this made sense and we'll talk to you next week. Thank you.