

The Great Simplification

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[00:00:00] Greetings. I am recording this, um, a day and a half after the, uh, attempted assassination on, uh, former President Trump. Um, boy, in the intervening two days, I've learned a lot about myself, and I've learned a lot about, My fellow citizens, uh, left, right, north, south, young, old, uh, wow. Some fascinating, um, observations.

[00:00:30] I think this was, as my friend Jordan says, an inescapable cultural cleaving event. And everyone had to make sense of what happened, and there does feel to be a sea change, um, in our culture. Something shifted. Of course, longtime followers of this podcast and my work, uh, over the past 10 plus years will know that Um, I'm, I'm not apolitical, but I'm non partisan because I care about reality.

[00:01:01] I care about getting the story right, uh, and passing the baton to more humans, um, to make better decisions individually and collectively in the future. But I increasingly fear that both political parties in the United States are disconnected from the reality, uh, that is coming, and what would a reality platform, a reality party, um, Look like.

[00:01:45] So, um, I wanna start by. Instead of, uh, having people agree on, um, on reality, what would be some things that the majority of people in this nation would agree on? Um, and I start with not values, but just preferences. I think we would agree that we like quiet sunsets with people we love and sunrises filled with birdsong.

[00:02:16] I had a wren singing out my window for an hour this morning. We like healthy food and clean water. We like to feel safe and walk our dog or our daughter around the block or in a forest. Um, we like the smell of babies fresh out of a bath or freshly washed. Linen, or the air before a rainstorm, or the garlic, cumin, and onion in beans that my girlfriend makes.

[00:02:44] Uh, maybe you all wouldn't like that, but I think most people should like that. We like humor and cleverness and novelty and stories. We like the freedom to choose, um, what we want to do. We don't want to be told or constrained. We like watching a NFL football game and then taking a nap on a Sunday afternoon on a crisp October day.

[00:03:09] Uh, we like our dogs or our cats, um, because they're part of our family. We like. Dave Matthews concerts on a summer evening, uh, near Milwaukee or on a Saturday night, listening to 70s love songs with some wine. Again, maybe I'm getting too, too, too personal on the things I like. Um, we like seeing old friends.

[00:03:35] Uh, and sharing stories about our lives. Uh, I've got two of my best friends from high school and college coming to see me this weekend. We love our children, our dogs, uh, our, our land, our family reunions. I think these things transcend, um, politics. And I think we can all agree, not only in the United States, but, but most people.

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[00:03:58] like these things. So underneath these preferences are values, uh, which do have political leanings. This is where we've never really agreed and this disagreement because of AI, because of technology, because of polarization, because things are getting tougher, is, is widening. So these things are like women's rights and abortion, fairness, equality, rule of law, fiscal responsibility, immigration, climate change, environmental justice, the right to bear arms, free markets, eradicating poverty, the right to life, etc.

[00:04:37] I mean, these are some of the core, uh, um, values and issues uh, in the political parties, uh, today in, in the United States. All of these values and all of the preceding preferences evolved during the upslope of the carbon pulse, where it was okay to have political differences because this surplus of carbon productivity allowed for so much contention to coexist.

[00:05:08] But reality, And it was over 10 years ago, it was 14 years ago that I named my class Reality 101. Reality doesn't care about political affiliation, nor does it care about preferences or values. And I've come to understand there's a difference between observing and describing our reality. and suggesting what sort of political policies or platforms might be appropriate to facing it.

[00:05:39] My work, I keep trying to do the former in hopes that more people will coalesce around the latter. So with that backdrop, what might be some core bipartisan Observations about our reality. Here is a short list. Each of these could be a 20 minute, uh, frankly on its own. I assume that those of you who've watched this before kind of understand where I'm going.

[00:06:08] Things aren't working for most people. A lot of people have very little savings, can't pay for health care, there's mental health issues, people have a lot of anxiety, they don't have good views of the future, and there's just a lot of uneasiness and concern about the future. People aren't as comfortable, as safe um, as they used to be and things aren't really working.

[00:06:41] The Dow Jones Industrial Average, which we get on the end of the day, uh, on the talk show, the quote. That no longer represents success for most people. Um, the bottom 50 percent of the population in the United States owns 1 percent of the stocks. The vast majority is owned by the top. The well being of our citizenry with health care and safety and security is no longer represented by a financial metric.

[00:07:12] Energy. is critical to our economies and our way of life. I think, uh, COVID and the Ukraine, Russia situation has opened our eyes a little bit to the importance of energy. And I actually paradoxically think that AI is going to raise awareness of oil depletion, uh, in a way that, uh, our former efforts never have.

[00:07:36] But we still think of technology and money as the driver of our progress and wealth when technology and money sit on top of a giant pillar of energy and ecosystem services from the past. Drilling holes. is not sustainable. Most of the inputs to our current global industrial system are non renewable on human timescales.

[00:08:07] The United States has more oil wells drilled than the rest of the world combined. It's like a pin cushion. We've used all of the best basins. What's left is shale oil. After shale oil, and there's a lot of that left, but it depletes rapidly and it's costly. After shale oil, there's nothing left. Drilling holes is unsustainable.

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[00:08:28] Charging things on our national credit card is unsustainable. We're going into an additional, uh, 1 trillion in debt every three or four months. Uh, that debt is a real claim on things in the future economy, which paired with the drilling holes is unsustainable, is a problem. Renewable energy isn't, um, and requires a lot more materials and inverters and batteries and things that need to be rebuilt in the next 20 or 25 years.

[00:09:00] We're headed for a multipolar world. Um, when all tides, uh, the tide lifted all boats the last 50 years, it was okay to cooperate, uh, on the way up. Now there are resources and militaries in other countries. Um, we're in two arenas in war right now in, in Ukraine and in Israel. We can't just assume that everything will be, uh, available, tradable, and shared, uh, going forward.

[00:09:31] So the sum of all those things is our current lifestyles on average in the United States and most of the developed world, uh, are unsustainable. Um, and that things that are unsustainable, um, change oftentimes abruptly. Um, Where is that in a, in a platform? Uh, changing direction, but still part of a describable reality is humans are animals.

[00:09:58] We're mammals, we're primates, we're apes, and we are part of the web of life. And this is relevant to our individual and our cultural behaviors because we have a human nature that is combined with our culture, our human nurture. Um, this is part of our reality. We can't change human behavior. Uh, we can change the cultural context and the consciousness and the choices of individual humans.

[00:10:28] Uh, but we do have a hardwired, uh, suite of prepared learning when we are born and wake up and find ourselves in this one time anomalous period of the carbon pulse, uh, where we're all trying to figure things out and, and make plans for, for an uncertain future. We're having a large and increasing impact on the biosphere and the stable ecosystems that humans evolved in.

[00:10:56] Most countries in the world, uh, believe in and are very concerned about climate change, except for maybe the United States. There's still a lot of people that think the climate has changed in the past and, uh, other stories, but just settings, climate change aside. There are many other planetary boundaries that we are exceeding.

[00:11:17] Uh, I think most people, whether you're conservative or progressive, should be concerned that there are microplastics in mother's breast milk. There's microplastics in our bloodstream. Endocrine disrupting chemicals are having sperm count drop by 1 to 2 percent a year. Um, we're losing insects 1 to 2 percent a year.

[00:11:39] Uh, the nitrogen cycle, the ocean currents are slowing. I mean, there are massive environmental impacts beyond climate change. Um, and part of our reality is there are many creatures alive now and unborn who are being affected by the waste streams, uh, of the global human economic system. What else? After basic needs are met, which arguably, understandably, for a lot of people they are not, but after basic needs are met, most of the best things in life are free.

[00:12:17] And I think many people would agree with that, uh, given their own recollection and introspection of their own histories. Technology, will be critical to human futures, but technology is not a solution to all these things I've just described. It's part of a suite of solutions, but we tend to overly rely on it.

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[00:12:41] We face a predicament, not a problem. A problem has a solution. A predicament has responses and things we can do to avert the worst. Um, and there are many things that we can do. Uh, that will make the future better than the default. Um, but we face a predicament, the human predicament. What the human predicament is that we face is bipartisan.

[00:13:12] It's really non partisan, but neither party or their policies are going to be able to navigate what I refer to as The Great Simplification and related events alone, uh, the best decisions, uh, ahead of us. will be country over party. Um, and, uh, that's reality. Things are going to be increasingly nonlinear, uncertain, uh, and we're going to get heavy doses of crazy in the news, um, in our lives in coming months, years, decades.

[00:13:51] Um, but in the end, I think we all care. about pretty much the same things that I mentioned earlier. Um, how can we cross pollinate this care, this concern into different conversations that are generative towards an uncertain future? I don't know the answer, but I'm so frustrated that so many well meaning Individuals in our country, in our world don't talk to each other and aren't part of this larger, deeper, more meaningful, more urgent, more critical conversation about reality.

[00:14:36] Um, much more to say on this. Uh, I will talk to you next week.