

The Great Simplification

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[00:00:00] **Nate Hagens:** Greetings, the world is full of chaos, we have tariffs, and AI, and Russia, NATO, Ukraine, Europe, US, war, and interest rates, and gold, and bitcoin, volatility, and Poverty and inequality and polar vortex and climate and biodiversity loss and polarization. And we get so much information, so much stimulation, so much cultural smorgasbord pulling us away from what an individual human stands for.

[00:00:49] I have a lot to say about many of those things. My work the last 20 years is to, describe using science, the underpinning biophysical macroeconomic framework of the human species, of the human predicament. But increasingly, I feel less about explaining and describing, and more about feeling.

[00:01:30] I increasingly am aware that lots of people, when they hear about our predicament, ecological overshoot, where we are mining, fossil energy and minerals millions of times faster than this Earth. sequestered them and in an eye blink are drawing this down. And as I've said, in our movie animation, turning billions of barrels of ancient sunlight into micro liters of dopamine.

[00:02:03] There's a lot of threads that are coalescing for me. one is that. The way we're acting today is downwardly caused by the collective emergence of this power dynamic. Combine humans with a lot of energy surplus and the default path is what's happening now. That doesn't mean that's who humans are. It means it's who our social comparing primate nature is out of context of our small, bands on the Savannah, of a hundred, 150 people thrust into this world with massive, material surplus and.

[00:02:49] digital claims on top of that, and now AI turbocharging the whole thing. I increasingly see that the energy transition is not about What kind of energy, or what kind of battery, or what kind of, supply chains or systems. It's about how we use energy. How we relate to each other. How we relate to the natural world.

[00:03:15] And this starts within us. Not external to us. And this is why the ghost of dopamine passed. And how our brains integrate with our bodies is central to the

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different landing spots of the human predicament. If you walk into a room and you see a dog, a cat, an Xbox, a computer, a toaster, a microwave, a couch, a book, a deck of cards, a painting, a pad and pen of paper, a croissant, a refrigerator, all of those things provide the brain services for humans.

[00:03:58] But how we engage with them depends on our own history, our own, pattern, our own neural pathways that are, emblazoned in our brains. And so, what we face, on the horizon, is, a cascade of different catastrophes and, speed bumps, and interruptions en route to various singularities. we've already passed an information singularity, because anyone that really has to be professional in a topic, having a PhD isn't enough.

[00:04:44] You have to have AI. There are other singularities on the horizon. the big one, famously coined by Ray Kurzweil, is that AI will improve itself increasingly without human control. And at some point the AI can automate everything. and then either Emergently grow its own self preservation instinct, to see us as kind of a carbon based, species as a threat, or they don't get that impulse and, they become subservient to some human CEO, and that CEO becomes transhuman, And a different species to the rest of us with different values.

[00:05:35] yesterday I had a conversation with Audrey Tang, the former digital minister of Taiwan is a fantastic podcast about open societies. And instead of the singularity, which, Audrey defined, We talked about a plurality because a singularity in the way that we're headed is the default path for a social species finding a bolus of ancient carbon energy, but it is not the default for us as humans.

[00:06:05] One of the core tenets of this podcast is that we are at the 11th hour. Using narrow boundary metrics, narrow boundary pursuits, outsourcing our wisdom to the market system, and it's wide boundary wisdom and longer term systems, coherence that is needed. So the singularity is itself. A purely narrow boundary goal that is tethered to dopamine when we really need a future that is the whole portfolio of our ancestral neurotransmitters, oxytocin, which we get from community and bonding and serotonin.

[00:06:54] So this is kind of a long way of saying that despite all the chaos in the world and how busy I am trying to explain, the human predicament to, pass the baton and engage people and organizations towards building responses ahead of

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time. I woke up with a long to do list at 5 a. m., and we had a blizzard here, in west central Wisconsin.

[00:07:24] It's so beautiful outside, and windy, so before it got light, I sat with coffee, and instead of scanning the news or slacking with my team, I sat there and listened to Brian Eno, and I wrote a poem. Which I'm not going to read because it's personal and intimate, but just the act of just sitting there creating words with some coffee, with the wind blowing outside.

[00:07:52] The singularity seemed not only distant, but to be fought. And we as individual humans, our only recourse is to form groups, small groups, larger groups that are connected, that have a connective tissue of bond and creativity and purpose and meaning. Yesterday, I presented to the senior leadership of the International Red Cross, gave them an overview of, the great simplification and the various risks and scenarios we had, coming ahead.

[00:08:34] In addition to the, five horsemen that I usually talk about, The financial overshoot, geopolitics, complexity, the social contract and ecological degradation. I now explained the accelerated move towards artificial general intelligence and the increasing lack of governance and takeover of open society freedoms.

[00:08:59] And you might be surprised at what I recommended to them as a response to an organization that has 20 million volunteer members around the world. My response was the same I give to individuals living in communities. I think, it's too late now. To tweak and, support, the current system days are numbered.

[00:09:29] I think it's obvious to people paying attention and the calling now is to create rocks in the river. In your communities. In the case of the Red Cross, perhaps in lots of communities across the world where 2%, 3%, 5% of humans are mature wise, have boots on the ground can squint and kind of soften the gaze and see what's coming and act as anchors for when the water starts rushing faster.

[00:09:59] They are solid. They have a strong foundation, and if there's enough of those anchors, enough of those rocks in a community, in a neighborhood, in a region, we support those around us, including ecosystems and those species that don't have a say. and if there's enough, we might even change the direction of the water.

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[00:10:23] so I think. At the end of the day, the ghost of dopamine passed in each of us, it behooves us to pause and recognize the best of humanity. The best of humanity is not what the market and what society is telling us. The best of humanity we know. it's walking barefoot in green grass and smelling a freshly washed baby and holding hands with a loved one and writing a song and sitting under a tree and playing cards with some of your best friends and all the best things in life, that don't need a lot of dopamine, material, energy, treadmill throughput.

[00:11:17] And we have to look inward, and the more of us that are psychologically prepared for what's coming, and the more of us that connect with the others, the better the default path, is going to be. So I'm not going to read my poem, but I'm going to read a poem. just because it feels right today in a blizzard, when I plan to do a frankly on draining America first, or, the gauntlet of aggregate probability or a plea to philanthropy.

[00:11:53] These are some of my factual graphic, not graphic, graphical, based franklies that I plan to do in the near future. but today I just wanted to express what's in my heart. and how I'm feeling and, the poem I'd like to read is called The Second Coming by William Butler Yeats. Turning and turning in the widening gyre, the falcon cannot hear the falconer.

[00:12:22] Things fall apart, the center cannot hold. Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world. The blood dimmed tide is loosed and everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned. The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity. Surely some revelation is at hand. Surely the second coming is at hand.

[00:12:49] The second coming. Hardly are those words out when a vast image out of spiritus mundi Troubles my sight. Somewhere, in the sands of the desert, a shape, with lion body and head of a man, a gaze blank and pitiless as the sun, is moving its slow thighs, while all about it, real shadows of the indignant desert birds.

[00:13:18] The darkness drops again, but now I know. That twenty centuries of stony sleep were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle. And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, slouches towards Bethlehem to be born. Write a poem today, and go for a hike, and ignore all the stories of bombs and blood and chaos and AI.

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[00:13:51] I'll be back next week, with some more fact led, thoughts about our human predicament. love you all.