

# The Great Simplification

---

**PLEASE NOTE: This transcript has been auto-generated and has not been fully proofed by ISEOF. If you have any questions please reach out to us at [info@thegreatsimplification.com](mailto:info@thegreatsimplification.com).**

[00:00:00] That's a very polite way to say greetings in Chinese. Um, you know, it would be great, as an aside, to have someone from China, um, on the show to discuss the metacrisis and how China is thinking about and facing some of these things. So last week I had a, a Frankly called the reality party. Um, and it was really my frustration looking at both parties in the United States, and I'm sure it's similar elsewhere in the world, not really talking about the core issues that we're going to be facing in the coming decade, And some of the feedback, uh, I got is what, what would a reality party stand for?

[00:00:50] What would be the solutions to the human predicament? What would be the policies that we would put forward? Um, and today I want to talk about that and talk about. specifically why I am not, um, promoting certain solutions, uh, to what we face, at least not yet. Um, and that is going to be the subject of today's Frankly.

[00:01:15] Okay, so brief recap. The human predicament, um, we, uh, are supported by ancient sunlight and treating it as if it were interest. Uh, we currently have a 20 terawatt, a 19 some terawatt, uh, global human metabolism, which is around 190 billion light bulbs worth of energy turned on 24 seven. That is impacting, uh, the biosphere and its waste absorption capacity.

[00:02:01] We're overlaying this with monetary claims that continue to grow. We're in ecological overshoot. Climate change is just one of many, uh, risks to the environment, including novel entities and plastic and PFAS and species loss, et cetera. Uh, it's my belief, uh, and my 20 years of research has led me to believe that From 19 terawatts, we will hit 15 terawatts before we hit 25 terawatts.

[00:02:31] Um, and we have a lot of things to do between now and then to make the future, excuse me, better than the default. On top of all that is the evolved human behavioral constraints and predilections of modern homo sapiens. So, with that as the general problem statement, and there's 200 hours of content on this site that unpacks the statements I just made.

[00:03:02] With that as a general problem statement, what are the solutions? What are the policies? What should we do?

[00:03:13] So, first I would, uh, as I said last week, there are no solutions, right? There are, um, solutions to a problem. What we face is a predicament. Um, and predicament, there are responses and things that would make it better than the default. Um, so I, I really don't like talking about solutions, but it's quite a quite a common word.

[00:03:37] So how do we, how do we think about, um, solutions mitigation to what I call the human predicament or the great simplification? Okay. So first of all, um, the, the responses to the great simplification are not, uh, simple. They are complex. So, first of all, the, the categories of the interventions would fall into three broad areas.

# The Great Simplification

---

[00:04:03] One would be, uh, using Marvin Harris's framework, the superstructure, which is the ideas, and the values, and the beliefs, and the memes, and the stories, and the narratives. Um, another category would be, um, The structure or, um, what Daniel Schmachtenberger and I have started to refer to as the social structure, which is our laws and our rules and our economic, uh, ways of transacting, uh, goals, uh, et cetera.

[00:04:32] And underneath that is of course the infrastructure, which is our energy, our systems, our, um, buildings, our environmental waste capacity, um, and all, and all those things. So if we talk about solutions, which of those categories are we referring to? And then to put this in a two dimensional space, those of you listening, uh, those paying attention to the future, um, care about different types of solutions.

[00:05:03] scales. Um, there's the individual scale, there's the local and regional scale, there's the national and global scale. And then to make it three, uh, three dimensional, there's the time aspect, which is the pre crisis time, which is now to whenever there is a financial or geopolitical, um, uh, cascade. uh, which could be very soon or we could have a decade before that happens.

[00:05:31] That moment I call the bend versus break moment is how do we stabilize the system, uh, and, and keep it going, um, at a, uh, less complex, smaller scale. And then the third timeline is 20 years from now, 30 years from now, 40 years from now, what are the technologies, um, ways of living with each other and with nature, um, governance models, et cetera, for the longer term.

[00:05:58] So that's kind of a three dimensional, um, view of how we might think about the solution space. But then if we even took one of those cubes, we could extrapolate it even wider. There are different sorts of people. Um, of course the world has 8 billion people in wildly different circumstances, but even the people watching this show, um, they might have a lot of resources or no resources, they might have.

[00:06:27] A lot of social capital and friends and networks or just be by themselves in their, in their, um, uh, off the grid home in British Columbia or something. So, people's circumstances, uh, high to low. Um, also, people might be living in a different culture that is not fully complexified. There's the global North, um, where I live near Minneapolis, things are incredibly complex, but also, um, I gave a presentation last week to a bunch of NGO leaders in India.

[00:07:02] India has not yet fully complexified was, which is an advantage to them. So the options available to someone living in India, is to kind of resist the siren song of conspicuous consumption, uh, in the global North. And, um, they have actually less degrees of freedom on the climate standpoint, but more degrees of freedom on how they organize things.

[00:07:24] And lastly, in this second, uh, Rubik's cube, um, is what you care about. A lot of listeners, uh, to this show care about other species and Earth's ecosystems and future generations. Um, others just care about, um, social justice and inequality. Others care about, um, local resilience and, uh, the economy where they live.

[00:07:52] So, um, all of these things make it clear that there isn't a one size fits all, uh, recommendation to people in the world or viewers of this program.

# The Great Simplification

---

[00:08:08] So one of the things that I feel strongly about and the purpose that I'm, uh, the reason I'm doing this, this work is, I think we have to avoid, have more people avoid being captured by wrong narratives that are dead ends. So in the sequence of being, uh, ecology, systems, and the energy blind. The very first step, and it is the most important step, is to understand what's going on.

[00:08:36] To understand how energy, money, technology, and economic growth fit together, how we do these things to get the same neurotransmitters of our successful ancestors, and how this whole system has an environmental impact. That takes a lot of time, but it's very important to understand, and this is politically neutral.

[00:08:56] It doesn't matter who you vote for or what party you vote for, um, your value system is at this point. Just to understand it is an integration of science and no one including me knows all this stuff but we're all learning and headed in that direction to understand the present because as my former guest Ed Conway said we have to understand the present to understand the future and we don't.

[00:09:20] Um, beyond that once we understand that's when you understand your values. come in. What do you care about? What do you feel? What is important to you? People that have followed me for 20 years, uh, or the last couple of years in this podcast know I deeply care about the natural world and the one and a half to two million known species and the up to 10 million unidentified species that have no say in our economic system and I want to chaperone them.

[00:09:48] as best as possible through the bottlenecks of the 21st century. I've concluded that we have to also, um, help human systems navigate this bend or break in order for that to happen. So that's my value system. I, that comes across, I think, in my podcast, but it's secondary. for the work to have people understand what's going on.

[00:10:11] Then downstream from understanding and caring about something is the plans and the responses and the solution set and to figure out what your strategy is. And then downstream from that is engaging and executing. Your, your, um, your strategies. By far the most important thing on this podcast is the understanding.

[00:10:35] And, um, I'm going to continue to say why I'm not going, um, whole hog into the solutions, but this is one reason why.

[00:10:47] Another reason why is, um, as soon as you have a specific solution You have narrowed your audience dramatically. For instance, um, I've come up with, and I will be articulating this later this summer, many categories of interventions. There's regenerative agriculture and technology, there's ecological economics.

[00:11:09] very much. What I call the real energy transition, which isn't transitioning, uh, to a type of energy, it's a transition on how we use energy and interact with others and with, with our local ecosystems. There's Goldilocks technology, not too hot, not too cold, just right for a lower throughput future.

[00:11:28] There's advanced policy. Uh, there's, um, a new, uh, framework for philanthropy, which I may call capital in the service of life. There's different governance models. There's libraries of healing. These are all general, uh, categories, but once you get, um, more specific than that, what if your audience is

# The Great Simplification

---

an engineer or a teacher or a celebrity or a college student or a college professor or a philanthropist or a farmer?

[00:11:57] There's different answers for each of those, um, categories.

[00:12:07] Okay. Uh, another reason I don't talk, uh, about solutions is, um, a delicate one. And I probably, um, could say a lot more about this and I probably will already say too much. Um, human systems, uh, the way we have a shared mind space around the world, With the 8 billion humans, or at least the billions that are connected to the internet, technology has accentuated this.

[00:12:36] This mind space functions very similar to, um, systems in nature. And there are adaptive adaptive processes, there's a predator prey like relationship and things move very fast. To give a natural system analog, there are bivalves, um, which are like mollusks and clams. And the thickness of their shell, um, is based on the predators around them that would be able to crush the shell.

[00:13:07] And if there are no predators that have strong jaws in their environment, they don't need to grow thick shells. Growing the thick shells is a waste of energy and resources. They only do that in response to things. And it's the same thing in human systems. Um, you know, Bucky Fuller famously said, you can't change the existing system, uh, by fighting it.

[00:13:29] You have to create a new system that makes the old system obsolete. He didn't believe that. He, he was a military contractor, um, that did the, the, um, the dew lines and the Arctic for the domes to protect the ICBM, uh, nuclear missiles. He was the contractor for those domes. He couldn't come out and say, Um, you know, fight the existing system, because then there would have been an immediate adaptive response to that, and he would have, um, you know, lost status and, and the voice that he had.

[00:14:02] Countless examples like that. Um, 9 11. um, no one knew that you could hijack planes, uh, Osama bin Laden figured it out and it was adaptive response. But it, the response in counter to it happened really fast because I think it was the third plane. On their cell phones people knew that you were, uh, they were doing this so they no longer allowed that to happen and the passengers attacked, uh, the, um, the pilots and that's why the plane didn't hit the White House.

[00:14:34] So, All of the information out there, um, is very quickly adapted to and responded to. And so the real solutions to the meta crisis will not be televised and they will not be popular either. Um, so it's, it's good to, um, talk about the framework that we face. And so people don't buy dumb narratives like net zero by 2050 with continued economic growth.

[00:15:06] But it will never be a thing that the solution set to the metacrisis is outlined. um, publicly, you know, in a subset of that, that's not the, uh, adaptive nature of it is the universe of socially acceptable solutions. And then there's a universe of effective solutions and how much that overlap is, is probably not huge.

[00:15:32] Um, so, and, and then on top of that, we've got climate change and economic growth and poverty and inequality and biodiversity and all these There's some overlap, uh, with some of them, but there's no overlap of all of them. And how do we manage for that?

# The Great Simplification

---

[00:15:56] A deeper, uh, um, more tangible example of this adaptive, uh, um, ceiling that I mentioned is I've been blessed with this podcast to come across a lot of humans who are working on fantastic things. Um, I met someone recently who is, um, working on existing language that when a wetland, um, gets bulldozed over for a new Walmart or something, that community has to, uh, procure a new wetland somewhere.

[00:16:30] in the world. And this person is, is working on the language to make that scalable in all communities in Canada and the United States. Um, another person I know has individually conserved millions of acres in South America of, um, uh, biologically sensitive land. These people I want to highlight them on the podcast, not to say, Hey, go do this, but to say, Hey, wow, look at all these things that can be done, but they don't want to come on the podcast because if they explain what they're doing, that creates an adaptive counter response from people that don't share their values and don't want those things to happen.

[00:17:13] So it actually. Causes their special sauce to dissipate. The one example that I have had on the show is, um, my colleague and friend, DJ White, one of the early Greenpeacers and the founder of Earth Trust. He successfully stopped the only drive kill of dolphins. Um, in history. It's over 30 years ago and I think the reason he shared why he did it and how he did it is because all the people in the Taiwanese government that were involved in in that, um, which he wasn't allowed to tell anyone that was part of the the agreement, are no longer alive.

[00:17:50] Um, the point is that there will be an in service of life underground movement. There will be things going on that are, um, responses and mitigations to the problems we face that no one knows about, uh, and hopefully some of you, uh, listening to this will, will do that.

[00:18:16] That leads me to policy. What are the policies that knowing about, uh, the human predicament and The Great Simplification we could do? Well, uh, on the surface level, there's some generic policies that would just generally be good ideas like term limits or, uh, age limits, uh, or getting the money out of politics.

[00:18:37] But most of the things that I'm talking about are not only in the future, but to avoid these things from happening, the policies that we're voting for are exactly the opposite direction. So, um, one of the things that I started a couple of years ago, and I've spoken to around 25, um, senators, governors, congressmen, is the concept of advanced policy, which is those things that we will have to do in the coming decade, but that are socially and political, politically, uh, too, uh, um, advanced, uh, to be accepted by the, the current, um, political zeitgeist.

[00:19:17] But we still need. to do them, uh, to build research, to do scenario planning, to build constituency, to create break glass plans. Um, I did some of that with some agencies of the U. S. government back in 2014, but those aren't online, obviously, because, um, talking about them makes them become self fulfilling prophecies or, uh, removes their potential effectiveness.

[00:19:47] This is a long way of saying that solutions, um, aren't going to just be listed 1, 2, 3 and followed linearly. Um, I think the last reason that I don't talk about solutions is probably the most salient one, which is truly I don't know. Um, I think it's clear to you all what I care about. I am learning along with you.

# The Great Simplification

---

[00:20:16] It's one of the blessings of, uh, unexpected blessings of this podcast is I've come across so many really smart, caring people who share my value systems and I'm learning along with you. And so, You know, if you go to a doctor and you're sick, the doctor will diagnose you and give you a pill or do a surgery.

[00:20:39] If you go to an auto mechanic and, uh, he, he, or she will tell you what's wrong with your car and then they'll fix it. Describing The Great Simplification doesn't, uh, qualify me or, or anyone to then know what to do. I'm trying to describe it. And it's my hope that there is, uh, uh, uh, a collective learning, uh, and a change in the conversation that creates emergent, uh, ideas, emergent responses.

[00:21:10] So my main goal now is to paint the picture as clearly as I can myself, and then get different aspects, different angles of it from my guests. To further complicate things is we don't know what future is going to arrive. There could be the AI, um, more boost in productivity, more door economy, where we have more growth and more environmental impact.

[00:21:33] There could be The Great Simplification, this financial Wile E. Coyote moment I've been talking about, or there could be a collapse. So how do we plan for those scenarios? I, at this point, don't. I think that I'm trying, I mean, although pro social prepping is one of the categories I think is important, this isn't just a prepping channel.

[00:21:56] Um, there are other ones that exist and, and based on how my farm looks, you don't want to use me as an example on how to prep. I'm still trying to save the whole, um, you know, social system in a way that, that we can go to a kinder, gentler, more sapient economy that, uh, um, includes the other species and the value of ecosystem services into our value system.

[00:22:24] So I'm still trying to breathe life into that vision. Um, I hope this answers questions that none of you even had. Um, Actually, this feels important to me to describe what I'm trying to do and why a solution, uh, for the metacrisis is, is kind of a, uh, a unicorn or a, or a carrot. And the reality is that's not how the world works.

[00:22:53] Um, I have a very, uh, intense personal, uh, frankly, hopefully on deck for next week, uh, about my family. Um, so. Until then, woman Zaja. Talk to you next week. Bye-Bye.