

The Great Simplification

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[00:00:00] Good morning. Last night I recorded a long, intense, heavy, and I think interesting, frankly, because Long because I have a lot to say intense, heavy, and interesting because those are the times we live in. But after sleeping on it, I think the framing of it might have been off. I framed it, given what's happening in the world, as the battles of our time, and I listed over a dozen word pairings that are the battle that we face globally in a macro perspective, all the way down to the metacognition perspective of our own brains and behavior.

[00:00:40] But I'll add the morning after another word pairing that is the battle, and that is the battle of our language. These really aren't battles, they are polarities which are to be navigated and hopefully harmonized. Even the actual kinetic pairings. battles are ones that hopefully aren't binary win or lose but there are some navigation and compromise and integration of the two sides.

[00:01:08] So with that morning after intro, here is the frankly about the battles or polarities. of our time.

[00:01:30] So let's now unpack what I consider to be some of the battles of our times. And. Let's just start there. We're moving from or the battle will exist between a unipolar world and a multipolar world. This is, this last 50 years has all been on the watch of the United States and our sidekick, the United Kingdom.

[00:01:55] And can we peacefully move to a world where multiple countries have a say in the leadership of the direction of the world or not? And can we do that peacefully? Not only is it The unipolar versus multipolar world, which has to do with military power, AI power financial power with the dollar, et cetera.

[00:02:17] But as things unravel in the world, especially with endocrine disrupting chemicals impacting our hormones and our sperm count and potentially testosterone and et cetera, some countries will decline. in population. And that will start feedback loops where people jump ship from the declining countries towards the countries that still have economic potential for an immigrant.

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[00:02:47] And so I think there's going to be feedbacks on feedbacks within and between countries. So the first battle that I foresee is actually between countries and how they fit into the new world order. Another battle which I think is gonna be central to our times is the elites versus the common man.

[00:03:09] And this was evidenced by the recent election in the United States wasn't really about immigration and economic policy was within the Democratic Party and within the Republican Party, but the election really was about class. Was about education and income and wealth. Only about a third of adults in the United States are college educated.

[00:03:31] And for whatever reason Trump and Musk took the role and the mantle of the populist candidates speaking to the common man and woman and they won handily. So, I think as we go forward in time elite versus common man is going to be a perpetual battle. And some of that has to do with education and some of that has to do with poverty.

[00:03:54] And I think we're headed for both within countries and between countries higher, wealth and income disparities. And already this is happening in our communities across the United States. There was an episode, which I'll link in the show notes in Bozeman, Montana, where the average house is 900, 000.

[00:04:12] And there are a bunch of rich people that move in there and the normal local people cannot afford any longer to live in a city where they've lived their whole lives. So I think this disparity especially with AI and the monetary productivity vortex that will be ushered in with a new Trump administration.

[00:04:33] Elite versus common man is a coming battle. Masculine versus feminine. I don't want to talk too much about this because I don't know a lot about it. And I'm not talking about men versus women, but in the same way that our multi level selection from an evolutionary perspective favored cooperation at times and favored competition at times, and both of those are hardwired in us.

[00:04:56] We also have big five personality traits like openness and conscientiousness and neuroticism and agreeableness, et cetera, that form a distribution in our population. And there are evolutionary reasons that these have been conserved over, over thousands and hundreds of thousands of years. Having

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stability and hierarchy and respect to authority and routine and favoring things that have worked in the recent past.

[00:05:26] is an important thing, but also is recognizing new changes and new risks like climate change and people that are open to new experiences and use abstract creative thinking to imagine scenarios different than the one that came before. That has been Adapted to in, in the past. So more broadly masculine traits and feminine traits in our society, in both men and women have allowed us to arrive here in this complex dance of humanity.

[00:06:03] But unfortunately our current system predominantly favors masculine traits of dominance and hierarchy and strength and things like that. And we're we've got a yawning gap of some of the more feminine traits, which is why I think having more women in positions of power in the world headed into The Great Simplification would be a good thing.

[00:06:26] So masculine, feminine, a battle in coming decades. Related to that is individual versus collective. The carbon pulse and the resultant energy surplus has allowed us to live more individual lives as opposed to collective engagements. And I think especially in the United States, again the individual reigns supreme, and the collective is kind of, looked down upon but in the not too distant future, we're going to need the collective again.

[00:07:01] The challenge here is at which, scale of the little Russian doll will be the collective. Is it the family? Is it the neighborhood? The community? The state? The region? The nation? Et cetera. So there is going to be a battle between the individual dynamic and the collective. Humans versus non humans.

[00:07:24] That's a big one. The things we're doing now we have lost the feeling of connectedness with the natural world, and we have caused many of the things in the universe to be perceived as inanimate. inanimate and not that important because if it doesn't matter to human economies, it doesn't matter.

[00:07:44] And obviously there are up to 10 million other species that share this ride through space and time and arrived at this moment in time through a similar evolutionary history that humans have. But they have no say in our boardrooms, in

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our elections. And they are, as followers of this podcast are aware, been gradually and inexorably being snuffed out.

[00:08:10] We've lost 73 percent of the average population of animals in our time. I'm going to have a podcast in early January with Shana Swan who reminds me that the fertility decline in animals is very much matching the fertility decline in humans because of endocrine disrupting chemicals in, in the environment we're losing insects we're losing lots of things at about 1 percent a year.

[00:08:34] This is no accident. Do we care about, The more than human world. So humans versus non humans, definitely a battle there, a battle between the present and the future. We make decisions to continue the present trajectory at a cost to the future we consume instead of invest or conserve the ghost of dopamine past has a huge say in our experience and decisions of the moment.

[00:09:04] You could say another battle is between dopamine and all the other neurotransmitters. Dopamine was important in our ancestral past, but it was only one of a smorgasbord of neurotransmitters and hormones that affected our lives. And dopamine is like the, leader of the one legged stool relative to endorphins serotonin and oxytocin in our current culture.

[00:09:30] And this precludes many wise, better decisions about the future because we are so, conditioned to short term stimulation and immediate feedback that our brains can't make the shift towards wisdom and we're stuck in cleverness in the moment. Another battle is extraction versus regeneration.

[00:09:54] We all know, those who are following this podcast, know that we live in an extractive economy, that our lifestyles are supported by us drawing down the carbon pulse and the energy and materials from geologic time in a couple centuries. This. happens during relatively short human lifespans of 80 years or so, so we feel that it's normal, but it's anything but.

[00:10:18] Whereas we can, we do have the technology and the skills and the information to be able to have regenerative technologies that take the flows of the earth, combine with some technology, and regenerate in a way that's sustainable. not only ecosystems, but the productivity emanating from them towards human and other uses.

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[00:10:39] The challenge is that a regenerative economy or a shift towards that means a much larger, a much smaller scale relative to the 19 terawatt 120 trillion dollar current global economy, but this will be a battle of the future extraction versus regeneration. Related to this is a battle of how we view the world the battle between things and connections.

[00:11:07] I mean, there's a lot of different ways to, to split this efficiency versus resilience, left brain versus right brain. mechanistic versus ecological. There are lots of humans lots of humans in positions of power that view the world as a list of things. And when we view the world as things, we neglect the richness of the ecological tapestry of how everything is connected, how we are part of the web of life.

[00:11:39] And then people would say, Oh, but humans are nature. Humans are nature. Yes. But the technosphere, which we have built with our things, all the things that humans have built is not part of nature, is a mechanistic giant amassing of stuff, which now outweighs all the living things on earth. Not just the animals and birds and insects, but all the forests and grasslands, etc.

[00:12:08] So there is a battle between a worldview of looking at the things in our life as things or as part of connections. As you all know, I frequently quote and use metaphors from the Lord of the Rings and I think Tolkien was so ahead of his time with his themes, even though we're probably ten times more energy and material consumption than when he wrote The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit.

[00:12:37] But there is a book a quote from chap book three, chapter four. I think that I now understand what he is up to. He is plotting to become a power. He has a mind of metal and wheels, and he does not care for growing things, except as far as they serve him for the moment. So this kind of summarizes that we as humans can look at the world as things or we can look at the world as connections.

[00:13:09] Another battle that I can imagine is between activism, and effectivism. So activism is kind of backward looking and destructive and blaming and effectivism is creative, forward looking and planning. One thing that's difficult to realize, but I think followers of this podcast understand that this is what I believe.

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[00:13:34] I think it's the truth, which is why I believe it is appealing to the better angels of our nature will only ever reach a few percent. of our population. And the rest are hungry, ambitious apes. And so I think to tell people all the truth and expand the truth to eight billion humans, you know, it's, the result is the same as do you train a thousand sheep or do you educate and inspire one border collie.

[00:14:08] And I think we, the followers of this podcast, I hope are pro social, pro future, pro planetary border collies because activism on the issues of the day has not worked. So we're going to need to own who we are as an evolved multi talented somewhat delusional hubristic, dangerous species and understand that and plan ahead.

[00:14:37] So I'm hoping in the battle of activism and effectivism, there are more people working on effectivism. Related to that, as an evolved species, there's going to be a battle between the brainstem and the neocortex. And the brainstem, as you know, is the limbic system and reptilian system that has evolved over millions and millions of years.

[00:15:00] Where the neocortex, our thinking brain, is a much newer development. In our social discourse, in our elections low brainstem, emotional power, and subconscious, aversive associations will always beat higher level thought in most individuals. Most of the time. Even the most elegant and intelligent propositions will lose without the majority of irrational support to support them.

[00:15:31] This is not a pleasant thing to say about us as a species, but I think it's true. And people in wealthier societies in the West. Are being told that they used to be wealthier by someone that they imprinted on like baby ducks. And this story is grammatically correct and gets people to elect them.

[00:15:55] And so I think a recognition of our biology and our evolutionary psychology is really central to understand as some small percentage of. people in the world. I mean, that's why this pod, this podcast will never be popular because it comes across and it is elitist because I'm trying to use the best system science that I've learned over the last 25 years to describe the human predicament.

[00:16:23] It's abstract. It's threatening. It's complex. There's no easy answers. The problems I'm talking about are in the future. That's an elite thing to communicate

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to others, but It's not elite in the sense that I only care about a certain demographic or a certain issue. I care about it all and I'm trying to pass the baton to other people who are looking to be effective with their neocortex and their other skills in the world.

[00:16:52] Another battle that we face is fantasy versus reality. And there's two components to this, right? One is that our brains evolved with thoughts and guttural sounds rather than complex sentences. So if I say there is a 300 foot long, great white shark, painted neon pink flying around Los Angeles scooping down to eat white Teslas.

[00:17:23] You all listening in your car or at your dining room table or on your hike with your headphones. Each of you imagined that totally implausible sentence, because I placed the words in your mind, and yet, obviously, that is not factually possible. This is the same with so many things in our non systemically science educated population, that we can utter millions of times more sentences than can exist in our minds.

[00:17:52] a biophysical energy, material, human behavior, ecology, tethered world and our brains didn't evolve to distinguish between these things. So unspecified magic sounds really good to most humans, especially if there is a politician or a leader or a marketer or a corporation explaining why you need this product or this direction.

[00:18:18] Now building on top of that, on the fantasy versus reality, is we now have misinformation, and AI, and algorithms, and big data, and monitoring, and all kinds of things that send us what we like, tell us what we want to hear, direct us to information that isn't true. Which is why I am susceptible to that the same way that you all are.

[00:18:45] But I like to think that the fundamental underpinnings of the human predicament that we are discussing on this platform, the role of energy, the role of materials, the role of ecology, the role of human behavior and how that all interrelates, it allows us to have a filter that we're less susceptible to misinformation and we're more tethered to reality.

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[00:19:10] And yes, we will be tricked just like the other the, as much as the next person, but we'll be tricked less often because it's like looking two or three steps ahead at the headlight, at the brake lights in a snowstorm which is why I'm doing this work is so we can have a better tether to what's really going on.

[00:19:31] As to our individual battles I mentioned earlier dopamine versus serotonin. There's also the sympathetic versus the unsympathetic. No, the sympathetic versus the parasympathetic in our nervous system. We are pulled every day with the chaos in the world and the distractions and the news, et cetera, and our stressful jobs and our anxiety and our trauma.

[00:19:57] To spend a good part of our day in our sympathetic nervous system, which is our fight or flight nervous system. And it will truly be a battle to stay away as much as possible from that sympathetic nervous system and spend as much time as we can in our parasympathetic nervous system. And I'm going to really digress here, but I have a coach who's teaching me how to do this.

[00:20:22] And so several times a day, I take a big exhale. And I pause for five seconds at the end of the exhale and then I just. Gently let the air back in, and that this is one of many tricks to quickly access your parasympathetic more longer term, stable, non fight or flight system. But we're going to need, in all these previous battles that I've mentioned healthy mentally and physically and spiritually humans on the right side of history to play roles in these battles.

[00:21:00] And we're going to need help. We're going to need support. We're going to need information. We're going to need community. We're going to need friends. We're going to need to be in our parasympathetic nervous systems. Another battle is our behaviors versus our values. A lot of people in the world are kind of giving up temporarily after the Trump resounding victory.

[00:21:22] I think that's a mistake. I think it was reasonably predictable. I've been talking about a rightward shift in politics reduction in environmental regulations, et cetera. If anyone has seen my talks over the last four years, this is what I've been predicting. Now is when the real battle of our time begins.

[00:21:43] The real work of the people following this podcast, but our behaviors are separate from our values. And now is the time that Some of us, many of us are

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going to have to stand up for our values, and our values can, at least in theory, trump the short term behavior of our choices. All of these battles that I've described are really part of a much greater battle, the battle of our times, which is that of power versus life.

[00:22:15] And we're near the culmination of 10, 000 years of human history that for 290, 000 years, we didn't have much power because we didn't have anything to hoard. We lived in balance with some hierarchy and some status on the Pleistocene in the savannas of Tanzania and beyond. Then we started to have surplus with agriculture.

[00:22:42] and then the industrial revolution with stored carbon under the earth. Then with finance and the digital creation of power and status and the accordion of wealth that afforded. And now artificial intelligence is truly the eye of Soran of our times. And artificial intelligence is going to merge with energy, with military power, in kind of a race.

[00:23:08] For one ring to rule them all and AI is going to accelerate all the other risks that I just talked about and all the other risks on this podcast. It is kind of the swan song of the human endeavor that, you know, with the combination of AI with Trump winning it, it's The superorganism just got a shot of prednisone or some other steroid and did a snort of cocaine at the same time.

[00:23:40] And this is where we're at. And this is where all the things that we've been discussing, and our values, and our forward thinking, and our effectivism, and our strategies come to bear. Because when we feel grief, It is painful. It is not enjoyable, but it allows us to see and feel with clarity what it is that is sacred, what it is that is really important, and it is a rolling your sleeves up sort of moment in our lives.

[00:24:19] Even beyond power versus life, what's at stake now is really the superorganism versus the mitochondria that it potentially, it's being created in our culture for something that lives beyond the flailing, dying throes of the economic superorganism, which is on its last decade or so of life. Mitochondria are the organelles responsible for energy production in our cells, and they are only passed down from mother to child.

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[00:24:48] And, I think, Planting the seeds of this mitochondria of a culture that comes beyond, that is kind of on the rightward side of all these pairings that I've just listed that is in service of the future, that's more feminine, that's more ecological and less mechanistic, that's more right brain versus left brain, that incorporates the value of the more than human world into our values, our prices, our decisions.

[00:25:17] The superorganism will squash all those things. but a new culture somewhere down the road, who knows what scale, what continent, what population size. Now is the time to plant the seeds for that. So I'll close with another Lord of the Rings quote. which I'm sure you've heard, but I think it's apt. I wish it need not have happened in my time, said Frodo.

[00:25:45] So do I, said Gandalf, and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us. And I think the battle of our times is between who we have become and who we might yet be as humans and as humanity as a whole. I have a lot more to say.

[00:26:13] I hope you're all well. I hope you stay tuned to this channel. I'll continue to host these conversations and our work is just getting started. Take good care.