

The Great Simplification

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[00:00:00] **Dougald Hine:** is founded both on the destruction of cultures and the devastation of nature, at least for those who got to experience it from the winner's perspective,

[00:00:21] **Nate Hagens:** Today, I'm joined with a repeat appearance by social thinker and author Dugald Hein to discuss how to find peace and purpose in the chaotic and unpredictable moment in history. We all live in after an early career as a BBC journalist, he co founded organizations, including the dark mountain project, as well as a school called home.

[00:00:45] Both of which act as information and social networks for those working to understand the ecological, social, and cultural unraveling that is now underway. Dugald is a prolific author and his latest book is entitled At Work in the Ruins, finding our place in the time of science, climate change, pandemics, and all the other emergencies.

[00:01:08] He also co hosts the Great Humbling Podcast and publishes a substack. Called writing home in this conversation, Dougal and I discuss our paths working through what some would call the end of modernity and how that work goes beyond discussions of climate change, ecological overshoot, or any other individual specific crisis.

[00:01:31] We also get a bit personal and discuss what it means to grieve the loss of the future. Our culture has told us to expect while we continue to work towards other possibilities. Before we begin, this platform, the great simplification is not for everyone, but it most definitely is for curious pro future humans.

[00:01:52] If you have friends in your network that would enjoy this conversation with Dugald, please share it. we'd like to grow the community that follow this podcast, but it's not for everyone, but it is for some of your friends. With that, please welcome Dugald Hain. Dugald Hain, good moron. Welcome to the program.

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[00:02:14] Good to be back with you, Nate. I'm bragging about the two words in Swedish that I know. Good work. so, I would love for you to start this conversation off by reading an excerpt from your book, the work, Life in the Ruins, please. All right

[00:02:36] **Dougald Hine:** then, here we go. One evening in the first days of 2020, between the headlines of Australia burning and an assassination in the Middle East, my partner sees a story about a meteor shower that's due.

[00:02:51] Outside, the sky is clear and I catch sight of one straight away, a bright flash traveling across the sky like a silent firework. So we pull out the sun lounger from my in law's conservatory and lie under blankets, staring up. While we wait, my son wants to be told the names of the constellations. He's not yet five, but he knows there are two names for everything, Swedish and English.

[00:03:19] Even when there are only two ways of pronouncing names older than the languages we speak. Orion Taurus The last time I saw the novelist Alan Garner, he told me there's new research on the resemblance between the Greek constellations and the figures seen in the sky by Aboriginal people in Australia.

[00:03:42] The similarities are strong enough to hint at common threads of myth leading deep into prehistory, stories carried out of Africa. How does it work when you wish on a falling star? My son wants to know, does the thing you wish for just pop up, out of the ground? His eyes are wide with recent memories of Father Christmas, and the cartoons he's been getting to watch on his grandparents TV.

[00:04:09] Suddenly I understand why he was so keen on this impromptu astronomic outing. I'm going to wish for a Port Patrol fire engine, he announces. I don't know how to disentangle myself or my family from this way of being, this web of extraction that surrounds us with objects that seem to pop up, magically, out of the ground.

[00:04:33] I don't even know how to frame the question, how to name the work that's called for. One thing I know that helps, one piece of the work, is to gather and share the embers of other ways of being, blowing them gently into flame together. Knowing how much unfinished history we bring to such encounters. As I listen to those who have more experience than I do, of the ways life has been made

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to work in other times and places, one theme I hear is how much work goes into making a grown up.

[00:05:08] It's not something you become by virtue of surviving childhood, or sitting out enough years in school rooms and lecture theatres. When the time comes, it takes a work of initiation, on which much of the life of your community is focused. You have to be cooked in the flames, I've heard it said, and the frame of initiation which your culture builds is the vessel that gives you a chance of coming through the fire.

[00:05:35] Among the stories and skills acquired in such a process, among the experiences described by those who have gone through it, a common element is some form of ritual death. On the threshold of becoming a grown up, you're taken through a staged encounter with your own mortality, an encounter which is taken with the utmost seriousness.

[00:05:58] I'm thinking about this, and about the clumsy, risk filled encounters that bridged this gap, as my friends and I stumbled into adulthood, and a thought comes. So that you do not meet your death for the first time when it comes for real. To be a grown up, it seems to me, is to live alert to consequences, to know the cost of your living.

[00:06:23] It's hard to be a grown up in the world that we have made. The cost is almost unbearable. No wonder our culture seems built to keep us distracted, to postpone the encounter with consequences until the last possible moment. If I insist that we have a lot to learn from the ways in which people have made life work in other times and places, this is not to romanticize the lives of others.

[00:06:50] There is no way back, nor would we want one. The lives of our ancestors were hard in ways we do not like to think about. For this reason, they could not afford the kind of carelessness to which we have been accustomed. Cushioned on millions of years of fossil energy, veiled by the impersonal logic of commodity exchange and the emerald city magic of the shop window display, the level of detachment from consequences which has been normal.

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[00:07:21] Even necessary for participation in our death fueled societies of consumption was, until quite recently, the preserve of mad emperors. Our ancestors could not afford this carelessness. And nor, it turns out. That's

[00:07:41] **Nate Hagens:** so beautiful. Thank you. and I asked you to read that because I saw you in person earlier this year and you read a similar passage to the audience and I had read your book, but for whatever reason, and maybe you can speculate on it, hearing the words.

[00:08:01] Creating pictures in my head of you and your son and the constellations and the story that you unpacked landed in an embodied way, different than sitting on my couch reading your book. Why do you think that is?

[00:08:18] **Dougald Hine:** Well, thanks, Nate. It's good to hear that it landed with you that way. I guess the piece that I bring to the table amongst all of the folks who you were in conversation with and all of us who are trying to puzzle with the strangeness of these times we were born into is that I've spent my life around storytellers of one kind or another and learnt to trust Not that we can magic everything right by finding the new story, but that part of what we need, as the kind of creatures we are, is the way of inhabiting the world, the way of being with the now, that storytelling knows something about how to offer us, and My friend Alan Garner, who I'm talking about in that passage, he once told me about this old storyteller from Uzbekistan who he met.

[00:09:15] And this was probably in Moscow in the eighties or something at some kind of intercultural Congress. And this guy, the first thing Alan said was, you know, he gave me his hat and this had clearly been like a major gesture of cross cultural recognition across the boundary of languages. And then, and then he said, When he was eight years old, this guy, the storyteller, he'd been picked out alongside two other village boys.

[00:09:43] And they'd gone and lived with the old storyteller in his house, been part of the household and all of the work, and travelled and listened and trained with him. And at the age of 18, the other two boys had been sent back to the ordinary path of village life. This one continued as the storyteller's apprentice, and at around the age of 40, he was allowed to tell a story in front of an audience for the first time.

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[00:10:09] That's how seriously these things which, you know, I've kind of clumsily patched together a training in my adult life from finding people who would tolerate me hanging around until I learned how they got to do the things they were doing. That's how seriously they have been taken in human cultures, which according to our logic of development, we're living in incredible poverty.

[00:10:32] I think that tells us something about the extent to which this kind of work of culture is not just a nice to have. It's not just entertainment or luxury. It's actually a matter of life and death and has been in most of the times and places where our ancestors were making lives work and we've kind of forgotten that.

[00:10:51] On the journey that brought us to the mess we're in. But if we're going to show up to the mess we're in, then I think that this stuff is part of what needs to come to the table.

[00:11:00] **Nate Hagens:** I have so many questions, that I have prepared about your book and your work, and now I'm going to go in a completely different direction.

[00:11:10] So does storytelling, I mean, what are the, do you know, the, the ancient origins of storytelling, presumably on the Pleistocene in Tanzania, we told stories, even as language was, was simple. Have you, have you ever looked into the origins of, of storytelling?

[00:11:27] **Dougald Hine:** I've heard some stories about it, but it does seem to be something that's deep within us as, as a species.

[00:11:34] So deep within our, our prehistory, the deep time of our, our kind. And it also seems to be something that relates to the kind of world in which we find ourselves as well. I think that there is something about storytelling that brings us closer to the world rather than taking us away from it. Or at least the ways of telling stories that have mattered to people in many times and places have that quality to them.

[00:12:04] They're not, you know, yes, some of the ways we tell stories around here just now are very much about distracting ourselves and taking our attention away from being present, but I don't think that's why it's been this kind of Life and death

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skill in all of the human cultures that we know about. So it goes a long way back, but maybe it also reflects something about the kind of world that our kind were coming into even before we got here.

[00:12:31] **Nate Hagens:** I don't know if you've seen any of my recent presentations, but, one of my main points is the three best inventions ever by humans, are bicycles, Stories and golden retrievers, because they're things that require very little energy input for a lot of the, the rewards are in things that are unquantifiable for our species.

[00:12:57] And I don't know if you've heard of, or played the game dungeons and dragons, but it's where six or eight people just. Come around and invent, an imaginary world and they go through it with dice and stories and it's hours and hours and hours of no energy and no materials. And they're engaging the creative kingdom of their minds, which I think is really cool.

[00:13:22] let me ask you this. Do stories historically in times of poverty, extreme poverty, like you said, I mean, The story that you're telling and that I'm telling is not a real happy story. Do stories have to be happy or do they have to pull at something authentic and real even if it's not happy?

[00:13:44] **Dougald Hine:** They don't have to be happy, many of them aren't.

[00:13:48] They do have to have some kind of pull of meaning. Within them of finding or making patterns of meaning within the world within experiences that we recognize ourselves in. I think that's probably, I mean, there are, there are other people I can, I'm sitting here talking to you about this and I'm thinking.

[00:14:12] I need to introduce you to my friend Martin Shaw, who's one of the great living storytellers in the English language and who I learned a good deal of this from just watching him in action and hanging out around his work. But yeah, I think it's, you know, the experiences that mean the most in our lives, the experiences that matter the most to us, the experiences that change us.

[00:14:36] Some of them are happy experiences. But plenty of them aren't, and I think, especially to, you know, to stay with the truth of the kind of times we're in, it's

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helpful to be reminded of that. That it's possible to find meaning, that it's possible to have things that matter deeply to you that come out of difficult times.

[00:14:55] The, you know, the artist Lydia Catterall said to me once, she said, I've realized that you can be grateful for something that you could never have asked for. And we talked about it and said, yeah, and the thing is, even when you arrive at that place of gratitude of managing to find something good within something you could never have asked for, that doesn't, that doesn't mean that if you had known that in advance, you could have asked for it.

[00:15:21] I think of, you know, somebody like Nick Cave, the singer and the way that he has shown up to. The reality of grief, the reality of death after the death of his son and mourned publicly and shared the ordinary tragedy of that in a way that's allowed lots of other people to show up and talk and break out of the isolation of their loss and tragedy and grief.

[00:15:47] And to me, that's a personal example of somebody making something remarkable out of something they could never have asked for, but it doesn't mean that if you could take him back in a time machine and offer him the chance, you know, you know what he would say, he would have his son back at any cost.

[00:16:04] **Nate Hagens:** I think I have noticed, especially in the last couple of years, a lot of the people that are deeply engaged with what we call the metacrisis or polycrisis.

[00:16:16] You may call it hospicing modernity. I call it the great simplification are people that experience some tragedy or grief in their own lives, and it acted as kind of a gateway to maybe Allowing the flood of all the climate and economy and war and polarization and all the things to be experienced as opposed to be kept at bay.

[00:16:41] What do you think about that?

[00:16:43] **Dougald Hine:** Yeah, one way or another, you have to go from that kind of arm's length knowledge of facts to something that You're vulnerable to something that that changes you and I'm thinking back for me. It was not any

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grand traumatic experience It was that when I was really quite young still in my mid twenties.

[00:17:04] I Almost accidentally walked away from the beginnings of a career at the BBC and in the months Afterwards had to reckon with this falling a falling aside from the story that you know My parents friends and my friends parents thought that I was living in a particular story of success. And I had to reckon with, you know, my own strange sense of liberation, even though it wasn't a, a kind of deliberate, fully conscious choice, having fallen out of that story.

[00:17:38] And then I had to ask myself, well, what's even worth doing with a life with, you know, however many years there are ahead of me when there's nothing in the university careers service? you know, information sheets that seems to match and from that, just finding myself on a path of going well, you know, I've always had a sense of something astray in the way that, you know, the things that are being taken for granted around me in the society that I grew up in and also.

[00:18:10] You know, from a young age growing up in the 80s and 90s, aware of environmental crisis and the trajectory that we were on. And just through that path of going, well, you know, how can I show up and use the gifts that I've got in a way that actually makes some sense to me, because the thing that looked most like a fitting career showed itself pretty quickly not to be worth spending a life on.

[00:18:36] You know, that was my entry point. Into it. So it was a lot gentler than plenty of folks who you'll cross paths with, but has some of the same character to it.

[00:18:45] **Nate Hagens:** You were aware of the environmental problems that we face in the eighties and nineties.

[00:18:50] **Dougald Hine:** Yeah. Well, I mean, I guess they were there in the sort of background from, I think when you're like eight or nine years old, that's probably when you start to try and make some kind of first prototype of a grownup model of reality.

[00:19:04] You try and understand what they're talking about on the news and so on. And it was the spring of the Chernobyl. Disaster and all sorts of things were bubbling up and coming into view in hindsight You know, you don't know this at the

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time as a kid in hindsight I was coming to that moment of kind of building my first awareness of a wider world Precisely at the moment when environmental issues were coming higher up than they'd ever been and actually higher up than they have been since on the national and international public agenda.

[00:19:35] When you look at those years between sort of the Brundtland Report in 1987 and the Earth Summit in 92, that's really the point at which we didn't have, you know, a right wing that was in denial about climate change. Then we had Margaret Thatcher making speeches about climate change. There was not yet the kind of the driving of the wedge.

[00:19:57] over these issues that then happened later on as a way of distracting us, as a way of stalling our taking seriously the trouble we were in. So it just so happens that, you know, my generation were coming to that awareness of a wider world at exactly that moment, and I guess that left its imprint on me.

[00:20:18] **Nate Hagens:** Not all of your generation, those years I was getting my master's in finance at the university of Chicago and I was reading completely different newsfeeds, than you, were regrettably. So when I read your book and when I've heard you speak, I had this odd juxtaposition that you're telling the same story as I am.

[00:20:40] you're just doing it with more colorful, descriptive, sentences and paragraphs than a cookie cutter stringing together of facts, about climate, about energy depletion. and I found that really fascinating. And, like I, I, I exhaled, in my body, here's someone else who I've never met until recently, and you're telling the same story.

[00:21:10] Basically using poetry. So let me ask you this, Dugald. So a lot of my work, at least ostensibly originally was to pass the baton of the system science of the human predicament to decision makers so that they do advance policy and build blueprints that we're going to need to respond to when there's an international banking crisis, because we've created too many financial claims on a finite amount of biophysical resources and.

[00:21:40] I increasingly wanted to connect the facts. how much of what you're attempting to do and in a similar way I am, isn't really about answers or solutions,

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but it's just bearing witness to the situation that we happen to be alive at. I mean, is it, is there an objective I'm doing this work because. Fill in the blank or is it just the right thing to do to bear witness to the magnitude of the meta crisis or the great simplification and which originally started with you with climate and we'll get into that in a second but what is what do you think

[00:22:21] **Dougald Hine:** I think bearing witness is a pretty powerful thing to do it can be a consequential.

[00:22:28] Thing to do and maybe that's more obvious from the side of the artists and poets and storytellers because we're aware of how attention is a thing that that moves and changes shape and that by drawing attention into different shapes we become aware of it's like you can draw more than one lap one map of the same landscape and so bearing witness is partly just, you know, offering maps that bring things into view.

[00:22:59] That were hidden from the maps that we were told we should be steering by and at that point you can see why what I'm doing and what you're doing feel pretty, pretty similar. I think then the other, the other side of it for me is holding open spaces of possibility. At the start of this book, I go back to something that Paul Kingsnorth and I wrote in the Dark Mountain Manifesto, where we said the end of the world as we know it is not the end of the world full stop.

[00:23:32] And I say a lot of the reason I needed to write this book is because of the damage that can be done by good people with good intentions when we cannot make that distinction. When we find ourselves doubling down on attempts to somehow make sustainable things that are fundamentally unsustainable. You know, when we, when sustainability ends up meaning, as it did end up meaning, sustaining the ways of life of the Western middle classes at all costs, as if that's possible or even frankly desirable.

[00:24:07] And so saying, you know, We, there is a space of possibility between the end of the world as some of us have known it around here lately, and the end of a world worth living for and it, that zone is where the work is. That's where, you know, I don't know if you even know this, Nate, I have a podcast called the Great Humbling, so the really is, no, I didn't know that.

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[00:24:31] Yeah, ed Gillespie and I've been working on that quietly for about four years or so. So when I came across the great simplification, I would say. Wow, we really, we've been speaking the same language, even though we piece these things together in, in different keys so that they will speak to different audiences.

[00:24:49] But, yeah, there's a, it feels like there's a deep resonance in what we're doing.

[00:24:53] **Nate Hagens:** Let me share something. I probably shouldn't say this publicly, but, but I think it's, it's relevant and, and maybe important. so I think your colleague, Paul Kings North, who I have great respect for is, is pissed off at me.

[00:25:10] He is not replied to my, invitations to be on the show. And I suspect it's because 10 years ago or so I wrote something on post carbon Institute. Yeah. that made fun of, badgers running around, people dressed as badgers running around the fire or something like that. Because at that time I was just learning about the severity of all this stuff and I was in a factory.

[00:25:35] To base mode where I wasn't bearing witness. I was like, come on people. We need to act and engage and fight and solve these things. And I wasn't in a space where of reflection and bearing witness and sitting with things and seeing what observes, what, what emerges. And so at that point I was wielding, a club, made up of facts and science synthesis without, I hadn't yet.

[00:26:06] To, and I'm still yet to, I'm just crawling along to integrate the body and the heart and uncertainty and tolerance. And maybe there is nothing we can do. I still am pretty averse to that, that. Thought, but when you told that story, that's what, what came up. and I still feel even if it's quote unquote too late and James Hansen and others are right about, the eventual, equilibrium climate sensitivity being much higher than, than the, the consensus at IPCC, even if that's right.

[00:26:47] I don't think we have the right. As humans alive today to say, there's nothing we can do and let's just enjoy ourselves and be the best humans we can be. I think we need to on behalf of the future on behalf of all of the unborn of ours and other species play a role in what's coming. Having said all that, you and I aren't the ones to say Here's the checklist of all the things we need to do.

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[00:27:16] We're setting the table of the things that are interconnected and you, especially using language that's inviting people to reflect and to walk away changed. And when you walk away changed your worldview shifts, and then we don't know what's going to happen a year or 10 years from now with that human or that group of human.

[00:27:38] So, yeah, if you have any, response to that.

[00:27:43] **Dougald Hine:** So first, Nate, Paul's not great at answering emails and doesn't like speaking to any of us over the internet. So I wouldn't take it too personally, but it's true that when we started dark mountain and what we were, what we were doing, in a sense, was creating a kind of campfire around which it was possible to gather if you had got to the point where the story you had been inhabiting no longer made sense to you.

[00:28:10] The things you were saying in your speeches or articles or whatever it was no longer rang true to you and you didn't know what was worth saying or worth doing and here was a space to which it was possible to come where you could wait for a while. Be in conversation with others not be judged for or feel rushed into action or to answers.

[00:28:38] And for a lot of people who I worked with in those years, it felt like Dark Mountain was kind of a journey to the far side of despair. So sometimes despair is not a thing to be fought off at all costs, but a kind of dark night of the soul that you need to go through. But you go through it, and the answer is not to be stuck doomscrolling for the rest of your life.

[00:28:59] The answer is actually that you let yourself be changed by that. And as you say, you come through and you emerge with your worldview reconfigured, reshaped. Things that you weren't taking seriously before are marked on the map now. There's other kinds of work worth doing. And that's why this book is called *At Work in the Ruins*, the sort of two claims in the title.

[00:29:23] On the one hand, there are ruins around and ahead of us. That's not a thing that can be avoided if we make the right choices. On the other hand, there is work to do. I say near the end of the book. I don't think any of us know. I don't think it's helpful to talk as if we could know exactly how all of this plays out.

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[00:29:43] We know enough to have a sense of how deep the trouble is, but it may be worth working on the assumption that what we're in What's around and ahead of us is one of those great bottlenecks within the history of this living world. And that in different ways, we may have a chance of affecting how much comes through that bottleneck and in what shape, including, you know, how much humanity and in what shape, what forms, what ways of being human together.

[00:30:17] **Nate Hagens:** You may not know this, but one of the three books I wrote with DJ White is called the bottlenecks of the 21st century and what you just said is exactly what we say in the book.

[00:30:28] **Dougald Hine:** I didn't

[00:30:28] **Nate Hagens:** know that. I'll have my staff send you, mail you a copy. So let me ask you this, you talked about Moving through grief and despair, to do the work, do people doing work, in the, the waning stages of modernity, at least modernity, that looks like this at this scale, do they need to go through grief, and despair?

[00:30:57] Is that a necessary gateway or, or not?

[00:31:02] **Dougald Hine:** It's not a, it's not a prescription. It's, it's something that most of us in one form or another are going to meet on our journeys. And that includes in the ordinary journeys of being human and it also includes in showing up to the kind of things that we are talking about here.

[00:31:22] And so just. Naming and having some vocabulary around the fact that it's not a mistake, it's not a symptom of failure when you hit those times of grief or of despair, that it can be a necessary part of a journey and that it doesn't mark the ending of a journey, that, you know, hitting a patch of despair is not giving up in the sense of game over, or it should not be.

[00:31:51] It's an invitation to, Take a step back from what you've been doing to find who are the people who it's worth being in conversation with, whether through the pages of books, whether through conversations like this.

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[00:32:07] **Nate Hagens:** So to reframe Mark Gaffney's, phraseology, we're talking about pre grief, grief and post grief, and the post grief conversation is an interesting one with respect to the metacrisis.

[00:32:21] **Dougald Hine:** Yeah, that, that rings true to me. I've heard somebody use the expression post tragic recently. It might even have been you. Well, that's Mark Gaffney,

[00:32:30] **Nate Hagens:** post tragic. Yeah. There we go. So, are there cultures or sections within cultures that are less Fearful of grief. I live in the United States and grief is not a publicly, approvable emotion.

[00:32:50] Really. I think our culture is, is, sweeps grief under the carpet pretty regularly. Are there other cultures that are different than that? And would they have an easier path towards integrating and doing the work in the ruins as you say in your book?

[00:33:07] **Dougald Hine:** I think nearly all human cultures, before ours, aside from ours, where ours is this kind of, this set of interrelated cultures of late western modernity, have of necessity been better at doing grief, better at living with the reality of death than ours has.

[00:33:31] I mean, Stephen Jenkinson, who I quote from in the book, you might have come across Canadian grief worker and writer and teacher. He, he talks about the death phobic culture of North America today. And certainly Northern Europe has much in common with that. But there are deep roots to this as well. I was reading a fascinating piece on Substack a few weeks ago by Ellie Robbins, where she was talking about the suppression of Lamentation of lament in ancient Greece in the reforms that preceded the founding of Athenian democracy and lament had been a public role played by women.

[00:34:20] And this is a thing that exists in many cultures, the howling, the, the, the wordless expression of grief as part of how death is handled within community. The, you know. Our bodies express almost violently the, the pain what's being done and that that's a necessary part of processing grief. And what Ellie was pointing to is that not long before the founding of the kind of rational Athenian democracy, there had been this period of reforms which included the complete suppression.

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[00:34:57] of these women's voices of lament in the foundations of the culture, which still to this day, the West looks back to as its kind of root ancestral culture. And I wonder whether we're still living with the consequences today and until that, until lament is allowed back to the table, we won't have, you know, we won't have a politics worth trusting for the kind of times that we're, we're in.

[00:35:26] **Nate Hagens:** Let me ask you this. your, your book is at work in the ruins. do we have to be certain there will be ruins? or can the ruins of modernity, be a, a section under the probability distribution said differently. Are you certain there will be ruins and how does that certainty or uncertainty affect your work and your writing?

[00:35:56] **Dougald Hine:** I think it's, it's wise to steer away from claims of certainty and to operate by the exercise of judgment in your work. You know, most cases, when I think about the ruins of modernity, to me, this is not simply about things that lie in store in the future. It's a recognition that modernity is founded on ruins, that people who looked a lot like you and me went around the earth, ending other people's worlds.

[00:36:36] in the name of progress. And, you know, one of the things that I quote near the beginning of the book is these anthropologists, Mario Blaser and Marisol de la Cadena, who say, you know, when we talk to the people we're working with, and, you know, this is including indigenous movements in Central and South America, To them, the, the talk about the Anthropocene coming mostly from cities like Berlin or Stockholm or New York sounds a lot like the world of the powerful becoming sensitized to the possibility that its world too could end.

[00:37:14] after having brought about the endings of so many other worlds. So to recognize that this thing that we're talking about when we use the language of modernity is founded both on the destruction of cultures and the devastation of nature, and that's how it's worked all along. And up until quite recently, at least for those who got to experience it from the winner's perspective, that all felt like a price worth paying.

[00:37:39] And it was taking us on this, you know, endless upward trajectory of progress, and now we're not quite sure about that anymore. We have good reason to doubt that that trajectory continues to be viable. It's, there's an image that I, I

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quote in the book from Bruno Latour, the French philosopher, from one of his last books.

[00:38:02] In English, the book is called Down to Earth, but the French title of it literally translates as where to land. And he says, it's like this. We're on an airplane and this airplane was headed on this trajectory towards the global. And there were right wing versions of that that were about global markets and left wing versions of it that were about social rights.

[00:38:22] But there was this promise of this journey of modernity, this journey of progress towards the global. And the pilot comes on the radio and he says, I'm afraid we're going to have to turn back because that. Destination is no longer available to us. So the plane turns back and you're headed back towards the local, but then the pilot comes on the radio again and says, Bad news.

[00:38:43] there's no longer any chance of landing back at the local either. And Latour's question is, so where's left? And he's like, the only thing that's left is you're coming down to Earth. And it's, you know, Bayo Akomolafe says the same thing. We're coming down to Earth. We won't arrive intact. We're going to be, you know, we're going to be broken.

[00:39:00] We're going to be shaken by it. But our best chance is to get wise to that being the trajectory that's left. And I think this is what you've been trying to, you know, narrate and frame for people in your work. It's certainly what I've been trying to do is how do we, how do we not fight That humbling trajectory, I mean humbling, literally the hum in humbling comes from the Latin word for soil, humus.

[00:39:27] It's the same as the hum in the beginning of the word human. So to be humbled is to be brought down to earth, brought back into contact with the soil. To be human is to be an earthling, to be a creature of earth. So this is, this is the invitation that's left.

[00:39:41] **Nate Hagens:** You're really skilled Dugald because you have this, I was going to say unique.

[00:39:48] It's not unique, but it's special, ability to put into words, things that I already knew, but I didn't know that I knew. and I mean, I'm pretty knowledgeable

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about this space, but, just listening to your last few minutes, those, those things landed with me. yeah. So much so that before I forget, I would really love you to be a frequent, guest on, on a reality round tables.

[00:40:17] I think your, your poetry and, and synthesis of these things would be a kind of like, the great simplifications, Ed McMahon. so I will look for emails in, in the coming months. so Let's get back to your book. So my understanding is that originally you were a climate activist and speaker, focusing on climate communication, how to motivate people, mobilize them into action.

[00:40:44] But in the last several years, you've, you've decided to pivot away from climate discussions. what, what happened, what led you down that path away from your focus on climate?

[00:40:57] **Dougald Hine:** Well, yeah, the book starts with this moment that I had in the second year of the COVID time, when I heard myself say in a conversation with my friend Felix Markard, maybe it's time to stop talking about climate change.

[00:41:13] And I wasn't. Making a statement about what everybody should be doing. I was just talking about my own work and even as I heard those words come out of my mouth, I realized I'm going to have to explain myself and have to try and make sense of how that could possibly be true, even if it's only for me and I was never the person whose job it was to explain the climate science or try Map out, you know, what the package of solutions are.

[00:41:41] My role was always to kind of come into the space in between and try and help us land, you know, what does this mean? How does it change where we thought we were? where we thought we were headed, what kind of creatures we thought we were, what kind of thing we thought history was, what kind of world we thought we were in, try and make room for that.

[00:42:03] And so that was even, you know, from having written the Dark Mountain Manifesto, I found myself brought into a lot of rooms, often at the invitation of climate scientists who were themselves. in that place of recognition of having hit the limits of what they could do, what they could bring to the table, a sense of frustration of it not working.

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[00:42:23] And often the initial invitation into those rooms, you know, here we were, there would be artists and writers and storytellers and indigenous elders and activists and religious leaders brought into these rooms. And it seemed like the frame was we were being asked to help deliver the message from the scientists to everybody else.

[00:42:44] And my role in those rooms was to say, I don't think that's quite how it works. I don't think, you know, certainly I, I was there with a kind of art hat on. I don't think art is a communications tool. It's not an expensive, it's not a cheap alternative to an advertising agency or, you know, a sophisticated extension of a PR department.

[00:43:04] It's something else, something stranger, something less. instrumental than that. But nonetheless, I think we might, there might be good reasons why we're together around this table. And it might be partly because, climate change asks us questions that climate science cannot answer. That can't even be framed clearly when all of the weight of responsibility of knowing and telling us about this is on the shoulders of the scientists.

[00:43:32] For example, how do we find ourselves? in this mess? Is it a consequence of a piece of bad luck with the atmospheric chemistry, that it turned out seven generations down the line that the fossil fuels on which we were building modern industrial societies were having these knock on effects on the climate system?

[00:43:52] Or are we in this mess as a consequence of a way of treating the world, a way of approaching everyone and everything that would always have brought us to this kind of mess, even if the atmospheric chemistry had been And that, you know, that question matters, it has consequences, which way you answer that, it's a very different frame in which to make sense of how we got here and therefore what's worth doing now, but you can't ask that question or frame it clearly if you're starting with the assumption that Climate change is a scientific concept and the work of knowing it is done by science and then the rest of us just need to show up and help deliver this knowledge from science to everybody else so that we act.

[00:44:40] What was changing for me by the time of the, you know, the pandemic was I was becoming increasingly concerned that the politicization of science was pushing us to a place where the idea that you could start a conversation with

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climate change, which is a scientific concept and say, but we need to zoom out beyond the limits of what science can talk to us about with this.

[00:45:06] That was becoming less available because The authority of science was being ramped up by one side politically. We'd gone through this kind of rhetoric in the climate movements of 2018, 2019, of unite behind the science. And then for understandable reasons, the politicians who were having to make difficult judgments in those early months of the pandemic were talking about You know, we're following the science as if that's what science does, as if there isn't also an exercise of judgment and sense making that calls upon things that science cannot simply answer for us one way or the other, involved in how we respond to what science can tell us about the trouble that we're in.

[00:45:56] And so, I just became increasingly concerned that where climate change had been the entry point for some of the people who are most sheltered from the other aspects of the breakdown of the promises of modernity and the trajectories we were meant to be on. You know, it was the place from which a whole lot of highly educated, successful by everyday standards people could find their way to the hospicing modernity conversation that people like my friend, Vanessa, had been starting.

[00:46:30] Instead, there was a risk that talking about climate change was now doubling down on the logics of modernity and we just needed to bet on a more and more desperate geoengineering and the rest of the, the kind of package of fixes that I was seeing being brought more to the center of the, the climate conversations by the beginning of this decade.

[00:46:52] And I just knew that I needed to find another way of framing a conversation and inviting people to a conversation about the trouble we're in and what might be worth doing. That

[00:47:01] **Nate Hagens:** resonates. let me, let me. Let me offer a few things. First of all, when we hear climate in the, discussions, it's fully embedded in modernity.

[00:47:16] As you say, climate change is a problem. The answer is, renewable energy, and some geoengineering. It's all, things versus connections, worldview. So, Climate isn't the problem, right? Ecological overshoot is the underlying problem.

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And the fact that those aspects of human culture outcompeted the wisdom and the other cultures that wouldn't have taken this bonanza of fossil energy and, and created the techno sphere.

[00:47:50] The other problem I have with, I mean, our, our stories rhyme, but they do differ a little bit. I care the most about the natural world. Climate change, the biosphere, the oceans, but I also from a systems perspective know that we will never as a global population or as a national population vote for that, as evidenced by recent elections in Europe and the United States.

[00:48:16] we're going to have to, But modernity is going to have to simplify regardless of what happens. And hopefully there will be some less bad, more benign outcomes for climate and the natural world. But if everyone in the world read your book and understand everything about the metacrisis and they had an open heart and change their values and consciousness, We would then still have to navigate the great simplification to some degree.

[00:48:46] because we're, we're on that airplane that you quoted about and we're turning around to trying to land on the local and there's no landing spot. so yeah, it's. It's a it's a pickle to use Jonathan Rowson's term. So, so building on that in your in your book, you're you're somewhat critical of science itself in the industrialized modern society and and what its role is.

[00:49:16] Can you explain that a little bit?

[00:49:18] **Dougald Hine:** I think it's worth differentiating between the work that's done by scientists and the role that science. as an ideological construct is asked to play. And I have a whole section of the book which is called Asking Too Much of Science, which is partly about, it's a sort of unpicking of my experience of having been quite close to a lot of people within the kind of wave of climate movements that erupted in 2018, 2019, in those years just before the pandemic, and making sense of some of the experiences I had around that, but also putting it within a much longer story, which is the story that has recurred throughout modernity of attempting to replace the fragile relational were of humans exercising their judgment with the promise of calculative reason, the promise that we can just measure everything, work it all out.

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[00:50:21] And then there won't be anything that we have to, Make judgments make difficult decisions about because we will have the numbers telling us what we need to do And you can trace that right the way back to you know In the wake of Isaac Newton at the end of the 17th century. You had the early deists who?

[00:50:41] were who reconstructed Christianity on the idea of You know God as this first cause pressing a button setting in motion a clockwork universe And you look at this and you go, well, this is the most unappealing turn on Christianity that anyone ever came up with. There's no love, there's no forgiveness, there's no, none of the good bits are in there.

[00:51:01] There's no mystery left. But if you put yourself in the shoes of these European intellectuals at the end of several generations of wars where religious differences had created the pretext for princes and warlords to go to war across much of Europe, huge devastation. The idea that. Well, you know, Newton has just given us this way through the power of mathematics to explain this invisible force of gravity.

[00:51:31] They didn't think that they were going to end up as Richard Dawkins style atheists. They thought that they were going to be able to trace this back all the way to God, and then there'll be nothing to go to war over because you had come up with the theoretical explanation and the formula and the rest of it.

[00:51:47] And instead, you know, actually those people were at the heart of many of the new conflicts that arose in, in Europe in the 18th century. And both the French and the American revolutions have strong deist contingents within them. And to this day, one of the things that plays out in American politics is the fissure that then opened up between the people for whom a Christianity reimagined as a scientific formula.

[00:52:13] broke and left them as Dawkinsite atheists on the one side, and the people for whom it broke and left them trying to somehow magic up an alternative version of science in which Genesis is the most reliable science textbook, on the other side, both of which are children of that moment of trying to replace the work of story, of judgment, of being humans together with all the difficulties that entails with the power of calculations and scientific reason.

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[00:52:46] And it's not that those calculations and that scientific reason doesn't bring us lots of good things. It's just that it's asking too much. And whenever we do that asking too much, something breaks under the weight of it. And the same thing happened within environmentalism in the 90s, where we went from an earlier generation of environmentalism that was always deeply scientifically informed, but which was also willing to do the thinking, ask the questions that Science can't do the questions about the why and how did we get here and you know, what are what would lives worth living look like if we can't go on this way and at a certain point in time in the name of growing up and in the name of being invited to the grownups conversations.

[00:53:30] We thought as environmentalists that what was needed was to put that stuff to one side and just present the facts and the numbers and the data and then everyone would have to listen to us and it would all change. And we're living in the ruins of the failure of that, which was a repetition of this, this process of asking too much of science that has gone on again and again in different forms throughout the centuries of Western modernity.

[00:53:55] **Nate Hagens:** I'm going to come back to your mention of, of children on both sides and, and grownups, but please speculate for me, Dugald, what would a society look like, a hypothetical one in the future, or what have you that had all the scientists that we have today working on insects and endocrine disrupting chemicals and climate and new inventions and All the best things that science, helps us understand, but then there's some buffer between that body of work and implementation in our institutions and policy makers and decision makers.

[00:54:39] What, how could a society, use science as a tool, but not a religion, as, as you point out?

[00:54:50] **Dougald Hine:** I don't know. And I don't think that. I think for the reasons that you and I meet around, I don't think the possibility of a kind of smooth enough trajectory that we could get to solving it on that level is really open to us.

[00:55:05] I think the question that is running through the book, which I say at the beginning, this is a question too big for a book to answer, but maybe the book can open it up, is how and in what forms do we manage to bring with us what we would

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want to salvage from the capacities, the knowledges and the practices of science as it exists today into the kinds of worlds we're likely to find ourselves in.

[00:55:32] And I think that the way, part of the way that we have the best chance of doing that is through bringing people who go under the name of scientist and people who don't together in settings that are shaped by by the kind of assumptions that you are asking people to step inside of when they step into the conversations that you're convening because so often within the professional environments that scientists are working in there is a The institutional environment is so set up to the logics of a world that is never going to be made sustainable that there that it's hard to even have the conversations hard to bring the knowledge and the practices and skills they have to a conversation, which says, well, you.

[00:56:29] What if we don't get to keep these kinds of institutions, these scales of operations, but nonetheless, we're trying to bring as much of the good stuff with us as we can and hold it within a wiser cultural frame than one that asks us to do all of the work of knowing. I'll give you one example of how, what I did with the book.

[00:56:51] is starting to contribute to those kinds of conversations. So there's a guy who I mentioned briefly in the book, Richard Smith, who was for a good while the editor of the British Medical Journal. When the book came out, he wrote a review of it in some depth in the BMJ. And he took something from the closing pages of the book.

[00:57:11] I have this list of four kinds of tasks for an age of endings. I say, you know, these are the types of tasks that seem to me to make sense, given the kind of analysis that this book has been operating on. Firstly, there's work of salvaging the good things we have a chance of taking with us from something that is ending.

[00:57:30] Secondly, there's a work of mourning the good things that we're not going to manage to take with us. And that mourning includes telling the stories, because those stories we can carry with us and they may turn out to be seeds in worlds we can't imagine yet. Then there's a work of discernment, of noticing the things that were never as good as we told each other they were, about the ways we've been doing things around here lately.

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[00:57:52] And then the fourth kind of task is a work of picking up the dropped threads, the things that we've been told were old fashioned, inefficient, obsolete, that may turn out to make all the difference in how we make lives worth living on the journey ahead of us. So Richard Smith takes those four kinds of tasks and in his BMJ review of the book says, well, okay.

[00:58:14] Based on my 50 years in the fields of medicine and public health, here are the things that I think we have a good chance of taking with us. Here are the things that are good, but we're not going to manage to take with us. Here are the things that are never, were never as good as we told everyone they were.

[00:58:29] And here are the things we left out of the picture of modern Western medicine that we need to bring back in in order to make ways of doing health that are going to have a chance in the kind of worlds we're headed into. So that's the kind of reframing of conversation where someone can bring their scientific expertise to the kinds of conversations that you and I are trying to make room for, I think.

[00:58:52] **Nate Hagens:** I love that. And we need to do that in every category beyond medicine and education, in manufacturing. At every scale of society, we should at least have that Overton window conversation. With the framing of the great simplification or the meta crisis or whatever, because that iteration between science and story based on science and then back to science, and then into society, that that's what could work.

[00:59:22] So therefore you, you indirectly answered my previous question. Let me, let me move on. You mentioned earlier about children, and, adulthood. So we've had a few guests on the show recently. Bill Plotkin comes to mind, discuss the idea of adulthood, distinguishing between someone's age over the age of 21 and someone's actual, actual developmental maturity, which in our culture can, can often be quite misaligned.

[00:59:55] What does being an adult mean to you, Dugald?

[00:59:59] **Dougald Hine:** Well, I guess it goes back to that passage that I read you at the start that, being an adult in a way that would be worth being is being aware of and taking responsibility for the consequence, for the costs of your being

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alive. And I think in most human cultures that have stuck around for any length of time, That's something that has been culturally held and that's what's in the, the kind of practices that someone like Bill Plotkin can, can talk to you about, you know, those things weren't done because they were nice or ethical.

[01:00:41] There's a pragmatism to these kind of initiations into taking responsibility and we broke that on the journey that got us here when I talk about, these. death fueled societies of consumption, that sort of rather pungent phrase in that passage from the book. It's one of the strangest thoughts that came to me in writing the book was, I was sitting with this idea of the honorable harvest that Robin Wall Kimmerer talks about in her book, Braiding Sweetgrass, and she's, you know, she's describing something which she recognizes as being common to many or all of the Native American cultures across Turtle Island, but there is this kind of common unwritten code.

[01:01:30] of the Honorable Harvest, which is about being worthy of what you take, not taking more than your life and your way of inhabiting the place is giving to the place. And that's, you know, that's how to be a keystone species that's going to stick around. And this strange thought came to me, which is like, once you tap into fossil fuels, you've ruptured that.

[01:01:54] equation, because suddenly you're no longer within the flows and the accumulations of life that you live alongside of as the humans. You're tapping into these vast depths of time of life that was taking place long before there were creatures like us around. And the question, how can I be worthy of what I'm taking?

[01:02:19] Is no longer thinkable. It no longer makes sense in the way that it does as long as the life that's feeding your life is coming within the rhythms of creatures and plants and the rest of it that you're living alongside of. And I think that that's somewhere in the deep roots of why it's so hard to grow up and to be grown ups in this, in this kind of a culture, this kind of a socioeconomic construct, if

[01:02:41] **Nate Hagens:** we had to imagine the cost The cost of modernity per human in the West is almost incalculable.

[01:02:52] It's, it's enormous, and can't really be paid. I mean, we're burning our ancestors to have this podcast. I mean, our distant ancestors, that, that we share

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common ancestors with, but yeah, I mean, that's, Thinking about the cost brings me pretty close to grief right away by thinking about the magnitude, of it.

[01:03:20] **Dougald Hine:** And so maybe this is also, this begins to flesh out that image of the plane that just has to come down to earth and there isn't a landing strip and you're just gonna have to try and bring it down as gently as possible.

[01:03:36] what that is, is getting from being this far removed from an earth in which we're in some kind of relation of what we're doing is giving back enough to be worthy of what it's taking and worthy in a very pragmatic sense, not some kind of fine ethical, you know, trying to be moral sense just because we wake up to this stuff doesn't make it any easier than it was the moment before to be able to answer the question of how then shall we live.

[01:04:10] It's not a, the, you can't get from as far up in the air living in the clouds as we've been to the ground like that. You probably can't get there in a generation. You're probably gonna need the help of some pretty severe turbulence on the, the downward trajectory. But nonetheless, you can try and attune to this as being what's at stake, and that any long term viable way of being human on a planet like ours, in a planet like ours, is going to involve something that would fit that definition of the honorable harvest and then go, you know, which paths are worth trying to explore together in which combinations that might have a chance of helping us soften the downward trajectory that takes us from here to there.

[01:05:01] **Nate Hagens:** And hopefully there's not a mountain in front of us. We can't see and an ocean below instead of land. so recently I interviewed a planetary risk, expert, Luke Kemp, at Cambridge who talked about something he referred to as the stomp. Effect, which describes, in history after a catastrophe, typically intense emergency government interventions are less effective than grassroots responses from the communities themselves.

[01:05:34] And that those government interventions can actually do more harm than good. How does this relate, Dugald to the ideas in your book about where the most effective responses to the end of modernity to landing this plane are likely to come from.

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[01:05:50] **Dougald Hine:** Well, that certainly rings true to a lot of the conversations I've had over the years, and a lot of the things that fed into the book.

[01:05:56] And there's also just a level at which I remember Vinay Gupta saying years ago, in a systemic crisis, you don't want to be where the central resources show up. You know, even before you get to that stomp effect, just because in a systemic crisis everywhere has got something to deal with and only the most, the acute worst affected places are going to get those kind of, the focus of attention of those centralized resources.

[01:06:23] So, there is. A thread running through the book, which is about recognizing the strange helplessness that is the shadow side of what we have called progress and development. And this comes very much from the influence of Ivan Ili, who is one of the thinkers who's shaped my work. And I've worked with many of his surviving friends and collaborators.

[01:06:49] And Elitch would say to us, you know. Industrial modernity, among the things it succeeded in producing, it succeeded in producing the most helpless human beings the world has ever seen, because until quite recently, everyone everywhere had to be part of a community which had, at community level, the skills of producing most of the food it needed, processing that food, looking after the sick and the dying and the young and the old, and passing on knowledge from generation to generation, and burying the dead, building homes.

[01:07:28] And the deal of industrial society is that more and more of those things are, professionalized out from being held within household and community and within becoming a grown up. And instead, you know, your role as an individual is that you fit into one tiny place within very large systems that are now meeting those needs and are almost useless at most of the other things that would once have been part of your role as a member of a community.

[01:07:58] So rebuilding those capacities. Seems to me to be the best preparation that there is for the kinds of worlds that we're likely to head into for all of the reasons we've been talking about

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[01:08:12] **Nate Hagens:** the economic superorganism by its actions and by our outsourcing, the wisdom to the financial markets has capped us most of us at adolescence.

[01:08:25] Because we haven't needed to be a full adult in the community, natural world sort of sense.

[01:08:31] **Dougald Hine:** And the paradox of this is that once we start looking through this lens, we begin to realize that the, the standard official maps of where the knowledge lies. And where the agency and capacity lies within our societies are probably badly distorted.

[01:08:47] There's an Irish philosopher, John Moriarty, who was born in 1938 in rural Ireland, and he used to say, you know, in the world of my childhood, If one morning everyone over the age of 14 had just vanished overnight, those of us who were left could have run the farms. We could have kept our communities going.

[01:09:09] We could have looked after each other and fed ourselves. And he said, and then I went off and went into the world of universities and philosophy and became a professor. And, and according to that world, Where I had come from was a world that was characterized by ignorance. So part of where we get to, if we take seriously what Illich is saying about this production of a new kind of helplessness, is a recognition that the people who are best equipped for navigating the, the things, the skills that are actually going to be need, needed are often not the people who are regarded as having high status knowledge.

[01:09:47] And actually, ironically, you know, the politicization of science that I was talking about earlier, the sort of ideological role of science has meant. that the very people who are the most strongly identified with believing in science are often also the people who are least equipped when it comes to these kinds of practical skills that are what are going to be called for to navigate the world that we're headed into.

[01:10:13] **Nate Hagens:** And they're going to be the last people that are going to be willing to listen to a podcast with Ducal time because it would, it would necessitate grief and a change in identity of, of their place in the world, etc. But

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this is where we're heading. I mean, I was one of those people maybe 10 years ago, thinking that science would, would, Maybe not solve these issues, but, lead the way.

[01:10:42] so in your book, you emphasize the need for something called engaged surrender. Can you describe what you mean by that and why it's important?

[01:10:52] **Dougald Hine:** So this comes from my friend Rebecca Bandt, who is among other things has worked as an intensive care nurse and she was describing the different responses that she witnessed amongst families who had a loved one in intensive care, often after an accident where they, you know, the prospects were either uncertain or it was clear how this was going to end and it wasn't going to end well.

[01:11:19] And she said, you know, what she witnessed was two standard responses, one of which was, you know, people just going into denial and kind of fleeing, literally disappearing from the hospital room and being uncontactable for days because they just couldn't handle it. Another of which, which was kind of the opposite of that, but not much more helpful, was people, you know, leaning obsessively into the data, the information.

[01:11:48] everything they could find out from Google about the particular condition, the particular operations and treatments that this person was having. And then she said there was a third response that was less common, but was extraordinary for everyone when it happened, which is what she called engaged surrender, which was people who were able to be present to what was going on without, you know, leaping ahead without.

[01:12:14] You know, needing to be certain if there wasn't certainty, if things genuinely were uncertain, but who were making the best of the time together, with the loved one, with each other, in the room, and she said, that was an extraordinary thing to witness. And when I read that description, what struck me was how, The dominant response is, again, this is back to this politicization of science.

[01:12:38] I think you can map, and I think that's what Rebecca was doing when she wrote about this, you can map those responses onto something like the pandemic. You can see the people who were sort of wanting to just put their fingers in their ears and you know, get out of there and just not, not deal at all. You could see the

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people who were obsessively leaning into you know, thinking they could protect themselves by obsessively compulsively informing themselves about all of the latest conflicting data from every possible direction.

[01:13:07] And that third move, the engaged surrender of going like, what are the sensible practical things to do here that don't rely on turning myself into a pretend scientist, which is kind of part of what that obsessive compulsive relation to the information looks like which don't involve pretending that I've got a secret deal with the universe that if I just do all the right things, then all the bad stuff will go away that looks a lot like the kind of ways of showing up that I think are being called for now.

[01:13:45] So

[01:13:46] **Nate Hagens:** do you have any advice for people listening who are looking to move into a type of engaged surrender or people who are listening who are working through trauma that comes from living in the middle and stage maturity? What sort of practical tips do you have or suggestions?

[01:14:07] **Dougald Hine:** There's a place on the far side of that, you know, that need to try and make yourself the pivot on which planetary history is going to turn.

[01:14:22] There is a place where you've given up on that and there are still things worth doing. There's a, Way of doing the things that make sense, according to what on your best days you hope are the trajectories that we can still be working for, where you're doing it in ways that are sufficiently a life giving, sufficiently meaningful, sufficiently, you know, grounded in relationship that on your worst days when you can't believe in those promises about how it could all possibly turn out anything other than it.

[01:14:57] You know, ending very badly very soon, the things you're doing still feel worth doing and there's a much greater resilience in finding that kind of life giving, way of doing the work that is called for than if you're doing it with a kind of a voice in your head that says, well, you know, I could be off having so much fun over here, but because I'm a virtuous person, I'm doing this instead, or, you know, I'm doing this because I heard a presentation that said that if enough of us do this, then it's all going to be fine.

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[01:15:31] Do you see what I'm describing here? That there is a kind of, again, we're back to being grown ups, not needing that sort of childish private bargain with the universe. Being able to inhabit the tragic aspects of what it's like to live lives like these in a world like this without succumbing to that, that I think is what the engaged surrender part of it

[01:15:55] **Nate Hagens:** is about.

[01:15:56] That makes sense. Could you give a tangible example of what that might look like for you or someone, you know, or someone listening?

[01:16:04] **Dougald Hine:** I'll tell you a story that embodies it for me. There's a book that arrived in The Post a little while after At Work in the Ruins came out, and I got a note from the author.

[01:16:15] Her name is Maura O'Connor. The book is called Ignition, Lighting Fires in a Burning World. And she said, she wrote to me, she sent me the book because she'd read At Work in the Ruins and she felt like the story that she was telling was an example of what the work in the ruins looks like. And I read it. I was like, yeah, this is exactly that.

[01:16:37] So it's the story of someone who's a, you know, a New York journalist, science journalist. And in the background of the beginnings of the book, you have this sense of being part of a milieu of people, many of whom by that point in time, where she started this project that led to the book, were in that kind of pit of despair over climate and, you know, just couldn't see anything worth working for or were trying to kid themselves into a sort of implausible wishful thinking version of optimism in order to keep going.

[01:17:12] And what she does is she goes off and trains as and works as a wildland firefighter and controlled burn fire setter. And in the story of the book, you, you follow her into some of the hell of, you know, there are a couple of chapters in the middle of it where she's working on the fire line and the mega fires in California that are really a bit like Cormac McCarthy's The Road, but you see her being changed.

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[01:17:40] by learning useful skills alongside and learning them from people who do not have her education or social status, who probably didn't vote for the same candidate in many cases that she voted for last time there was a presidential election. And you see the genuine respect and love that builds up between her and the people she's learning from and working with.

[01:18:03] You see the strange coalitions of people, the scientists who've been working on the stuff that goes missing from the big debates around fire and are capturing the nuance and bringing that to work alongside the experienced firefighters, the indigenous people from traditions, which know a huge amount about the role of fire.

[01:18:22] in North American ecosystems. And these people working alongside each other, even praying alongside each other. There's a scene where they're getting ready to do a controlled burn and they're all in a circle and three prayers are offered up, two in native languages and one in the name of Jesus. And you get a picture of how.

[01:18:41] When we start to learn skills that were not the things that we were praised for if we're highly educated people in the journeys that led us to the kind of social and cultural status we might have enjoyed within the world that is not going to be made sustainable, we begin to see a path beyond the ending of that world in a way that's harder to see as long as we're sat.

[01:19:02] trying to talk about, you know, how soon is it all going to be over from offices in big western cities. And so, you know, I see other stories like that, that involve people getting involved in land and food. You know, what you get involved in is going to depend on who you are and what calls to you and what skills you have to bring to the table.

[01:19:22] But there's a pattern that I think Mora's book really exemplifies there of what it looks like to be humbled in a helpful way.

[01:19:30] **Nate Hagens:** Do you think we'll see the end of modernity in our lifetimes, yours and mine, Dugald?

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[01:19:35] **Dougald Hine:** I think it's a bit like, remember the future is already here, it's just not evenly distributed.

[01:19:42] Right, right. The future is already over. It's just not evenly distributed here in Sweden. There's this history of Sweden as Valens modernist a land the world's most modern country Which was really both a self image and an image that lots of other countries in the West Had of Sweden for a good part of the 20th century and I'm always threatening that one of these days I'll write a book called the world's last modern country about what it's like when the tide of modernity is gone going out and you're sort of left marooned furthest up the beach because that's a bit like the disorientation that Sweden has navigating these things today.

[01:20:20] So I think it's all patchy and I think that, you know, things that in hindsight will get written about in ways that make them sound like they were very rapid unravelings when you live them in the present tense. They form the background against which the ordinary everyday foreground events of your life are playing out, and that's probably going to continue to be.

[01:20:42] What it looks like most of the time

[01:20:44] **Nate Hagens:** that feels right to me. do you have any personal advice? given your breadth of Experience and thinking about these issues to the viewers of this program who are also quite fluent in the metacrisis Framing what have you learned and what sort of advice would you give?

[01:21:06] **Dougald Hine:** I think the, the thing that I've learned just in this past year is a greater recognition of the extent to which the uninhabitable earth that in lots of climate conversations we were threatening people with as a prospect later this century actually distracts from recognizing that there are already lots of people around us who are experiencing the absence of a habitable world.

[01:21:37] There are lots, especially young people, who are not experiencing a world worth staying alive for. And that would be the case, even if the IPCC would come out tomorrow and go, guys, Terribly embarrassing. We got our sums wrong. You can release as much CO2 as you want. You know, that's about all sorts of different things.

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[01:21:54] Only parts of which are on the ecological side, parts of which are on the cultural and the human side that are dysfunctional and counterproductive about the ways we've been doing things around here lately. And it might be the case, I don't believe that it is, but it might be the case that you could come up with some wonderful technical magic wand solution that would.

[01:22:16] fix the uninhabitable earth problem and like just somehow get rid of climate change as a threat and you'd still have the uninhabitable world problem. Now in the world we're actually in, I don't think it's likely that that technical magic wand is going to come along and so I, I think that turning to, the absence of a habitable world and starting from there, starting, as you were saying earlier in this conversation, Nate, with how many of the things that make life worth living.

[01:22:45] Don't have a very heavy footprint. David Fleming used to say this. He used to say, yeah, I know that we all quote the, the thing. Is it from Gandhi of the world has enough for everyone's needs, but not for everyone's greed. And we talk about needs and wants, and we say, Oh, it's the wants that are destroying the earth.

[01:23:05] He says, you know what? I'm not sure. I think the things I want are mostly quite humble and human and resemble things that my ancestors three or thirty generations ago would recognize, while the things that I need in order to participate in a modern society, like a car, like, you know, houses of the scale that we build and live in today, as badly insulated as many of them are, etc.

[01:23:29] Those things, the things that it's hard to opt out of starting from here, they are actually what have the big heavy footprint. So recognizing that the things that make us come alive are often actually some of the humbler and You know, treading lighter things, and if we can create pockets of habitability where people, especially young people, have the experience that there's a world worth living for, then together we can go about, you know, the negotiating the surrender of lots of the things that Right now, as part of this techno economic system, we can't imagine living without, but that don't actually add very much to the quality of anyone's life if it weren't for the fact that they were dependent on them for being able to pay the rent.

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[01:24:21] **Nate Hagens:** So you, in addition to your writing and, the great humbling podcast, you, run something, I believe, with your partner called a school called home. Is that a school for young people? And, I asked. Because my next question I ask all my guests is how would you change the advice you just gave for young humans?

[01:24:44] and are you doing that in your school in Sweden?

[01:24:47] **Dougald Hine:** So our school is people of all ages. It's, we say it's a gathering place and learning community for those who are drawn to the work of regrowing a living culture. So, parts of that take place in online spaces where we're joining up people from all around the world to travel more deeply into the kind of things that I've been talking with you about today.

[01:25:10] Parts of it happen quite humbly in this old shoe shop that I'm sitting in speaking to you from. Now, as we just learn how to put into practice in this small community where we've been living for the last three and a half years, What it looks like to show up and get back involved in community and to practice being part of a living culture here.

[01:25:33] **Nate Hagens:** What are the barriers to our listeners starting their own versions of a school called home and the communities where they live?

[01:25:40] **Dougald Hine:** Well, over the last five years or so, since we started the online side of the school, one of the really heartening things has been watching people go on journeys of precisely starting up their own kinds of you know, kitchen table institutions, where we say it's a school that starts from the conversations that Anna and I bring together around our kitchen table.

[01:26:01] And there's that idea that that very humble scale of conviviality has actually been quite central to how humans have made life work and solved their problems at community scale throughout. our species history, and therefore we need to build up those muscles, get back into that practice. And so I think about, you know, one of our participants, Frances, who started the Spencer Street Folk School on her street in, you know, a suburban area in an ordinary American city.

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[01:26:32] Just her and a friend who she'd been talking to, going knocking on everyone's doors and talking to them about, you know, What do we do if the electricity goes down for a few hours? Are there some things we could be working on together? And over a couple of years, that's been building up into a tiny institution.

[01:26:49] At the other end, you've got extraordinary radical projects like the, the peasantry school at Sand River Community Farm in upstate New York, where Adam Wilson has been living for four years, farming completely in the gift economy outside of the logic of market exchange and being supported. by his community and building the relationships that's making that possible.

[01:27:13] So one of the barriers that people often encounter is that they feel like it has to be big in order to be worth doing, and it doesn't. Like it's a long journey that someone like Adam has been on that's taken him to the place where he's involved in an experiment as wild and deeply inspiring as that, but you can start on that humbler scale.

[01:27:34] You can start with inviting a few people over for dinner or just paying attention to the things that are already going on and getting involved with some of the local associations or whatever it is in the place where you live, and there are going to be different obstacles depending on where you are and where you're starting from.

[01:27:53] But when you think about it in terms of, well, what's something that if it were just two or three of us getting together once a week or once a month would be worth doing, and that that might be the seed of something that has life in it. That's kind of, that's where, that's where I tend to encourage people to, to begin to, to experiment.

[01:28:13] **Nate Hagens:** And, revisiting a question I kind of asked a little bit ago, what sort of advice do you have for young humans, 18 to 25, becoming aware of, of, the potentially uninhabitable earth and uninhabitable world, our current culture and economic system?

[01:28:35] **Dougald Hine:** Generally, when I get to hang out with people that age, rather than give them advice, what I mostly try and do is get them to tell me more

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about what it's like being that age. Because they're the, the group who are least likely to find their way to a school like ours at the moment. Our participants tend to start from late 20s onwards, partly because You know, if you're at that age group, you're likely to still be caught up with an existing educational institutions that are preparing you for a world that isn't going to be there in your adulthood.

[01:29:07] **Nate Hagens:** They're fully captured by modernity, that age group.

[01:29:10] **Dougald Hine:** They're often very, very troubled by it. but it's Hard. It takes, I remember being in my early to mid twenties and the work of just puzzling through the bits that were true and the bits that were missing from the maps that I had grown up with in order to start plotting a course of my own.

[01:29:29] So I guess one thing I would say is it made an enormous difference to me. at that age to find a few grown ups who were out there ahead of me, who just modeled the possibility that you could be a grown up in a way different to many of those who I had seen in my life up to that point. And I remember reading Alistair Macintosh's book, Soil and Soul.

[01:29:58] which is about the campaigns that he had been part of in Scotland, but also about the deep cultural roots of the struggles that he was involved in. And he, I guess when I read that book, he was probably about the age that I am now, somewhere in the second half of his forties. I read that age 25 and I sat down, it's the only time I've ever done this.

[01:30:19] I got to the end of the book and immediately sat down and wrote to him and he wrote back to me and that meant a great deal. And I think that One of the things that you need at that stage in your life is to find a few folks who seem trustworthy to you in the way they're showing up. And probably for those of us, you know, my age or older, part of how you prove yourself trustworthy is by not pretending to have all of the answers.

[01:30:45] Another part of it is by not putting all of the weight. onto this kind of idealization of, ah, your generation are going to be the ones who are going to do it, which I definitely saw kind of happen in that moment around Fridays for the Future and so on in a way that is not terribly helpful to, to anyone.

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[01:31:04] So I guess those are the kind of conversations that I would be getting into with, with folks of that age, but also just wanting to, wanting to hear more about how it looks from there.

[01:31:16] **Nate Hagens:** I agree. You follow this podcast. So, you know, this question is coming. I'm curious as to the co founder of Dark Mountains response to what would you do if you had a magic wand with no personal recourse to improve human and planetary futures to gold.

[01:31:37] **Dougald Hine:** I remember. Martin Shaw, the storyteller who I started off talking to you about, being asked a similar question. And he said, without, without pause, he said, I'd switch the whole internet off for a month and just sort of break the trance that these technologies have over our lives. And obviously that's a sort of.

[01:32:00] An imaginal proposal rather than a kind of literal one, but maybe in tune with that is I would, I would figure out something that I've been talking with people about for years and haven't figured out fully, which is what does 12 step for a whole culture look like? You know, what does an equivalent to Alcoholics Anonymous?

[01:32:27] where the addiction is on the scale of a whole culture or a whole society look like, I would wave my wand and there would be rooms that had the same kind of quality of broken honesty and of people who don't share very much in common. In terms of their status or their professional, their life experience, aside from this one shared experience of the thing that brought them to the door of that room, I would figure out what that looked like for us collectively

[01:32:57] **Nate Hagens:** as societies.

[01:32:59] Maybe step number seven on the 12 would be a we're very soon going to do an experiment where we turn off the Internet for a month. And here's how you prepare for that. And step number six would be turning off the Internet. For a month, because I, I agree these little dress rehearsals we have like COVID and when there's a hurricane in a city and we have to live differently.

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[01:33:22] And then we go back to the way things were though. Those are learning moments. So I wish there was an ability for us to have a dress rehearsal, for post modernity, but I'm not sure how feasible that is, but it's been wonderful. Dougal, do you have any, closing words, for our listeners?

[01:33:42] **Dougald Hine:** I guess the thing that I always try and bring to the, the closing of this kind of conversation is just this humbling reminder that none of us know how this story is going to end.

[01:33:56] None of us will actually get to see the ending of the story. I think it's the really vanishingly unlikely that the whole wild human experiment is gonna be. Over within the lifetimes of those of us who are listening to this conversation and to say that is not to downplay the amount of trouble around and ahead but it's possible to take apart in a story without having to see without having to have any guarantee of the ending of it and for that.

[01:34:28] nonetheless to bring meaning for you to come alive in showing up to the trouble and Like that journey that maura o'connor went on you're going from that place where you're just overwhelmed by the whole information flow of the trouble to finding a place somewhere along the front line encountering fire at close quarters as something mysterious and powerful and enchanting and not just as a kind of distant terrifying threat and there are equivalents to that that are waiting there for all of us if we choose to take that.

[01:35:06] path into, what we said in the Dark Mountain Manifesto, the, the hope beyond hope, the, the paths that lead to the unknown world that lies ahead beyond the ending of the world as we've known it around here lately.

[01:35:22] **Nate Hagens:** Thank you so much to gold for your time today for your wisdom and your continued, work in, in midwifing, a space for like minded people or around the world.

[01:35:33] most definitely to be continued. You're a good dude.

[01:35:36] **Dougald Hine:** Thanks, Nate. It's always a pleasure to talk to you. Take care.

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[01:35:39] **Nate Hagens:** If you enjoyed or learn from this episode of the great simplification, please follow us on your favorite podcast platform. You can also visit the great simplification. com for references.

[01:35:51] And to connect with fellow listeners of this podcast, check out our discord channel. This show is hosted by me, Nate Hagens, edited by No Troublemakers Media and produced by Misty Stinnett, Leslie Batlutz, Brady Heine, and Lizzie Sirianni.