

The Great Simplification

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

[00:00:00] **Nate Hagens:** When I started this work, or this inquiry 25 years ago, I was really focused on the supply side. Like how much energy, is available, what are the impacts of that energy? What are energy alternatives? And more and more I'm turning the demand side. what does it mean to. Be happy and healthy and connected to the web of life.

[00:00:24] How much energy do we need? How is our relationships with others? And I think there is a unsustainability of our energy and material throughput, but there's also an unsustainability of our social relationships, both the number of them. which are fully supported by, the energy dynamics of the carbon pulse and social media and flights to different cities and countries and conferences and the quality of the relationships.

[00:00:57] we can't have. Hundreds and hundreds of real relationships that are healthy because that requires time and effort and full attention and awareness of being in real relationship and conversation with the other human. That can't happen with T status seeking transactional interactions. So today I would like to talk about, our ancestral social brains and the very real musical chairs dynamic, that we are in with respect to the number and the quality of our social interactions.

[00:01:50] So of all the topics I cover, on this platform, some I am kind of, slightly confident in some, I have medium confidence, some I have a lot of confidence in that category is the fact that we are evolved social primates. Our minds, in addition to our bodies, are a product of what worked in our evolutionary past.

[00:02:16] For instance, the sclera, the whites in our eyes we're the only ape that has such a proportion of sclera, and this is because theory of mind and evolved intent of what did that other person. Doing. We have a small mouth, which suggest cooperative, hunting and eating in the past. We have very little hair.

[00:02:37] We are bipedal. There are many epidermic traits like ear lobes or blue eyes, or limb bar ridges in the eyes. All these things led to evolutionary or sexual selection. in the past, however, our brains just as much as our bodies. Are a product

The Great Simplification

of what worked in the past. If you say roughly, it takes, that women reproduce at the age of 20 historically, just to make the math easy, that's 15,000 generations of modern homo sapiens.

[00:03:11] the vast majority of that all but 500 of those 15,000, were pre agricultural revolution. And we've only had 12 generations since the founding of the United States. And. And one or two generations, since the founding of the internet and social media. So there's a prominent, theme in evolutionary psychology called Dunbar's Number, which is the social brain hypothesis, which is that certain primates, because of the social arrangements, had to develop an advanced neocortex.

[00:03:46] And Robin Dunbar, extrapolated that because of the complexity of the social arrangements, of our hunter gatherer ancestors. Roughly 150 individuals was about the capacity that we could have stable, meaningful relationships with. And that was kind of the midpoint. I think it was between 50 and 300 was the sweet spot.

[00:04:12] And there are some, critiques of that analysis. But I think what can't be critiqued is the fact that for most of our past, we grew up in communities, of relationship, people that we had relationships with, that we saw every day, and we paid deep attention to those relationships. And, being ostracized from those groups was, a death sentence back then.

[00:04:41] but if we bring this to today, I. We can't have full, stable relationships with everyone we know. One of the, the hallmarks of the social brain hypotheses is we have different hierarchies of relationships, and there's like an inner core, your family, and your really, close friends.

[00:05:03] And then there's an outer circle, and then some. Kind of Okay. Friends. And then there's a fringe people that you've met and know, but they're outside of your network. I have 1800 people's phone numbers on my phone. I don't know that I am, the average person because I have a podcast and, a lot of social connections.

[00:05:24] I. But I looked, this morning and I added up how many, messages, either video or text I sent last week on WhatsApp and Signal and, the SMS. it was over 200, on signal and about 150 on WhatsApp and about 120 on the SMS. This got

The Great Simplification

me to thinking, it got me to thinking about Ian McGilchrist, believe it or not, who told me, and I believe he said that in the podcast, that the greatest gift that humans can give to another human isn't money.

[00:06:07] it's related to time, but not time. Exactly. It's attention. It's full attention to the moment, to people, to nature. to art, and that what has happened, one of the things that's happened in the Supernormal s stimuli, smorgasbord of modern culture is that the left brain reductionist, transactional aspect of our hominid brains, has been hijacked and has become the master and not the emissary.

[00:06:45] and that full attention. Like full concentration focus, listening to the other person or the bird or the painting, is really becoming a rarity. And yet that is the ultimate of human expression is to have full attention. But how can you have full attention to hundreds or many hundreds of people?

[00:07:14] I don't think you can. And so, I. A story from a friend of mine, who is kind of a psycho nott and, He lives in Europe and he does, mushrooms and ayahuasca and has different experiences, and he and his partner, periodically do MDMA, or ecstasy as, a marital counseling tool because it improves their relationship, because, It's love and bliss and connection and all that. And I was talking to him last week and he said, my girlfriend told me something really profound. She's like, I don't really like doing MDMA. It doesn't make me feel great, but the reason I like doing it, it's the only time that you pay full attention to me.

[00:08:06] It's the only time that I feel seen by you. And I was like, whoa. 'cause that kind of hit me because in my own life. I'm so busy, and again, I, this isn't about me. but I'm using myself, as an example of a human in the belly of the Superorganism in the modern world, trying to, you know, do the right thing and manage my relationships and my work and my personal life and everything.

[00:08:36] And I, I don't think I'm that dissimilar than the average person. There are a few people in my current life that I focus on every single word they say. I look them in the eye when we're together and I am riveted with attention. I can do this when I meditate. I can do this. I with my ducks. I try to do this when I'm interviewing podcast guests and those of you that have followed me from the start, I've gotten a lot better.

The Great Simplification

[00:09:08] I used to, either get distracted or I would interrupt the guest, and I'm doing that much less because I'm learning. I've been doing some meditation. I went to this Maha Mudra retreat where awareness and attention is the ultimate. Not meditating and forgetting and trying to clear your mind of anything, of everything, but actually to have full awareness of everything in your sphere, which is sounds, and sights and smells and thoughts, and even the self is not real.

[00:09:42] It's just one of the things that we come across in our awareness. So in my life. There are people that I do because I'm so busy, I don't have time to listen and be fully present for that person, even though that's what they need and that's what they deserve. and I find myself interrupting or being impatient and where I've gotten is I just don't respond.

[00:10:13] About 40 of my WhatsApp and signal messages from last week are recordings from people. That I haven't even listened to. and that makes me feel shameful, and that I'm not being a good friend. but. Big picture flying up high for the aerial view. how does Dunbar's number, which is our ancestral heritage of being able to manage around a hundred, 150 real relationships, coupled with the carbon pulse and the social media who's grabbing our attention, reducing our attention spans?

[00:10:54] And the fact that we are on the precipice of The Great Simplification. How does this all fit together? I don't know the answer because I think we can't have meaningful relationships with that many people. I. So that means you either have partial relationships with a lot of people, or you consciously focus on, these are the meaningful relationships I'm going to have.

[00:11:20] Or you just delay 2, 3, 4 weeks before getting back to people, but then it's not even a real relationship because you can't have intermittent of 2, 3, 4 weeks. The real upshot of this is at some point. The carbon and available credit, smorgasbord that we've become accustomed to is going to slow or stop.

[00:11:45] and I. Kind of like the Crosby Stills and Nash song. Love the one you're with. We are not going to have the mulligans, of being able to find a new boyfriend or girlfriend or move to a different city because you've burned your relationships. Or, I'm sorry I didn't pay attention to you all those years ago.

The Great Simplification

[00:12:06] Or, you've lived next to me for eight years and I've never met you. And, yeah, we should, plan about the future. I don't know the answer here, but I suspect, the default is we're all gonna have to become more friendly in a real relationship sort of way with the people that are close to us in proximity.

[00:12:29] And at some point the music is going to speed up and then stop. it's really interesting because I go still not as much as I used to, but I go to conferences and, convenings on various topics. And every time you go, you connect with two or three or five humans and you get their business cards and you establish a friendship and, you share social media.

[00:12:54] I mean, I mean, messages and phone calls and Zoom calls and we cycle through all these new people. At some point it's gonna be the people who are in our inner circles right now who are there with us for the duration. so this is a long-winded way of saying that I. The carbon pulse and the modern technology have extended our, our social networks far beyond what our ancestors had, far beyond what is sustainable, but also far beyond what gives us meaningful interactions with other humans.

[00:13:39] would you rather have 300 or 200 or 100 kind of marginal connections or 10 intense really good ones? it's a question I ask myself. Of course, I am unique because I host a podcast and I have so many people that are interacting, with us. but I think. The loneliness epidemic, that is just under the surface of our culture.

[00:14:11] I think focusing on awareness and attention in the moment with the other human you're with is ground zero for a better social milieu going forward. I'm gonna have more to say about this. I'm really interested in awareness, attention, and, how we might better integrate that into a new cultural model I'm gonna be searching for experts to have on the podcast.

[00:14:45] I'll talk to you next week. The next two Franks are gonna be, graphically intensive and very interesting. so stay tuned for those. And, Go and hug your loved one and go meet a neighbor today. I'll talk to you soon.