

The Great Simplification

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[00:00:00] **Luke Kemp:** Power tends to beget more power. That means that both wealth inequality, but also other forms of power tend to become more concentrated, and that has a number of corrosive knock on effects across society. When you get these settlements, they actually start as egalitarian, and then over time they start to become more unequal, more hierarchical, and often once they reach a high level of inequality and hierarchy, that's when they start become unstable and start to collapse thereafter.

[00:00:25] Are we in collapse now?

[00:00:34] **Nate Hagens:** Today I am rejoined by existential Risk and collapse researcher Luke Kemp to discuss his new book, Goliath's Curse, the History and Future of Societal Collapse, which was just released in the United States on September 23rd. Luke is a research affiliate at the Center for Study of Existential Risk at Darwin College at the University of Cambridge.

[00:01:00] His work focuses on understanding the history and future of extreme global risk. With this new book, Goliath's Curse being the product of his years of research. This episode is on more than just the most likely causes of collapse in the coming decades. Rather, it's a deep dive into why the social structures that humans have been creating for the last few thousands of years.

[00:01:23] What we typically call civilizations. Always inevitably collapse due to the very nature of how they were formed. The implications of Luke's research lend enormous insight into our modern global systems, what Luke calls the global Goliath, and also carries a lot of parallels to the story of the Superorganism, which is at the heart of this podcast.

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[00:02:09] With that, please welcome back, Luke Kemp. Luke Kemp, welcome back to The Great Simplification.

[00:02:18] **Luke Kemp:** Thanks

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[00:02:18] **Nate Hagens:** for having me back, Nate. So this is your second time on the podcast, your previous episode covering the topic of existential risks. where on that conversation you mentioned you were deep into writing a book, which is gonna be the topic of today's conversation.

[00:02:38] Your book is called Goliath's Curse. Shown in the back, and it's just out, which is an in-depth look at the history of how humans have organized as social groups and civilizations. And in your book you focus on a specific type of society, which you call Goliaths. So can we start by you describing what a Goliath is and what makes these Goliaths unique from other ways that humans have organized themselves in the past?

[00:03:11] **Luke Kemp:** I have been working on this book for several years, so since 2018, and one of the first questions I had to encounter in Unravel was what collapses. And most people when they talk about collapse, talk about the collapse of a civilization, which of course begs the question, what is a civilization? There's two problems that term.

[00:03:32] The first is it's always been incredibly vague. We've never had any good definitions as to what constitutes a civilization. So these often range from things like having an advanced culture, which is about as useful as it is. Biased against indigenous peoples. And the second one is this idea of having a checklist, so you can basically have a whole list, different indicators as to what constitutes civilization.

[00:03:58] A famous one is Gordon Shield, a very famous Australian archeologist who had a list of 10 factors, including things like writing the presence of cities, agriculture. The problem there is we have plenty societies, which would call civilizations, which don't have one of those factors. For instance, the Incan Empire, which at one stage was the largest empire of the, of South America, didn't have writing it had this thing called a quipu, which is basically a kind of bundled corded knot, which was used for accounting purposes, but no writing.

[00:04:31] The second problem with the idea of civilization is that it's always had some pretty unsavory connotations. You know, it was of course used during clonal times to justify the conquest of indigenous peoples, and additionally, it doesn't really make sense when you think about it. It comes from the Latin root CITAs, which has connotations of good political conduct, restraint, virtue, et cetera.

[00:04:56] This is where we get the idea of being civilized. Yet when you look at the very first civilizations we often speak of, they're far from it. They're far from civilized. They're usually marked by things like mass, human sacrifice, patriarchy, warfare. That to me seems more like a term of propaganda than an accurate piece of terminology, and that's where they basically landed was that civilization

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always has been a propaganda term, and I prefer not to propagate that propaganda, hence I settle in the term Goliath instead because that's essentially what we're talking about here, right?

[00:05:34] When we actually try to pick out the original civilizations, so we call them if it's in China or the Near East, or even Cahokia in North America, there's one key thing that changes, and it's one that we're really uncomfortable with. What changes is we start organizing ourselves rather than being egalitarian into dominance hierarchies.

[00:05:54] A dominance hierarchy is where you have a ranking system where one person is placed in a hierarchy above another, and they enforce that through the use of violence. That's the key thing that changes in almost every of the first states in every kind of basin or cradle of civilization we talk about.

[00:06:12] **Nate Hagens:** You will not be surprised to hear that.

[00:06:15] I have so many questions for you, my friend. when I hear the word Goliath, I. I hear David and Goliath and also Goliath grouper, those giant like 600 pound fish that we hardly catch anymore. so I, hear what you're saying there that almost civilization is, is the opposite of what it's intended to imply, at times.

[00:06:44] And, it, it seems to me that there's so many words in our vocabulary like climate change, it's really a euphemism as is global warming. It should be global heating, would be the scientific description of what's happening. That's interesting. Thank you. Because civilization is one of those terms we throw around as if it's the goal, as if it should be maintained.

[00:07:10] And, there, there's a dark underbelly, of that term and history is what you're saying. So, so what are other, can you just briefly list some of the other checkpoints that you, mentioned? You said there was a list of 10. can you have a couple other of those, list them out.

[00:07:29] **Luke Kemp:** So as mentioned that these include things like urbanism to the presence of cities, which we do have cities which don't appear to be organized as dominance hierarchies.

[00:07:38] So some great examples include the Indus Valley civilization in modern day Pakistan, which seem to have multiple cities up to I think 40,000 in the case of Mohenjo-daro, which as far as been told, didn't have any large scale centralization. There was no dominance hierarchy as far as we can see. Teotihuacan at a later stage as well is another example.

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[00:07:57] We also have other factors like writing agriculture. The presence of great artworks I think is another one that is used here and long distance trade is one that always comes up as well. Long distance trade is an interesting one because we actually have examples of obsidian being traded by hunter gatherers 200,000 years ago across Africa for distances of more than 160 kilometers per year.

[00:08:22] So again, this is something which even hunter gatherers seem to do. And apart from that, I have to go and consult Shih. I think he also has things like the presence of large scale monuments. Again, something which hunter gatherers actually do at certain stages. Göe in Turkey being a great example. And I think the presence of a centralized government as well.

[00:08:43] I haven't looked at the actual checklist in a while, but it's all those kind of typical factors you'd think of.

[00:08:48] **Nate Hagens:** So are, there any historical examples of large numbers of humans, whether you call it a civilization or not, that did not have the dominance hierarchy, set up,

[00:09:03] **Luke Kemp:** as mentioned, both the Indus Valley civilization or the Harappan, as I sometimes referred to, and who were concurrent with the very first states in the Near East.

[00:09:15] So both the first dynasty of Egypt and Uruk, as well as numerous other city states in Mesopotamia and Tetuan, which Teo basically begins as being a, fairly autocratic state. It has large scale human sacrifices, most major temples as far as we know. See, there seems to be some kind of internal revolt, and thereafter you don't have any signs of rulers and there seems to be a, surprisingly high level of equality, at least in terms of housing sizes across TRT will come.

[00:09:42] **Nate Hagens:** Was the revolt due to the, human sacrifice ongoing?

[00:09:49] **Luke Kemp:** In short, it's hard to tell. We only have archeological remains to go from. They don't have any written descriptions. Yeah,

[00:09:55] **Speaker 3:** yeah. The

[00:09:55] **Luke Kemp:** leading theory right now is that it was likely a combination of inequality and kind of large scale oppression, including through the use of human sacrifice.

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[00:10:03] But Tecan and the Indus Valley Truist, obvious ones, we do have several others where you have things like agriculture, yet you don't seem to get the emergence of these big dominance hierarchies. So even today, actually, a paper came out in, I think it was in Science Advances, looking at the Park, Papa Carpathian Basin, I should say.

[00:10:24] And I looked over a hundred sites, and many of these had agriculture. They had, as far as we can see, kind of large scale goods in Potter production. Yet they didn't seem to become an equal, they had kind of lay leveling mechanisms within the society to make sure that one individual couldn't gather more wealth than the others.

[00:10:42] **Nate Hagens:** So we're gonna, we're gonna get into all that. 'cause I, do have a lot of questions, but by, just to level set here, by the end of this new book, Elia's Curse, you come to the conclusion that the entire system we live in today might be called a global Goliath. and, that, you know, we're gonna, we're gonna unpack that quite a bit, but to start off, why did Goliath's first start appearing.

[00:11:10] like what were the initial conditions that created these Goliaths and how many Goliaths were there, in, your study? and how do these align with other typical markers of human histories, such as the agricultural revolution or the Bronze Age, and the like,

[00:11:30] **Luke Kemp:** swift while taking a step back and clearly defining what a Goliath is.

[00:11:34] **Nate Hagens:** Okay.

[00:11:35] **Luke Kemp:** In this case, it's a collection of different dominance hierarchies. So in the case of the Roman Empire, you can think of the dominance hierarchy in terms of the empire itself, the political structure and apparatus. But Rome wasn't just made up of the imperium. It was also a collection of other different dominance hierarchies, master above slave, men above women, rich, above poor.

[00:12:02] And when we think about different kind of societies across the world, different big empires, they usually had that collection of dominance hierarchies. So patriarchy being a key one, for instance. And the reason I call it Goliath is because most of these begin in the bronze Age, they're built on violence, and they're surprisingly fragile.

[00:12:22] So it all echoes the old tale of David versus Goliath. Goliath being this biblical figure of a massive soldier that David had to defeat by slinging a stone

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directly between his eyes. Now in terms of when the very fiscal lives arose. This is somewhat difficult because it's hard to tell archeologically when you can actually identify dominance hierarchy.

[00:12:46] The one really clear example here is when you have the emergence of the original states. So across the world we have five different areas that produce the very first states, a state here being essentially a set of centralized institutions that enforce rules upon a given population within a given territory.

[00:13:05] So we'd think of the US of course, as being a state today, but also Urich roughly 5,000 years ago, was one of the very first states in the Near East. So there's these five bas, there's the Yellow River valley in China with the Shah Dynasty. There is in Mesopotamia Urich, the very first city state in Mesopotamia.

[00:13:25] In Egypt, we have the first dynasty. In South America, we have Aku or Wari there roughly concurrent. And in me America, we have ban, also known as a zeck. And

[00:13:38] **Nate Hagens:** roughly how many years ago were those just roughly

[00:13:43] **Luke Kemp:** varies. So in the case of the first EE of Egypt, it was approximately 3,100 to 3,300 B bce.

[00:13:51] Okay. Work is approximately the same as, well, it's about over a thousand years later for in the case of China with the Shah Dynasty and ban. Was I believe roughly 500 CE and KU was 700 ce, 800 ce. Around then in general, there's about a lag time of 3000 years between the intensification agriculture and the emergence of first of the first states.

[00:14:17] There are a few things which unite these different areas. The typical story you'd always heard, including people like Kyle Marx, Adam Smith, and even Jared Diamond, is what you need is a surplus. And once you get a surplus, you essentially need rulers and managers to more or less delegate the surplus and oversee much bigger projects.

[00:14:36] **Nate Hagens:** To show you that I listen to you, I know where you're going now. 'cause what I learned from you on our first podcast, what is not just surplus? It's mutable surplus.

[00:14:50] **Luke Kemp:** I am, yes. Deeply proud of you right now, Nate, keep going. Yeah, precisely. So mutable resources, as I call them. So these are resources that can be ease in easily seen, stolen and hoarded or stored grain is the ultimate little resource.

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[00:15:09] As a good example here, Papua New Guinea has agriculture roughly the same time as Egypt does. So roundabouts 5,000 B BCE or so in the case of Papua New Guinea, they grow. Bananas, yam Tarot, they never produce pyramids. They never produce a state, they never have onic rulers, even in the 17th century when they had sweet potato imported in.

[00:15:33] And that leads to a big boom in population, for instance, and more elite goods being traded. They still never form a state. And the key difference here is that banana yam tarot, they're not lable resources, they're mutable, but they expire in a week precisely. So lable, when I say it, basically means that combination of seen, stolen and stored as well, and it to be all three stored and stored.

[00:15:57] Got it. Okay. Precisely. So in the case of grain like wheat, for instance, which has grown in Egypt, you can store that for decades potentially. Yeah. In the case of most tubers, six months is kind of your best bet. The other key thing here is that in the case of things like corn or maize, wheat and rice, they all have very clear harvest periods, and they tell you by kind of advertising the fertility, you know, you have very tall stalks of corn, for instance, in the case of things like potatoes and sweet potato, you can actually leave them the ground after their typical harvest period.

[00:16:30] They often have a harvest period of months, for instance, so they're not easily observed or seen, which means they're not easily stolen and you can't store them afterwards either. Which means it's really hard to base an elite class, a dominance hierarchy on resources which aren't mutable. And this explains why you see it in these five areas and not other areas in the world.

[00:16:51] **Nate Hagens:** So the concept of super normal stimuli is in biology where a fake birds beak on a Popsicle stick that's painted red, will give the signal to the mama bird, oh, this is important. And she'll preferentially feed the popsicle stick instead of the children, the her real babies. This is like, an evolutionary cue that targets, part of her, evolutionary biology in the mutable storable surplus.

[00:17:21] there's also a super normal stimuli thing potentially going on because you go from potatoes or yams to grains, but then to gold and silver. They're higher up the super normal stimuli because they're small, they're concentrated, they're hidden. You don't need big wagons to hold them. So does the intensity of the super normal, stimuli, mutable surplus correlate to more dominance hierarchies?

[00:17:51] Just a question

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[00:17:53] **Luke Kemp:** in a sense, yes. I believe that one of the root causes behind these dominance hierarchies is the impulse for status. And if things like Silver Gulp, particularly 'cause they're rare, have far greater status attached to them. I'll quickly finish off, what are the other ingredients? Yeah. What I call Goliath, feel behind it.

[00:18:11] Goliath, and then we can merge into the importance of status as a kind of root cause behind the emergence will Goliath and behind our very predicament today.

[00:18:19] **Nate Hagens:** Well, th this is just, using different words. The, where you're going with this is the entire premise of this podcast. status energy surplus, hierarchy, the, Superorganism.

[00:18:35] I mean, it's just coming at it from a different vantage point. Yes. Please, continue with the, the commonalities between the places worth Goliath's formed or the, necessary ingredients as such.

[00:18:47] **Luke Kemp:** Absolutely. First of all, I completely agree in many ways Goliath ends up being a term for you have otherwise identified as the Superorganism.

[00:18:55] I think it ends up being very similar to what was also called by Lewis Mumford, the super Machine, or the mega machine, I should say. And it's even has some similarities to what some people call multipolar traps or Morlock. I basically think only goliath for into them. So bear that in mind as you're listening to this.

[00:19:10] It probably is gonna link with a whole bunch of previous stuff you have in the podcast in terms of the free ingredients. So one is liberal resources, there's another two, and all three of these I refer to as Goliath Fuel. Even if you have little resources like grain, you won't necessarily develop a very large dominance hierarchy.

[00:19:28] I already mentioned we've had numerous cases where you have agriculture, and yet people seem to have leveling mechanisms that prevent the emergence of large scale dominance hierarchies. A second factor seems to be the presence of what I call monopolize weapons, so weapons that can be easily monopolized and used by a single smaller group.

[00:19:50] In the case of the Near East, you only see these dominance hierarchies. These first states start to emerge once you have the use and emergence of bronze Age, metall, in particular, handheld bronze axes and swords, which are of

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course much more effective than copper, much more effective than wood or stone.

[00:20:09] And hence, give a small group a massive military vantage over others. We see numerous examples of this across the world. So even in the case of hunter gatherers, there's a group called the Chumash, who, as far as we can see were relatively egalitarian and still they start to develop oceangoing canoes, which allowed them to not only ho hunt marine animals, but they also started to go further down and do raids and hunts on other people across the coast.

[00:20:33] And then they started to organize themselves to dominance hierarchy. With slavery, it occurs over and over again and across history because humans human labor was lable and a surplus. Precisely. So once you get these large scale dominance hierarchies, often humans become a second type of lable resource.

[00:20:52] BC has happened again, the importation of horses into both, meso America and North America eventually leads to the Comanche Empire. So basically a large scale horseback empire in North America. The third one here is caged land. In general, a Goliath emerges when people have less exit options, and we actually see this across the animal kingdom.

[00:21:16] That species which can more easily disperse, tend to be less hierarchical. The key idea here is that if you have a landscape which makes it more easy for people to escape, it means the rulers have to negotiate more of them. Otherwise people can just walk away. And when you look at many of the first.

[00:21:32] Areas of civilization or Goliath, they tend to have caged land. So Egypt for instance, is basically cut off between the Nile River and the Red Sea. Mesopotamia, and Greek literally means the land between two rivers. On top of that, another key factor here is as you had bigger populations who are dependent upon agriculture, it became harder for them to move.

[00:21:55] And there's some emerging evidence here that initially this isn't as much of a problem, but as you get more and more people with less and less land, suddenly land becomes a limiting factor and hence it becomes much more difficult to move. The land becomes more important. And that leads to emergence of inequality and dominance hierarchy.

[00:22:13] **Nate Hagens:** So lettable surplus, contain geography, which, you say, caged land status seeking individuals and a concentration of improved weapon technology. Those were the ingredients. There's

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[00:22:29] **Luke Kemp:** the three key ingredients I talk about are little resources. So easily seen, stolen and stored monopolize weapons and caged land.

[00:22:39] The status competition is a slightly different thing. So these are all environmental factors. Why we get the emergence of dominance hierarchies in particular. So why the very first big states weren't, say for instance, very large scale worker cooperatives with gender egalitarianism. That's a slightly different story, and that's due to a bunch of different psychological mechanisms across us, what I call the darker angels of our nature.

[00:23:04] The big one here is status competition. All of us, to some degree, desire status, which makes sense. It ends up as far as we can see being a very big evolutionary boost. So in large scale studies across different traditional societies. People who have more status, both tend to have more children, but they also tend to have those children make it to adulthood more effectively as well.

[00:23:27] **Nate Hagens:** And to be clear, and this is a point I often make, Status in our current, system tends to correlate with, wealth and resources and consumption. But in pre agricultural revolution times, humans did seek status for sure, but it was, our consumption was still largely egalitarian because we didn't have anything, we were hunter-gatherers in nomadic, so there wasn't, carrying with us this storable mutable wealth.

[00:24:01] so that was a big evolutionary transition once there was mutable surplus.

[00:24:05] **Luke Kemp:** Precisely. So there's two factors here, which seemed to limit the importance of status competition. One is, as you mentioned, we didn't have a surplus, we didn't have lable resource cyber as far as we can see, there's no large scale agriculture during the paralytcs.

[00:24:20] So roughly the period between 300,000 years ago when we developed as a species, and 12,000 years ago when you had the advent of the whole sea, it may be the, that our culture was simply impossible. Given the climatic swings and the soil at the time, that makes it pretty difficult to signal that you have more power than others.

[00:24:39] You may have had like temporary differences in power dynamics. A shaman may have become particularly respected, but they couldn't really pass that status down to their children, and they couldn't really translate that ideological power into a whole bunch. There's a couple of other things to mention here in status.

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[00:24:58] One is that it seems to be men in particular who seek it the most, and it also tends to be people who are higher in the dark triad, which makes a lot of sense. I'll quickly do an aside the dark triad, which I believe Nate has an episode coming up on and has probably been mentioned a few times. In this podcast is a set of three antisocial personality traits.

[00:25:18] One is psychopathy, so a lack of empathy in a certain callousness. The second is marking of eism, a willingness, manipulate others, a personal gain, and the third is narcissism and overinflated sense of self and ego. And essentially all those seem to more or less correlate with high levels of status competition and status seeking, in particular for what's called domination.

[00:25:43] So there's two ways you can get status. One is through prestige, essentially by providing benefits to the group. By being a very good hunter, for instance, you get more status. The second is by dominating others through the use of force and violence. Historically, it seems like we more or less as a species quelled status competition.

[00:26:05] Part of that, as you said, is materially, we didn't have a surplus. But another equally important part of this is we seem to do it intentionally. So there's been several studies.

[00:26:21] You have what are called counter dominant strategies in pneumatic egalitarian groups. So across many pneumatic, egalitarian forages, you do have an individual who tries to dominate others. And what tends to happen is there's a range of different mechanisms the rest of the group employs to put them back into their place, into level of power.

[00:26:39] One is ridicule. So there's a great example, I think, belief in the coy, some people what's called insult in the meat. So if a hunter comes back with a great kill, everyone's like, we can't eat that puny thing. It's terrible, et cetera. Yeah, And they even, exploit it as, we don't want to become too prideful.

[00:26:55] So we try to cool his heart by insult in the meat. And there's numerous examples have had similar norms attached to 'em like that. The second is ostracism, literally kicking someone outta the group, which in many cases could have been fatal. And last but not least, is the very worst of all ingroup executions.

[00:27:12] So there's a story amongst the Koi side as well, where you have this hunter called Troi. Troi, I believe, kills three people in the group at different stages, eventually have a discussion including this family and decide to kill him. And so they come together, shoot him a poisoned arrows, and then symbolically everyone stabs him to more or less show that they're sharing the kill.

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[00:27:33] The key thing here is that we seem to have natural leveling mechanisms, and these likely are not just for homo sapiens. They likely get back to at least a million years ago when we have changes in iCal joints of our shoulders, which allow us to more effectively approach for projectiles. At the same time, we also have a decrease in what's called sexual dimorphism, the difference between males and females in terms of their stature and weight.

[00:27:57] The pretty clear evolutionary story is that when you have sexual dimorphism, you tend to have much stronger, usually male based dominance hierarchies. So in the case of silverbacks, of grillers, for instance, you have one male monopolizing the group, and the reason they can do so is because they're much bigger, stronger, and have sharper teeth than everyone else.

[00:28:17] And so hence there's an evolutionary pressure for being big, strong at having sharp teeth. When you have the opposite occurring, it kind of suggests you're having more egalitarian settings, and that makes sense because if suddenly you can throw spears much more effectively, all it takes is two men in the middle of the night to get rid of an alpha.

[00:28:34] So it's likely a kind of violent pressure here as well. And interestingly, when you look at the effect of status on reproduction, it's four times higher in other primates than it is in US humans. What is four times higher? The effect of status on reproduction.

[00:28:51] **Nate Hagens:** So my thinking has evolved, on this, because since you and I spoke last, I did have a podcast with two expert, psychologists to discuss dark triad.

[00:29:03] And here's one of my, my big insights. Adding to the integration of all these things is historically I've thought you combine large numbers of humans with, to use your parlance, mutable, energy surplus and a dominance hierarchy ensues. And we end up with a global economic Superorganism, or what you might call a global Goliath.

[00:29:34] But there was a missing piece, because I inherently think humans are generally good. generally pro-social and there's lots of evolutionary reasons and stories, but we are predators, we are social primates and predators. and what I learned was that about 1% of babies that are born, are psychopaths.

[00:30:04] And, there is a predatory and a defense version of psychopathy and the predators. Historically, we can understand why in periods of difficult times or wars, a psychopathic human would've been adaptive because, you made it

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through a bottleneck. But like you said, sometimes in our evolutionary past, like the, Bushman that you mentioned, there's, three ways.

[00:30:35] There's strong reciprocity. and this happens in silverback gorillas as well. There's two junior ones that can team up, and, alliances and coalitions and such. But when you combine a predatory, non empathic dominant slash status seeking human with a thousand other humans, or 10 per thousand, you can kind of predict everything else being equal, what would happen, and that would be today's modern civilization.

[00:31:13] So, so, I actually do think psychopathy and dark triad is a central part of this story. And to be, to be totally honest and or blunt, I, didn't say this during that podcast, which will probably air before this airs. But I was in a good mood after the podcast because I realized that it's not humans per se, that are, to blame for what's happening.

[00:31:41] It's this unique combination of surplus, large numbers and sprinkle a few psychopaths in and without the checks and balances that might happen in a small, group of, humans living on the Kalahari. This is what ensues. So what is your response to all that?

[00:32:01] **Luke Kemp:** I would roughly agree, although I think it's bigger than the dark triad.

[00:32:05] So as mentioned, I think of these root causes behind both the emergence of a Goliath, but also the global predicament we find ourselves in today, what I'll later call the end game and the root causes are both. The environmental ones for the emergence of Goliath fuel, which allows for the emergence of dominance hierarchies, but also the psychological ones and the dark triad is one.

[00:32:26] I think you're right about that. The second is, even if you don't have psychopaths and narcissists, you still do have some people who just want status and they're willing to take it through. The use of dominant strategies

[00:32:37] **Nate Hagens:** said differently, maybe. psychopaths and dark triad is not a binary yes or no.

[00:32:42] There's a sliding scale, and so some people in the middle would default towards the hierarchy and dominance strategies,

[00:32:49] **Luke Kemp:** although as far as I know, you can also have people who are high on dominance, status seeking, who aren't high in the dark triad

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necessarily. So the two tend to overlap, but there's not a perfect overlap necessarily.

[00:33:00] The third one here is power corrupting. So we have numerous studies now both in neurology and social psychology, which suggests that people who get a higher placement of hierarchy tend to be, have less empathy. They tend to undervalue those below them. They tend to be more likely to cheat both in games and their spouses.

[00:33:19] **Nate Hagens:** So if you like randomly had a hundred people and they were all equal and you played a game where five of them had, fake, authority given to them, then those people would naturally then develop less empathy and such.

[00:33:35] **Luke Kemp:** Most would, there's some individual variation, but in general's rule of thumb, yes, we do have some cases here where people are primed either by actually doing a kind of game like that where they're placed in a high position of, authority, or they're primed by giving a memory where they're being in a position of power.

[00:33:53] And then we scan their brains. And one of the key things we notice is actually mirroring, which is essentially we try to imitate each others different nonverbal cues. And it's a way of basically having empathy that seems to get shut down. But there's a, big range judicially here, which I'd recommend Brian Klaus's Power Corrupts or Corrupt, I believe it's called actually as a good kind of summary book on

[00:34:13] **Nate Hagens:** this.

[00:34:14] So, so hierarchy and dominance structures in our species are almost a positive feedback sort of thing.

[00:34:22] **Luke Kemp:** Precisely. So by nature, you're likely to have an open representation of both people who want status through dominance. You're likely to have an open representation of the dark triad, for instance. While I believe psychopaths are roughly 1% of general population, and granted the studies here are somewhat murky, there's a big range of how well represented they are in places like the boardroom and parliaments and in general tends to vary from somewhere between like three to 25%.

[00:34:51] **Nate Hagens:** That stands to reason it was self-selected, for, that personality type because they would be more successful at those sorts of, jobs

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[00:35:00] **Luke Kemp:** precisely. And even those who make into those jobs, just based upon prestige and based upon ability, are more likely to also become corrupted by power over time.

[00:35:10] So that's three of the dark angels. The last but not least, is what we have, what I call the authoritarian impulse. The authoritarian impulse is people when they feel threatened, tend to become more authoritarian in their belief structures. In short, they're more likely to both value and be obedient to large scale hierarchies, particularly dominance hierarchies.

[00:35:32] And we see this across the world today, right? When people feel threatened, they're more likely to accept strong man leaders and to scapegoat minorities. This is something which has happened across history. It's something we have pretty good evidence for now, and it's not just simply that people become more authoritarian, but those who are already more authoritarian tend to become more politically mobilized and more violent.

[00:35:56] And the key thing here is when you're under fret, you're more likely to turn to a strong man.

[00:36:00] **Nate Hagens:** That makes so much sense. I'm working on a, frankly, on the blind, key blind spots of the progressive movement, and one of them is that, we tend to think that, author authoritarianism is only a right wing phenomenon.

[00:36:15] and it's not, it's across all political spectrum and what you just said, makes total sense. Dude, this is, this is gonna be a great conversation. We're midway through. It's difficult for me because I have so many things to ask you, and you're such a good science communicator. but before I get too far, you just had a, an article come out, today is, August 6th that came out, two days ago in the, Guardian called Self termination is Most Likely.

[00:36:49] But, let me ask you something about that. In your work, you talk about dominance and hierarchy, but this Guardian article tended to use the word inequality. So is there a difference between, those two terms, dominant slash hierarchy and inequality?

[00:37:07] **Luke Kemp:** They are somewhat different, but all interrelated.

[00:37:10] **Nate Hagens:** Okay.

[00:37:10] **Luke Kemp:** In the book, I draw a heavily lip on this idea of a source of social power, which was originally explored by a sociologist called Michael Manny.

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Had a big series of books in the 1980s called A Source of Social Power. And I've kind of modified these, but the idea is there exists different forms of power.

[00:37:28] One is economic power, differences in wealth, and your ability to control resources. The second is political power, your ability to control decision making and authority. De third is information power, your ability to control ideology, ideas, and the flow of information. Fourth is violent power, your ability to control and dispense with lethal violence.

[00:37:51] And last but not least, is the great amplifier population, the size and skills of the population you're dealing with. A dominance hierarchy doesn't need to be built upon inequality and resources, but it almost always is. As mentioned, lable resources are usually the kind of key building block on a dominance hierarchy.

[00:38:13] The dominance hierarchy itself is essentially large scale inequality in decision making backed through the use of violence. And when you look at the first states and when you look at Goliaths in general, they're basically. Inequalities across every single one of those power structures. So you have a leader who's not just a leader in terms of making the big decisions.

[00:38:35] They also usually control the military, and they back up the decisions through the use of force, at least in the earlier states. They're almost always depicting themselves as God kings or is representatives of gods. And additionally, on top of that, they tend to have lots and lots of resources. They tend to be some of the most richest individuals in society.

[00:38:56] And of course, this varies somewhat, but the key idea here is that in inequality and one source of power tends to be fungible across others, particularly once you gettable resources. Once you get economical power that is really fungible, you can start to buy private armies. If you're rich, you can start to lobby and get yourself into positions of power, which we see in every society almost.

[00:39:19] And of course, you can start to use it to influence the way that information is dispersed. It's no coincidence that Jeff Bezos has also brought Audible and Twitch. It's known coincidence that Elon Musk has purchased Twitter. I refuse to call it X.

[00:39:36] **Nate Hagens:** Okay. So my, my good mood, from discovering the dark triad, back is slowly dissipating, based on the inferences of what, you're saying.

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[00:39:48] But let's get back to your, scholarship by the way, like. How many hundreds of hours did you read articles and books to get this whole synthesis put together?

[00:40:02] **Luke Kemp:** Didn't keep track, but it took seven years. And for those seven years, I only read one fiction book. And that was read after I finished the book.

[00:40:12] So

[00:40:13] **Nate Hagens:** it's been a while. Well, you deserve to have a reread of the Hobbit or something now, this August. So, so one of the central points that you kept returning to, in your book was the myth that civilization and statehood were the antidote to otherwise naturally violent human behavior. And the collapse of those formal societies meant falling back to the nasty, brutish and short lifestyles of our pre civilization ancestors.

[00:40:42] Can you explain what this narrative gets wrong and, and what the actual role of organized statehood is in, in relationship to human nature and violence?

[00:40:53] **Luke Kemp:** That term of nasty, brutish, and short is emblematic of this narrative that most people associate with the 17th century philosopher Thomas Hobbes.

[00:41:04] The idea is that humans naturally don't cooperate very well. We're solitary animals, we're suspicious of each other, and we tend to have high rates of violence because we can't trust each other. And in his hypothetical state of nature, this means that there's no arts, no commodious buildings, no industry, no trade, and a surplus of bloodshed.

[00:41:26] And the idea is that because humans are innately so bad, we had to. Have a social contract in which we all essentially gave up some degree of freedom to a ruler who could control us, who could control violence, and hence prevent chaos from emerging.

[00:41:45] **Nate Hagens:** So is the nasty, brutish and short language itself kind of self-serving for the people in the dominance hierarchy to move towards centralized authority?

[00:41:55] **Luke Kemp:** I think it's telling that Hobbes wasn't the first one who came up with this kind of story. There's at the very least, Vedic scriptures, the mata, I believe it's called in the first millennium, which has a similar idea of before

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the emergence of kingdoms, we had multiple different competing groups who ate each other up, like big fishes, eating small fishes of the rough language.

[00:42:18] There's the Decar, I believe it's called, which is DHA Nakaya, which is a Buddhist text, which essentially talks about how there was this great period of chaos. People couldn't trust each other, and hence, eventually they elected a ruler who they gave an edible early form of tax to everyone gave them a grain of rice.

[00:42:34] It's funny because they actually also say they chose the most handsome and charismatic person, which seems like not a good set of criteria for selecting rules. We also have zoo era songs. We have Aristotle's idea of the elected Tator. This is a story which emerges over and over again, and it echoes all these other stories, including the story civilization, and I believe it's the Assyrian Empire had this idea of they were essentially the bastion of order, and everything beyond the empire was chaos, and it was a divine duty to basically spread themselves and get rid of the prim primordial chaos.

[00:43:06] So it's become always a very self-serving story to justify dominance, hierarchies, you have to have us in charge, otherwise you'll kill each other. There's just one problem. There's no evidence to support this. Hos, when he first came up with this, he was living in the 17th century time of civil war. He had a very rough life, so it's natural.

[00:43:27] He had a pretty dim view of humans. He didn't have access to archeological earth political findings. Said what he did was have a list of assumptions about human nature, and he used that to paint this grim and dark picture of the state of nature. The good thing is we now actually have scientific evidence we can rely upon, and it paints a much more hopeful view, of humans.

[00:43:49] And I'll admit, before I started this book, I had a much gloomier view of both people, how we'd actor and collapse. And I also kind of believe that maybe we should just have an elected dictator that would be the way to get over things like climate change. I don't have any of those views anymore. And a large part of that is because of looking into this.

[00:44:08] First of all, most of us, when we think about pre-history, we tend to think of very small groups. And indeed Hobbes and even Rousso has this kind of more cheery look on the past. They both thought that humans were solitary. That's exactly the opposite of what we're, deeply pro-social primates. There is a reason why the very worst punishment you can dole out even in prison is solitary confinement.

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[00:44:33] We don't find hell of other people. We find hell in the lack of other people. And this turns up when you look at the archeological data and the anthropological, interestingly enough, hunter GABAs aren't just groups of like 20 to 40. The band size often ranges up to. 150 to 200. And importantly, people are constantly mixing across bands.

[00:44:54] So even though the individual group might be a hundred or so, they actually live in societies with thousands of connections. And in the individual bands, it's not just a small family or a small group of families. One study from a few years ago looked at pneumatic egalitarians and found that less than 10% of those in a band were genetically closely related.

[00:45:15] And you often even had people who didn't even speak the same tongue involved. When you think about this from an evolutionary perspective, it would've been kind of weird for us to survive if we didn't really like each other. We weren't very cooperative and we were constantly killing each other. It means we'd have very low numbers, we'd have very low genetic diversity, and small disasters would've wiped us off the map.

[00:45:43] It's worthwhile pr quickly having a site here on Dunbar's Number, which all you probably know of, it's this idea from the Oxford anthropologist or Dunbar that human groups can only kind of reach a rough cap of 150 people. And beyond that, we need to find other ways of organizing ourselves, including through hierarchy, for instance,

[00:46:00] **Nate Hagens:** because of the limited size of our brain and the, cognitive, precisely bandwidth it takes to maintain that many relationships.

[00:46:08] **Luke Kemp:** The key thing that Robin did here was basically equate our bele to have social relations to what's called the neocortex in the front of the brain, and then more or less look to patterns across primates. The difficulty here is we're not actually sure if the neo cortex is the perfect calibrator for whether or not you can have a certain cap on social relations.

[00:46:27] The numbers, when they've been rerun up, studies suggest that this is a pretty big cap between two to 520 people roughly. And as mentioned, even though you may only have a couple of a hundred people, you know really closely, those can change over your lifetime and create a much bigger web, socially speaking.

[00:46:47] and hence you get a very different picture of what's happening in the Paralympic. So over the first 300,000 years of human existence, we're not living in

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these very small ragtag groups of individual families. Instead, we're actually living in these pretty large scale, what I call fluid civilizations.

[00:47:03] We have evidence of 160,000, no, 120,000 years ago, goods like technology, lipic instruments, even musical instruments being traded all the way from the east coast of Africa to the west coast of Africa 120,000 years ago, roughly. Yeah. I didn't know that. We similarly have, I believe it's 43,000 years ago, there's what's called the orian, which is a essentially a cultural zone of very similar forms of artwork, forms of lipic instruments and tools that are spread all the way across the Eurasia.

[00:47:38] So in an area that's larger, the European Union, would a musical instrument be considered a lable surplus? No. It's something which isn't critical to your survival, first of all, like something like wheat or rice is, and it additionally, it's not necessarily easily seen and stolen, but the key thing here is it's not actually critical to your survival at all.

[00:48:01] But the key thing is, as far as we can see, hunter gatherers, were constantly trading amongst each other. Both obviously technologies, and this is something which helps us through what's called cumulative culture evolution. We share culture, we learn from each other, but we were also sharing people, we were constantly mixing groups and that's what gave us the requisite genetic diversity to make it through what was a, would've been a very challenging time.

[00:48:24] The para lithic was five degrees called day. We had 86 active volcanoes across, Africa, and we also had some pretty bad events like the Tobo eruption roughly 74,000 years ago,

[00:48:35] **Nate Hagens:** and massive swings in the climate during that period.

[00:48:38] **Luke Kemp:** Precisely. I refer this as the ice age, but there are actually multiple ice stages with short, abrupt warming periods, and this seems to be this kind of, these fluid civilizations.

[00:48:49] Our interconnectivity, our nobility seems to be one of the key reasons we survive while the upper hominids die out. So Neandertals, for instance, seem to die because they have such small, less genetically diverse groups, at least one burial site. The genetic diversity of Neandertals was pretty similar to what you get in small endangered mountain grillers, which you have groups of five to 20 people, which meant that all it took was small shocks for eventually in Neal to die out.

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[00:49:17] While on the other hand, we were very diverse, we shared culture, we shared genes, and that's what allowed us to get through the Ice

[00:49:22] **Nate Hagens:** age. I'm just gonna do an aside here. During all the hundreds of hours of research for this, when you were reading a nonfiction anthropological book before you went to bed, did you ever dream or even in the daytime wonder what it would be like to be living in paleo lithic times?

[00:49:39] Luke Kemp back in the day,

[00:49:43] **Luke Kemp:** I'll admit, I have, I have a good friend here who does a lot of the, work which I draw upon on pneumatic egalitarian hunter campers. And I've asked her on multiple occasions what, her experience was like living amongst the Central African Republic Hunter gapper, she's, she works with, I mean, in general, if I had a choice between being placed randomly to being reborn in the modern world versus being reborn the paralytic, I probably take the paralytic.

[00:50:10] I mean, I'm incredibly lucky the fact that I was born in Australia. I have attributes that are valued in society. But if I was reborn, the odds are I'm probably born as a peasant farmer in India, or a factory worker in China. And frankly, I'd much prefer to be alift to Comera.

[00:50:27] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. Or a waged employee in the United States.

[00:50:31] precisely. If

[00:50:31] **Luke Kemp:** I have my choice between being a Danish citizen versus prolific hunter Gaver, that's a more difficult choice. yeah. But we should quickly go back onto what it was actually like to be a prolific hunter Gaver. So as mentioned, we have these big cultural zones, these fluid civilizations.

[00:50:47] There seems to be a lot of trade going on. There seems to be a lot of intermingling, but what you don't see much of is violet. So you're probably all familiar with the idea that hunter gatherers are very violent. And a lot of this comes from theological literature. So looking at modern day hunter gatherers, the problem is this often includes hunter gatherers who aren't nomadic egalitarians.

[00:51:09] So ones which aren't equal and aren't nomadic, which means they're not the great best analogs for the paralytic world. And even when you look at these studies, they tend to have a huge variation. So one of the best studies I've could come across, they found a variation all the way from 0% amongst the Bakari in Brazil.

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[00:51:29] So essentially, Bakari have no deaths attributed to lethal violence, fruit of the ache in Paraguay who have a lethal violence rate of roughly 55%.

[00:51:39] **Nate Hagens:** Let me ask you this, though. isn't there a selection process going on here that if you invariably have, egalitarian, nomadic, hunter gatherer societies and they are the lion's share of, pre agricultural, human societies, but then you have a dominance, hierarchies, society dropped in there, then over time there's a selection process that goes on and the archeological and anthropological evidence, favors more dominance hierarchy societies because the egalitarian ones got wiped out.

[00:52:21] Or, outcompeted. Yes.

[00:52:23] **Luke Kemp:** Agreed. We'll get momentarily. I wanna quickly finish off the, okay, sure. Please, why we think we're less violent, but you're absolutely right. There is a selection effect here and a very powerful one. When we actually look at the archeological evidence of how violent we were during the paralytic, during the ICE age, the best studies we have is one done by has Elli, and they essentially look at 3000 skeletons across 400 sites.

[00:52:45] They only find six examples of lethal violets, so things like what are called par wounds, broken forearms, cranial trauma, and pierces and embedded projectiles. Four of those are just simply individual skeletons with signs of violence, and we don't know if those are hunting accidents or something else.

[00:53:06] One of those is a triple burial, but there's actually no signs of lethal violence. So it may have just been, for some reason we decided that these three should be buried together. The only site they could find, which is Undisputably. An example of large scale violence was in Gibel SA Harbor, which dates back to roughly 10,000, 12,000 years ago.

[00:53:23] There's a collection of 50 ed skeletons there, which have signs of some kind of lethal violence. It's worth noting that 10,000, 12,000 years ago, that was when we were moving in towards the whole scene in this particular area in Sudan, seems to have been going through massive environmental changes. So it's not exactly emblematic of the broader Paralympic, and when you look at people who tend to think that we're super violent, so Stephen Pinker in the Better Angels of Our Nature is a great example.

[00:53:50] He thinks that there's roughly a 15% kill ratio amongst humans. So for every a hundred deaths, 15 of those would be due to lethal violence Historically. Historically, boy, that sounds implausible to me. In his list, three of the of his cases are duplicates and one of them only one is from the paleolithic.

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[00:54:12] The rest are after the Paralympics. Not exactly a good archeological analysis,

[00:54:18] **Nate Hagens:** but after the Palli Paleolithic, we had societies that were more dominant hierarchy with lettable surplus. Precise. So precise, you have to differentiate the, natural human pre agriculture and then post agriculture like humans in the presence of lable surplus versus humans, not in the presence of lettable.

[00:54:39] Surplus is a very different animal.

[00:54:42] **Luke Kemp:** Precisely, and this is what Pinker doesn't do, and this is crucial. When you look at the, you have this 55% kill rate. Almost all the deaths are attributed to ranches, farmers, and the presence of things like alcohol. It's not exactly a good analog to what's happening during the Paralympic.

[00:54:59] On top of that, we have genetic evidence, which just that probably the kind of maximum level of lethal violence we have in the species is 2%, and we have just the simple fact that we don't seem to like to kill each other. There's study up the study using things like battleground reenactments, looking at how often things like rifles of shot and also just simply doing interviews of soldiers which show frequently in war, less than half of the soldiers present, even use their rifles or try to kill the their opponents.

[00:55:28] Don't like killing each other. We don't like violence. We need to have lots of training to do. So

[00:55:33] **Nate Hagens:** how would you explain the Rwanda, situation from not so long ago with the Hutu and TSIs

[00:55:39] **Luke Kemp:** Randan genocide? A couple of things here. One is that based upon court documents, it was only a small number of people who were actually involved in the violent perpetuation of this.

[00:55:49] Roughly 3% of the overall population, as far as we can tell. And oh, I think it was over 90% of them were men between the ages of, sorry, men, women, median ages 31. So this is not everyone trying to kill each other. It's as very relatively small select group of men,

[00:56:08] **Nate Hagens:** which, may, which still we don't know.

[00:56:10] But those men may have been on the dark triad scale, to some degree. I mean, I'm just speculating

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[00:56:17] **Luke Kemp:** potentially. And importantly, they also had a large amount of organization. You had an ideology been perpetuated between the hut, the hoods, and the tootsies. There's a really good book called The Rise of Organized Brutality by a sociologist, and he puts forward that you can't have really large MAs scale killings unless you have very big organizations to actually organize it.

[00:56:38] The ideology to actually make people want to kill each other. And additionally, what he calls micro solidarity is basically when you look at groups who do try to kill each other, they tend to develop these really strong sense of, I'm defending my ingroup, I'm defending my brothers. And again, that's something that doesn't always come naturally.

[00:56:56] It has to be inculcated into us. And it's something that militaries do very intentionally. And social media precisely. In short, these all pretty much require dominance, hierarchies, which were not present throughout the Paralympic. All

[00:57:09] **Nate Hagens:** makes sense, Luke?

[00:57:10] **Luke Kemp:** Yeah. And in the book, I also cover, won't go too in depth here, but when you look at the emergence of the very first dominance hierarchies, they're almost always, they are always proceeded by the emergence of warfare.

[00:57:22] You basically go from individual violence to small scale raids to eventually more organized warfare, and that tends to lead to the emergence of a Goliath.

[00:57:30] **Nate Hagens:** Except this Goliath has nuclear weapons, which none of the other ones, did,

[00:57:35] **Luke Kemp:** did unfortunately. Which leads us to why has Goliath scaled up over time?

[00:57:40] So why is it that you went from having just a couple of pixels on the world map 5,000 years ago to suddenly pretty much every piece of arable land across the world being under control of a nation state of a Goliath? In the book, I talk about this idea of babies, bombs, bacteria, and barbarism. Which are essentially the four main advantages that a Goliath has over other forms of social organization.

[00:58:07] So a simple one is babies. The main form of lable resources is grain, which allows for you to have denser populations and large populations. There seems to be amongst most Goliaths, some attempts to actually have growing

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populations. So both the Chin and Augustus had multiple policies in place, including tax breaks to encourage larger families and greater fertility.

[00:58:29] For instance, even today back in Australia, we have the baby bonus, which is essentially if you have more babies, you get more tax breaks and you even direct payments. You have the similar thing in France, similar things in South Korea. Hungary spends, I believe it's over 1% of its GDP in trying to encourage fertility.

[00:58:46] So this has been a long running preoccupation of people. And Elon Musk is another great example of this big obsession with people's fertility. So babies is a key thing, and if you have more people, you're more likely to win wars. Rome lost plenty of battles and never lost a war, but because it's just always really good at getting larger numbers of men and throwing them into battle.

[00:59:09] Second is bacteria. When you get the emergence of first lives, it tends to be built on lethal resources, which means bigger dense populations, usually interacting close with animals, which means you get lots of genetic infections. The bad thing is people die. You have really bad diseases. Many of the things we struggled today like measles, influenzas, and previously smallpox, they only emerge essentially with the first large scale human cities.

[00:59:35] They're not something we had during the Paralympic. They're fairly recent orphans considered. The key thing here, bud, is once that initial disease goes through a population, those who survive have some natural immunity. That means that when they encounter people who have not had an interaction with that kind of disease, it tends to be much more deadly for them.

[00:59:56] The best example of this, of course, is the introduction of European diseases into the Americas during the colonization of the Americas. So bacteria is another key one here. A third one is bombs. Basically, dominance hierarchies seem to be preoccupied with conquests and expansion, which makes lots of sense if you have people on top who obsessed with status.

[01:00:19] One of the best ways to graze status, of course, by conquering others, and over time most lives tend to develop better and better weapons, all the way from bronze weapons through iron weapons, to eventually the use of gunpowder, muskets, et cetera, and to nuclear weapons. Today, developing all those things requires economic exploitation.

[01:00:38] It requires people doing the really shit underpaid jobs of working in mines, being, cutting down trees, things people wouldn't usually wanna do. And these are usually done by prison labor slaves or people who are generally

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underpaid. It's something which most nomadic, egalitarian groups wouldn't probably do.

[01:00:57] It'd be very hard pressed to get the coan people to undertake that kind of big exploitive economic endeavor. But the US China, they're pretty happy to do so, but that's what you need to do in order to get a military advantage. And last but not least is barbarism. So this is basically the fact that you acquire this large spo scale, exploitation of both people, but also the environment.

[01:01:21] If you're not willing to explore people in the environment, that puts you at unfortunately, an evolutionary disadvantage. And those are the four reasons why the lives take over, not because they're the best in terms of human welfare, not because they're looking out for the best interest of those underneath them, but because they're better at warfare.

[01:01:38] **Nate Hagens:** And so, just based on your recent comments there, in the context of the global Goliath now addressing climate change is probably not in the top 10 on the, concern list of the dominance hierarchy.

[01:01:57] **Luke Kemp:** One of the most interesting things when you look at how we identify the first signs of inequality in the archeological record is how similar there are in some ways.

[01:02:08] So when we try to think about inequality, looking through the archeological record, it tends to be things like grand burials. So you bury some of lots of big goods, including things like weapons and jewelry. A second is monumental architecture. third one is human sacrifice, and that includes having a bear of res basically being buried with a whole bunch of people alongside of you.

[01:02:30] What's common across all of those is the conspicuous consumption. They're the wasteful use of energy. Nothing says I'm more important than you, than literally having people toil their entire lives to build a grave monument for yourself and then be

[01:02:45] **Nate Hagens:** buried with you.

[01:02:47] **Luke Kemp:** Precisely. Yeah, and the funny thing is, of course, that if you're really in a kind of high pressure environment, wastefully, using energy in that way is just dumb.

[01:02:56] It's disa disadvantageous, but it is very good at once again, signaling that I have status, I'm important. Well, it's like a peacocks tale.

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[01:03:04] **Nate Hagens:** I mean, precisely. It's a waste of resources from a pure, natural selection standpoint, from sexual selection, not so.

[01:03:12] **Luke Kemp:** And interestingly, this is a very big change from what we have, Nome Egalitarians, where they frequently have what's called the principle of least effort.

[01:03:21] They tend to forage and hunt in such a way as to conserve their energy. So when they have literally low population densities, they focus on hunting, that's basically the biggest bang for their buck. They don't tend to essentially try to even get a surplus. There's a great quote from my builder. It's a coan hunter gatherer who says, why would I plant seeds when I have all these Mongo nuts?

[01:03:44] You know, I already have more than enough to feed myself. Why do I need more? And this is pretty common. It's, it seems to be only with the emergence of Goliaths more or less, you start to get this really big obsession with the wasteful use of energy conspicuous consumption. And today the global Goliath is built on exactly that.

[01:04:04] You know, even if you look at Jeff Bezos's, recent wedding, something like, what was it? An entire hangar in 90 private jets had to be used just for that wedding. It's pretty clear why he is doing that. It's a big display of status, either consciously or subconsciously. One great example of this is back in the 1920s there was an, or baron by the name of, I think his name was Harold Haroldson.

[01:04:27] Haroldson Hunt. And this tycoon had roughly \$700 million. He was an incredibly wealthy person at that time. And he actually has this quote of saying, anyone who has \$200,000 is by all means as good, well off as I am. Everything I have an addition to that is just a way of keeping score.

[01:04:48] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. and we can, smile about that.

[01:04:52] But, you know, I used to manage money for billionaires, at Salomon Brothers. and it was a game that they had to get more and more, and their friends were getting more and more. And it was one of the reasons I left because I was like, wait a minute. I thought the goal in life was to get enough money to retire and enjoy life, but these people are like obsessed with more and more.

[01:05:18] so I smile when you say that quote. 'cause it is one of the fundamental, drivers of the current Goliath. Precisely. Okay. So Luke getting back to the book, and it's really quite an impressive, piece of scholarship. congratulations on, on, on your hard work. Thank you. So in the book, ultimately every Goliath that you

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studied faced a collapse of some sort, which you say is because each Goliath is built with the seeds of its own collapse.

[01:05:56] So what were the usual drivers of these breaking points and, why are they always baked into these type of societies?

[01:06:04] **Luke Kemp:** Over time, Goliaths tend to become more unequal and more extractive. When I say extraction here, it essentially means the elites in a society take more and more energy and labor and value from those below them.

[01:06:18] So

[01:06:19] **Nate Hagens:** you're not saying extraction from mining and taking things from the earth. You're saying extraction from other humans.

[01:06:26] **Luke Kemp:** It includes both actually in this case, and I think they tend to be very deeply interlinked. We know pretty well that equality seems to increase across most societies that dominance hierarchies over time for a few reasons.

[01:06:40] One, as Thomas Piketty has shown in his book *Cap Capital* in 21st Century, the value of capital tends to increase quicker than wages do over time. We see that today the value of a piece of land or a house is in is, increasing much more rapidly than any average wages, and that holds true for most of history.

[01:07:01] A second one is that once you have power, you tend to have more ways to get more power. It becomes a positive feedback loop. So if you have a pretty decent sized budget, you can suddenly start to hire lobbyists. For instance, you can start to create patron client networks. So basically bailing people outta debts, for instance, or hiring people and basically creating a whole bunch of social networks where you have more political power.

[01:07:28] You can also start to influence. The narratives of the world as well. I mentioned before the billionaires of today trying to buy up different social media outlets, for instance. And you can even, for instance, buy your own private army, but in short power tends to beget more power. And particularly if you have ignore power, there's ways to use that as a positive feedback over time.

[01:07:50] That means that both wealth inequality, but also other forms of power tend to become more concentrated, and that has a number of corrosive knock on effects across society. How this manifest itself differed across history. In my book, I talk about Goliath's curse, this idea that every Goliath has, as you mentioned, the seeds is earned, demise built into it, but the way it actually could changed a bit over time.

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[01:08:19] So many of the very first cities in the very first Goliaths seemed to collapse in large part because people still had really strong dominance or counter dominance. Intuitions. Remember, we're still just moving from hunter gatherers into these kind of very first experiments with hierarchy and dominance, and hence, it stands to reason that we were less used to being dominated.

[01:08:39] And you see this time and time again, when you get these settlements, they actually start as egalitarian. And then over time they start to become more unequal, more hierarchical. And often once they reach a high level of inequality and hierarchy, that's when they start to become unstable and start to collapse thereafter.

[01:08:55] So I have a big set of timelines in the book showing this for a range of different case studies ranging from channel Hoek in modern day Turkey through to Tiwanaku and Ban and Meso American South America.

[01:09:06] **Nate Hagens:** Does this rhyme with Peter Turin's work, who's also a guest on this podcast that societies end up overproducing elites, which presumably is dominance, hierarchy language.

[01:09:18] **Luke Kemp:** Absolutely. I believe this comes more important in later empires. I think with the very first states in the very first cities, what you often see is that they start to become pretty unequal early on. It's hard to measure if we have elite over production as Peters haws about. But the other key thing is that they don't have very good ways of controlling their citizens.

[01:09:38] They don't have things like writing for propaganda quite frequently. And you often see this really interesting, weird boom bust pattern across the very first farmers, both in Europe but also in the southwest, the US where basically they settle into an area, they start to grow in population, but they also start to grow in inequality.

[01:09:55] Then there's some kind of big bust where there's basically a big outbreak of violence. People disperse, they come back together and the cycle restarts. That I think in large part is because of this lack of ability to control citizens alongside the tendency for dominance hierarchies to result in growing inequality, to basically have people wanting to either leave or to potentially rebel and destroy things, and inability to actually quell that violence, which makes many the first states somewhat fragile in that regard.

[01:10:26] Later on, you get bigger empires with much better control mechanisms. There's one, I think, fairly persuasive theory that when you look at the first states, they start to emerge also. Once you get a group that needs to match more than

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one day from its capital to conquer new territories, which requires an internal administration to basically keep things in order back at home.

[01:10:49] So you start to develop internal bureaucracies, and this is often one of the key differences people talk about when they try to distinguish between states and chieftains is a state actually has a specialized internal bureaucracy, once again for purposes of control. But once you get these very big empires, they have more control mechanisms, but inequality still has a whole bunch of corrosive effects to them.

[01:11:12] One of them is exactly, you've mentioned Peter Turin's idea of structural demographic theory. It actually dates back to Jack Goldstone, but Peter's done the most pioneering work in this regard. The basic idea is that over time inequality increases, you get a wealth pump, which basically moves wealth from the lower classes to highest classes.

[01:11:32] The high classes tend to grow larger and larger over time. What he calls elite of production, which essentially means that you start to get so many elites that there's not enough high status positions for them to take over. There's only so many people who can be governors and kings for instance, and you get this combustible mix of the lower classes becoming more eviscerated over time.

[01:11:55] They basically have less and less resources. They're less and less healthy. There's a cost of living squeeze and you have lots of different elites who have lots of resources trying to battle for power. The result is often things like cos rebellions in a, in fighting.

[01:12:10] **Nate Hagens:** I was just wondering if you were giving a historical analog or talking about modern day.

[01:12:16] **Luke Kemp:** I mean unfortunately it applies to Beau Fright. If you look at China for instance, it has numerous cases of national transitions basically led by some kind of internal war board coup. And it seems to be linked to like in the case of the Ching elite of production, Rome, exactly the same thing as well.

[01:12:32] Were there,

[01:12:34] **Nate Hagens:** other seeds of their own demise or is the inequality in overproduction of elites? the primary one.

[01:12:40] **Luke Kemp:** I add, several factors onto Peter's basic idea of structural limbach theory. In modern day studies, we see a really clear empirical relationship between corruption and inequality, which makes a lot of sense.

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[01:12:53] If you have more corruption, it tends to mean people are taking more resources for themselves, for the use of public office, which by nature should make more inequality. But likewise, if you have more inequality and greater distortions of power, it should mean people have more opportunities to basically be corrupted, to take resources as well.

[01:13:11] If you're really rich, it's easier to basically change the rules, pay people off, et cetera, and practice tax evasion. And this seems to happen historically as well. particularly in places like Rome, you seem to have ev evidence of increasing corruption going towards the more unstable periods. On top of that, inequality seems to be just uniquely innately corrosive to Saudi.

[01:13:36] This is built upon the work you've probably heard of from Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett. in the books, the inner level and the spirit level, basically more unequal societies, both if you look at states from the US but also across the OECD. More unequal societies tend to have high rates of violent crime, high rates of violent pollution, less trust in public institutions, and even things like greater polarization, which makes sense.

[01:13:59] If we are a species that is developed, be egalitarian, we don't tend to do too well in situations that are of high inequality. On top of that, as you get more and more elites battling, there tends to be a greater need to conquer further field, and conquest can be initially quite beneficial. In the case of Rome, they managed to abolish, sorry, provide free grain and abolish taxes in the city of Rome due to the conquests.

[01:14:28] Yet later on, as you get more and more conquest for a field, they become more costly. You get a bigger military, becomes harder to fund, and of course there's longer supply chains for further conquest. And on top of that. As you get a bigger expanding empire and more elite competition and need for more resources to status, you tend to have to work the mines and the fields increasingly hard.

[01:14:52] So in the case of Rome, you do see signs of depletion of silver mines across Spain, for instance, and some signs of lower yields, which could have been linked to climate change as well. I call of this diminishing returns on extraction. Essentially, over time, Goliath's dominance hierarchies tend to become more extractive over time.

[01:15:12] As you become more top heavy, they take more and more energy and wealth, not just from people, but from the neighbors and from the environment. Initially, that can have benefits, particularly for the people on top, but eventually it has declining benefits and a whole bunch of mounting costs that makes a state

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more and more fragile over time until eventually you have some kind of a hazard hit it.

[01:15:35] So usually in the form of warfare, a climatic change of some sort, like a drought or

[01:15:40] **Nate Hagens:** a disease. So some sort of trigger, would, cause the, house of cards to, finally, break

[01:15:48] **Luke Kemp:** precisely in. When we talk about risk, we usually speak of risk as having four determinant factors. So one are hazards.

[01:15:56] So this could be, say for instance, having a tsunami. The second is vulnerability, so you don't have the infrastructure to cope with the tsunami. The third is the exposure, the fact that of course, you're in the way of the tsunami. And last but not least is response. How you respond could either mitigate the threat or exacerbate it, make it even worse.

[01:16:14] And this is the final bit in the diminishing returns and extraction puzzle in many cases of collapse. People ponder, why is it that the hierarchy, why the people didn't respond better? They often had signs that things weren't going very well. Why is it they couldn't put in place policies to pull them back from the brick?

[01:16:33] This is one thing Jared Diamond talks about a lot in his five point framework on collapse. There's a pretty obvious answer, oligarchy. As you get an increasing and equal society, you get a concentration also in decision making power. This means that, well, first of all, you're probably gonna have overrepresentation of both status seekers, people who are corrupted by power, and of course the dark triad.

[01:16:57] But you also have an overrepresentation of people who don't want to see the status quo changed. They're basically buffered from the impending fret and don't wanna see the system fa change in a fundamental way, which is going to work against them. There's numerous historical cases, but probably the most obvious one you can see, of course, is the modern world where fossil fuel companies have lobbied extensively to make sure that people aren't aware of and doubt the science of climate change.

[01:17:23] Yeah. But that, that,

[01:17:25] **Nate Hagens:** I mean, they're the pushers, we're the users, I mean, fossil fuels have, I mean, we have to include the convenience and loss

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aversion, and positive feedback in the average western global, north lifestyle as well. Yes.

[01:17:42] **Luke Kemp:** Even if we go across fossil fuels to say, for instance, novel entities, so things like PFAS and PFAS, even there, 3M DuPont, the major producers were aware that these could have carcinogenic effects and effects on things like facial defects, prostate cancer, et cetera, in the 1970s because

[01:18:02] **Nate Hagens:** they're part of, the institutional dominance hierarchy that they're just following the motions of the organizational structure that they're part of, not to defend them, but I'm just saying that fits into, I mean, corporations weren't part of your Goliath research, but now they are.

[01:18:22] **Luke Kemp:** Yeah, we'll get into a bit later. I think there's some very particular reasons to believe that these organizations behave in a way that is different to the rest of us. But the key thing is when you get oligarchy, you tend to also have a representation of decision makers who don't necessarily want to address oncoming crises.

[01:18:39] On top of that, a lot of my background was in foresight and forecasting. And when you wanna have better decisions being made, it tends to involve having a larger group of people who have a very diverse set, of information. And often they themselves are quite diverse as well. And they deliberate, they genuinely exchange information, are willing to change their minds.

[01:19:00] That's not what usually happens in oligarchy. Usually have a small homogenous group with very similar interests who are not very willing to listen to each other necessarily. It's very rare you see genuine deliberation in the context of a parliament. In short, oligarchy is bad for decision making and it's even worse for making decisions about oncoming disaster.

[01:19:20] and this is also evident in some of the research we've had done on looking at what types of societies best address disasters and climate change, both in the modern world and in the ancient world. So some of the states back to a Yale air poll just called Peter Peregrine, where he tried to look at historical when you've had big climatic shifts like the late anti Ice Age, which was a kind of series of regional, global, sorry, regional, cooling phases of roughly one Celsius.

[01:19:48] What societies changed and how much cooling did they experience? And then after that, he tried to ask what explains the differences we see here? Because he found it interesting. He had an interesting discovery that essentially those who had very large changes in social structure didn't necessarily have the

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biggest changes in cooling, which is just simply evidence that some societies are more vulnerable to climate change than others.

[01:20:15] His key explanation after another study was societies are more inclusive and democratic. Were better at weathering climate change. We also said modern day studies as well. One, the largest systematic studies of natural disasters and how states both deal with them but also recover. Found that states that have both more capacity, but also importantly more democratic, tend to be much more resilient as well.

[01:20:40] All that's a very long-winded way as saying we have very good growing evidence that oligarchies a knock of decision making, particularly when it comes to disasters, while democracies are so in short, this isn't just about a leader of production. It has a whole bunch of knock-on effects for extractive institutions, which make a society more fragile, more vulnerable to hazards, and less likely to address them

[01:21:03] **Nate Hagens:** while not, to diverge too, far off the central point, but one of the fundamental tenets of.

[01:21:11] Democracy or a healthy democracy is an informed population, which you just said. The dominance hierarchy, of owning the, media and, such makes it difficult for, at least in today's world, people to really understand what, what's going on and, the basic, what's true, information flow.

[01:21:32] **Luke Kemp:** Exactly.

[01:21:33] So the concentration of power in terms of the control of information essentially inhibits us from making good decisions, even as a collective.

[01:21:41] **Nate Hagens:** So, getting, back to the core part of, the book, how many societies, Goliath did you study roughly that went through collapse?

[01:21:52] **Luke Kemp:** I had initially a set of roughly 440 states in what was called the Morris Database.

[01:21:58] Morris is the Greek God of doom, and this stands for the mortality of states. And essentially that database was just a collection of what's the best estimates of when states start and when they end, and what are the different reasons that have been put forward as to why they ended and terminated only a small subsection of that where actually collapses collapse is a, fairly rare phenomenon and it's worthwhile taking a step back.

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[01:22:22] And so quickly defining what I mean by when I say collapse. Collapse is when you have multiple power structures fragment and fall apart together. So when you have a state fall apart, when you have the power structure in politics fall apart, we tend to call it a state failure or a political collapse.

[01:22:43] When the economy disaggregates, we call a risk an economic bust or an economic collapse. When a population tends to collapse, we call course called a bust to a population collapse. When you have all these multiple power structures come down together, that's when you call it a societal collapse. Societal collapse is a fairly rare and alongside the moral dataset, I also used a lot of findings from both, the Sasha database.

[01:23:09] This is curated by Peter Turin, who we discussed before, and Dan Hoyer, who's now the kind of lead author on esat and also in particular, what they have called the crisis database with a collection of roughly 150 different case studies of crises and collapses for at global history. And apart from that, just individual case studies.

[01:23:29] So it's hard to put down a very particular number, but it would be at the very, I've looked in a broad way across hundreds and at least in depth in a couple of dozen.

[01:23:40] **Nate Hagens:** And what would it have been like to live through one of those collapses in the couple dozen of, societies that you studied? How, did people respond when this was happening?

[01:23:50] **Luke Kemp:** It varies dramatically. And what you experienced really depends upon who you were and where you were. Take for instance, the case of the collapse, the Western Roman Empire. If you were living in a small Roman town in kind of Central West Britain or Central East Britain during the collapse of the Roman Empire, you basically, within the space of a single lifespan, go from a situation where you can see Roman bath houses.

[01:24:21] You have Roman soldiers marching around, you have currency, people are speaking Latin, and you have a pretty prosperous market town to suddenly having a situation where most people around you no longer speak Latin, they have different tongues that town's been largely abandoned as kind of just a small trading village of sorts.

[01:24:39] The different villas and bath houses have all been abandoned as well, and you no longer see Roman soldiers or Roman bureaucrats. Your entire life has basically changed. On the other hand, if you were an aristocrat in France or a

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peasant in Spain, you might not notice very much change at all apart from the language that your tax collector uses.

[01:25:01] So it really depends upon who you are and where you are. And apart from that, most people probably don't know or understand that they're in the midst of a collapse. They know and feel the very direct disaster that's confronting them. So if you are in Rome during a sack, you know that warfare is coming.

[01:25:19] You can see the soldiers, you can smell the smoke. It would've been horrendous. And probably the best people to speak to about this is those who go through modern day disasters, like in the Syrians Ever war. But there wouldn't have necessarily known this is part of a larger collapse. And in some cases, this case we made that often collapse is something we kind of retrospectively see.

[01:25:42] and on a chilling note, it could just simply be that collapse is often invisible until after it happens.

[01:25:49] **Nate Hagens:** So are we in collapse now or is it just not evenly distributed as people say?

[01:25:55] **Luke Kemp:** I don't think so quite yet. I think we're likely heading towards a decline. I wouldn't say we're past the precipice yet.

[01:26:02] Precipice yet,

[01:26:03] **Nate Hagens:** unless you're in Gaza or Ukraine or Afghanistan, or if you're a dolphin or an elephant, et cetera.

[01:26:12] **Luke Kemp:** Precisely. Yeah, but this is where we have to think about collapse as being collapse of power structures. And at this stage, at a global level, it's definitely true. You still have state failure, but when we speak about collapse, I think both you and I are usually interested in global societal collapse in particular.

[01:26:28] **Nate Hagens:** One of the surprising things in your book, is you suggest that in these historical collapses, which big caveat, big asterisk is we're in a no analogs global and ecological situation now, but historically collapse, per year research had a more positive outcome for the general population than for the 1%.

[01:26:53] So what were some of the bright sides of the historical collapses? You researched,

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[01:26:57] **Luke Kemp:** dark ages do often have bright sides. One of them surprisingly, is human health. If you look at the West Roman Empire, after its fall, people seem to get healthier and taller. So one of the best general indicators of human health we have is human height.

[01:27:15] In short, people who are taller tend to be healthier, then tend to have bigger, more varied diets, or more protein and more calories. When you have less bone lesions, you tend to also have stronger bones. Once again, usually indication of more calories and more protein. What cross roam, you basically have people who have less holes in their teeth, less bone lesions, and are taller after it's fall.

[01:27:40] **Nate Hagens:** Caveat being the people who didn't die than these people are taller, healthier, et cetera.

[01:27:46] **Luke Kemp:** Precise. What I was gonna get to what we call the survivor effect. Essentially, when you have a lower population, what that means is workers become scarcer and more valuable. Suddenly labor increases in value and real wages tend to shoot up.

[01:28:00] We see this in the wake of the black death as well. Basically, labor becomes scarcer that people have more ability to bargain with their landlords and others, and they tend to become healthier, more prosperous. So people after the black death also become substantially taller and much, much richer in terms of real wages.

[01:28:18] That's the survivor effect. So whether it's people dying or people moving, a small population tends to be better off after catastrophe. The second is that Rome encouraged the use of grain, particularly is tax crop, and people, as they moved away from the empire and often lived more rurally, tended to have a diversification of diet towards more animal protein, and that was a good thing.

[01:28:41] Precisely more animal protein usually meant more calories, but also just was in general, is better for your overall health. It means usually better growth overall, except for the animal. Precisely, yeah. The third one is that Rome bys end was a staggering, really unequal place. One is submit, according to Walter Schneiders, it was three quarters of the way towards the maximum theoretical level of inequality.

[01:29:05] That maximum theoretical okay. Level is basically where one individual earns all the surplus wealth. So a ginny coefficient of, one, essentially. Yeah. And interestingly, Rome was not atypical. It was not an anomaly. One study of I believe 48 societies across world history found that on average though, were around three quarters of the way towards this theoretical maximum in the Lord.

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[01:29:29] What? I didn't know that.

[01:29:32] **Nate Hagens:** Wow. Where, are we today? If, those were collapsed at three quarters, what are we at now? 30%, 40%? can you quantify it? I mean, we can look at the global GI coefficient in short. I'm not

[01:29:45] **Luke Kemp:** entirely sure. Okay. I do know that 81 billion billionaires, or yeah, 81 billionaires own more wealth than the bottom half of humanity, so we'd be pretty high.

[01:29:55] yeah, in general, genie coefficients in most countries are lower on average, but they're still usually roughly somewhere between a third to a half of maximum fair level of ill wealth and equality.

[01:30:07] **Nate Hagens:** If you look at within one country and then between countries, you, get quite a different picture

[01:30:13] **Luke Kemp:** precisely.

[01:30:14] Also, if you look between wealth versus income, wealth tends to be much worse than income, but in short, don't have statistics to mind. But in general, wealth inequality is not looking great and it's getting worse as well. in the 1980s, roughly 25% of wealth was captured by the top 10%, I believe. and now it's closer to 40%.

[01:30:35] **Nate Hagens:** So

[01:30:35] **Luke Kemp:** let me

[01:30:36] **Nate Hagens:** ask you this, Luke. you have, or had in the last seven years in creating this book just access to a, vast amount of historical data. And if, you could remove the names of the societies and someone did like a double blind test for you and showed you, time stamps of the 20 years or the 50 years, could you given those cues?

[01:31:05] could you tell if a society was in or getting ready to collapse?

[01:31:10] **Luke Kemp:** There's some evidence that we could, but it requires certain kinds of data. So there's been two interesting studies done by Martin Scheffer and colleagues looking at both P societies. So these are basically some of the first farmers in southwest United States and also the first farmers of Europe.

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[01:31:31] You went through these big boom bust cycles during the neolithic, and in both cases you tend to have what's called critical slowing down, which essentially means after some kind of shock, the society is slower at recovering. And a slow recovery seems to signal that they're becoming increasingly vulnerable and fragile and that a future shock could actually cause something that's deeper and more permanent.

[01:31:58] That's one indicator. I would say also, once again, growing levels of extraction and inequality tend to show that a site is gonna become more vulnerable over time. It's worth noting that I did a study that was led by Martin Scheffer using the Morris database, trying to look at do societies seem to age that is, do they become more fragile over time?

[01:32:19] And the answer based upon the statistical analysis of Morris database was, it appears so that up to around about 200 years, society's becoming ly fragile and then they kind of stay at that high, at high risk level thereafter. We should quickly jump back to, just to where I didn't quite finish off, to the benefits of collapse.

[01:32:41] So just very briefly, Rome was not necessarily good for its citizens by the end, something like. A third of economic output was captured by the top 1.5%, and there was such crippling taxation that it was increasingly difficult for people to raise large families on farms, which is why they had to rely upon German mercenaries.

[01:33:01] **Nate Hagens:** Here's a dumb question, but if, you were teleported back in time and had all this historical data and you could have told, Roman leaders, about this ahead of time before they got to the terminal, phase, would they have listened and what you would you have recommended to them?

[01:33:22] **Luke Kemp:** They almost certainly wouldn't have listened, particularly, don't speak Latin.

[01:33:27] **Nate Hagens:** You okay. You know what I mean?

[01:33:30] **Luke Kemp:** No. Even if I speak spoke Latin,

[01:33:31] **Nate Hagens:** I, I doubt they would've listened because your information and your guidance would not have led to their continued dominance and, hierarchy.

[01:33:42] **Luke Kemp:** I think that's one key factor. Yes. And what would I tell them to do? It would've been a pretty fundamental reshaping of meridian society,

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including things like the abolition of slavery, trying to basically get back, conquer territory and shrink back towards the original city, state of Rome.

[01:33:59] Democratic reforms, essentially all the things we'll touch upon for what I'd recommend for the modern world as well.

[01:34:04] **Nate Hagens:** Right. So the, so to give up things, to give up some of the things that lead to your dominance and hierarchy and status so that you don't lose all of your dominance and hierarchy and status and maybe your life.

[01:34:17] **Luke Kemp:** Yep. In short, to reverse the increasingly extractive society, make it less concentrated and well, and wealth and power, which means some people have to lose out.

[01:34:26] **Nate Hagens:** So the, the article, by The Guardian earlier this week, and I imagine you didn't choose their title, I mean their journalist, but the title of the article was, self termination is Most Likely.

[01:34:38] what does that mean and what are your thoughts about that

[01:34:42] **Luke Kemp:** in the book? Towards the end, I have a chapter called Be Fates of Goliath. When I first started this, it was partially driven by desire to do foresight better. So my original job at the Center for Study of Ex Risk was in foresight, and I both became familiar with how to do forecasting, so making very precise numerical predictions about future events, but also foresight, where you have these more general plausible pictures of the future, which are often done for things like scenario analysis, but also by what's called horizon scanning.

[01:35:12] So getting together big groups of experts and basically using deliberative democracy amongst them to get better predictions about the future yet. I was increasingly skeptical of how effective this is going to be for really thinking through how likely is collapse in the future and how could the world unfold.

[01:35:30] And I found that most of my colleagues, when I thought about this question, they must always had some kind of story about history in the back of their mind. So for some people it was that history's driven by technological change. Technological progress tends to be the driver of human welfare, and the technology is largely outside of our control.

[01:35:48] That was their kind of historical story, which drove how they thought about the future. To me, this book in many ways was me trying to interrogate, given the evidence, what should I think about deep history in order to understand

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the deep future. And what I identify is three main trajectories for Goliath going to the future.

[01:36:10] One is, as mentioned, is self-determination. The key problem here is that Goliaths tend to, according to what I call Goliath traps, what others would call multipolar traps or even morlock. I never quite liked mooch. It just makes it seem too ethereal, too too difficult to overcome. And multipolar traps didn't quite catch it for me either, because these are things that don't happen to everyone.

[01:36:38] So just to be clear, when we talk about Goliath traps and multipolar traps, these are basically situations where individuals pursuing their own self-interest will result in outcomes that are collectively bad. So the classic one here is things like the tragedy of the commons. So it's usually attributed to Garrett Harden, but actually was a British economist over a hundred years earlier who originally came up with the idea.

[01:37:03] But essentially, if you have an open access resource that people can use, say for instance, a pasture and you have peasants farming their capital on it, then everyone has an individual incentive to use that resource as much as possible, even if used it leads to over exploitation. Collectively, it would be best of course, if no one exploits the resource, but they can't rely upon others.

[01:37:27] And so everyone collectively pursues their own self-interest. The pasture gets overgrazed, it falls apart, and everyone suffers. That's the idea at least. And we have similar ideas, like in game theory, we have this idea of prisoners, dilemmas, and arms races. So essentially, if you can't trust your neighbor and their motivations, you have an incentive to basically build up weapons because you don't know if they're gonna attack you.

[01:37:56] And that means they see, you building up weapons, and they're gonna start building their own weapons, becomes what is called an international relations, a security dilemma. The problem is. Game theory is mathematically neat. It doesn't actually seem to work in practice. For instance, when new people put people into a laboratory setting to do a tragedy, the commons, as soon as you let them communicate, they don't tend to result in a tragedy.

[01:38:20] The commons similarly, when you try to get people to do arms races or do a Nash equilibrium in a prisoner's dilemma game, they don't tend to end up like that. That's because all this is built upon an assumption that humans are self-interested and profit maximizes. In reality, we have much better evidence that we're really concerned about what other people think about us, our status and our reputation.

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[01:38:42] And we're also really concerned about our equity, about equity. So this goes back to that vision of humans are parent pointed to. In the Paralympic, we have natural counter dominance and tuitions, and we are very obsessed with status. And you see this in games, so you're probably familiar with the dictator game where you essentially have a pot of money.

[01:38:59] One person gets to select how much they get and how much the other person gets the catch is the other person has to agree. In theory, I should be able to over a hun over a hundred dollars say I'm gonna take \$99. You get \$1, you are actually better off. You have \$1 more than you would otherwise. Yet most people are gonna tell me to fuck off.

[01:39:21] It's usually not until you get roughly above 30 to \$40

[01:39:24] **Nate Hagens:** most people across multiple cultures, by the way. Correct? Yeah. Yeah.

[01:39:29] **Luke Kemp:** And it's not until you get roughly above 30 or \$40 that people tend to start to take the deal. And that's largely because they don't see it as fair. They don't see it equitable. In short, game theory doesn't work in the laboratory.

[01:39:42] It also often doesn't work in practice. Eleanor Ostrom almost immediately debunked harden's idea of a book, basically going through all these examples of indigenous cultures and other groups who seem to pretty sustainably manage their resources. But because some people who have been living in their environment for as we can far as we can tell, at least 200,000 years without having arms races or depleting their natural environment.

[01:40:04] **Nate Hagens:** But did you say earlier that the koan was the example where if, a dark triad person is, in their midst, that they have ways to, circumvent that eventually leads to infanticide or killing of them in extreme cases,

[01:40:24] **Luke Kemp:** counter dominance. Counter. So if they have one person counter dominance, yeah.

[01:40:27] Yeah. If they have one person who tries to dominate the group or if that be dark, tried or not, they tend to have ways of putting them back in line at the very worst executions.

[01:40:35] **Nate Hagens:** One of the fundamental, implications of this is counter dominant strategies are much easier to implement with a hundred people than 8 billion.

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[01:40:44] **Luke Kemp:** Not necessarily. Let's quickly go. I think an important thing here you're touching upon is that they had ways of controlling certain types of individuals came into power. So interestingly, when you look at game theory, there are certain people who are more likely to end up in a tragedy commons or end up defecting in the case of a arms race or anything like that.

[01:41:06] Unsurprisingly, it's people who are high in the dark triad. There's a second group, which is those who are trained in finance and economics, essentially, those who think that others are gonna defect because that's what they've been taught throughout their studies. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts.

[01:41:24] Now I want you to take a step back and think about, say, ExxonMobil or a state like the US or Russia, and imagine that organization, that state has a person stalking the streets outside. What do they like?

[01:41:39] **Nate Hagens:** Opportunistic, ruthless, clever, sneaky, shall I go on?

[01:41:47] **Luke Kemp:** Precisely. I think we all have a pretty good picture, but they would be constantly boasting about themselves and how great they are.

[01:41:53] They give at least less than 1% of their wealth to those in need. They would be constantly stockpiling weapons and suspicious of their neighbors. If you did a psychological test of them, that'd likely be pretty high in the dark triad, they'd likely be very high in status dominant seeking behavior.

[01:42:09] **Nate Hagens:** So, so our corporations, which are not people, do they, exhibit the personality traits of dark triad.

[01:42:15] **Luke Kemp:** We can't really give a psychology test or a corporation, hence the Ford experiment. But I think they do. I mean, most corporations tend to behave in a way, which I don't think most people would. And one example of this is they tend to be much more likely to fall into these Goliath traps, into arms, races.

[01:42:31] Races, resources, and races for status. One of the key points of the book I make is that in the long term, if you're locked in these races, it's not going to work out well. Where does an arms race end? If you have increasingly sophisticated weaponry and technology, where does it end over the space of centuries?

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[01:42:50] It ends in nuclear war. Yeah. Or something worse. You know, we of course are trying to find ways to build even worse weapons, including things like killer robots, even orbital lasers, stuff like that.

[01:43:00] **Nate Hagens:** Those wouldn't be worse than nuclear war because nuclear war would, be the, you know, black soot that would shut out, photosynthesis.

[01:43:09] Yeah. And go beyond the human sphere.

[01:43:11] **Luke Kemp:** Yeah. A nuclear in terms go, simply leaving up the possibility that we could potentially build worse weapons. There no doubt are things that we may doubt discover, which we dunno about right now. In 1940, if I was researching existential risk, well, 1950s, let's say I'm only really worried about nuclear weapons.

[01:43:27] When I'm researching today, I have colleagues who work across ai, engineered pandemics, climate change, et cetera. I think this is the key problem. If you're locked in these races, you are eventually going to likely end in self termination. The second pathway I talk about is maybe we find ways to have technological fixes for different frets.

[01:43:52] We throw up, you know, we find ways to decarbonize using high technology. We do things like Jira engineering. We find ways to align more dangerous AI systems. Somehow our nuclear weapons stay in check, and we just get very lucky as well. Yet, even if we have that, what kind of world do we like live in? When you look at the long DeRay, something that Goliath can be very consistent with and very reliant upon doing is building up more control mechanisms over the broader population.

[01:44:23] One of the very first rules in the world, like Namur, the rule, the first dynasty in Egypt would've known very little about their citizens. Indeed, most ancient societies of rulers had very little idea of what their citizens are actually doing Today. The head of Google or a state tends to have an order of magnitude, orders of magnitude, more knowledge about their citizens.

[01:44:45] They often know who you are, what your name is, what your tax income bracket is, what you've searched on Google, and hence, what's your sexual proclivities, what you like, what you don't like, what your political affiliation, et cetera. That's an incredible amount of power, which of course is being used in the context of founs capitalism to move people towards particular types of advertisement, particular types of consumption, and the case of intelligence agencies.

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[01:45:08] It's being used to better identify not just to a potential threats, but who are potential political dissidence as well. And as you get societies to become increasingly extractive, and we see this happening in a global level since the 1980s, wealth inequality has been increasing over across countries and globally, but you've also had democratic backsliding.

[01:45:30] So today, 5.7 billion people live in autocracies. I think it's approximately 45 are becoming more autocratic while only 18 are becoming more democratic. In short, we don't just see the world becoming more une equal. We also see it becoming less democratic again. Each more power is becoming more concentrated over time.

[01:45:52] Where does that lead? I talk about this idea of silicon Goliath, which is essentially that every form of Goliath fuel changes and makes a society more draconian and in many ways more oppressive. So rather than caged land like building walls or having rivers, you now have massive balance systems. Rather than having bronze weapons, you have potentially killer robots, which can be controlled by an individual or small group.

[01:46:19] And of course, we already have nuclear weapons, which are controlled by an individual, the choice to go to nuclear war. Technically it just sits with one person, the president, which is called some people to call it affirm nuclear monarchy. And last but not least, we have little resources, not just in the form of grain.

[01:46:36] We still do have grain of course, but also fossil fuels and data. Data is the new little resource, but hence the idea of silicon golia. If it's basically a large scale dominance hierarchy that extracts things like data, uses that to fuel AI systems to better understand and control everyone around it and has the weapons that can be easily concentrated amongst a small elite to enforce rules as they please.

[01:47:00] I think even if we have somehow an escape from catastrophe, and that could happen, of course the future's uncertain. And even if we do somehow have increasing standards of living and abundance, we'll not likely to have more freedom or demo democracy in the future, we're gonna have silicon Goliath,

[01:47:17] **Nate Hagens:** techno feudalism as Giannis Veka through.

[01:47:21] Precisely.

[01:47:22] **Luke Kemp:** Yeah. And the very last trajectory is essentially we slay life. We find ways to shackle Goliath, destroy it, and build much more democratic

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inclusive global institutions. That is, I believe, the least likely. Scenario, but the one it's worth, most desperately fighting for,

[01:47:43] **Nate Hagens:** which is why I have this podcast, and which is why you're a guest on the podcast, and which is why there's no way that I can tap all of the labyrinthian, irid edition in your brain.

[01:47:57] so I, as you were speaking, I think you have to come back on a round table with, Lisa Crawl or John Gowdy, or Daniel Schmuck Berger or Peter Turin to do some integration of, what you're covering with some, rhyming, topics. So I hope you'd be willing to do that.

[01:48:16] **Luke Kemp:** That'd be wonderful. Thank you.

[01:48:17] **Nate Hagens:** So getting back to your, book, while human nature, you know, as at the level of the individual human may be inclined towards cooperation in these situations, it's clear that institutions, corporations, and have set and incentives that we're all embedded in today, are not so based on your research in, writing this book, what would actions and policies need to target and most effectively shift the system away from the Goliath dynamic that you've, painted?

[01:48:52] **Luke Kemp:** If I'm right, then the key problem here is we have the root causes of both the darker angels of our nature and Goliath fuel combining to make institutions that bring out and amplify the worseness. That's why when you think about the US Russia or ExxonMobil as a person, it doesn't paint a pretty picture and it paints a picture of a person who is far less trustworthy and virtuous than your neighbor, and that person is far more likely to act in a game periodic way and get caught in certain kinds of traps.

[01:49:23] Just as a side note, I shall also be clear here that while I use a shorthand of talking about traps and races, these aren't just about competition, they're also about corporation. If you look at, say for instance, fossil fuel industry, they're technically competing for a larger market share, yet they regularly come together to lobby against climate action, for instance.

[01:49:44] Same with Freedom DuPont, they're technical competitors, but they came together to lobby and basically quell information about how dangerous their products could be, and exactly the same with the military industrial complex as well. The NSO group in Israel had a tool they called Pegasus, basically a highly effective program to hack into mobiles.

[01:50:05] Just using the number, you didn't even have to have someone click a link, and they sold that with the approval of the IDF, the Israel Defense forces to

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the enemies like Qatar, for instance, in Saudi Arabia. If this was purely an arms race, why the hell would you do that? The thing is, it's acting more like a kind of racket essentially.

[01:50:25] Anything that gets you more power and allows you for greater extraction, you pursue including corporation level elites, which is probably one way where I kind of differ from Peter A. Little bit. I think there's more about elite factionalism, so you get increasing cooperation between certain groups of elites, but they compete as well.

[01:50:43] That aside, what you need to do if you wanna make sure that you don't have these Goliaths amplifying the worseness is to reverse the process that created them to essentially level out the different forms of power, and there's pretty easy ways to do that for each form of power. Think about political power, simply use citizen assemblies and citizens juries.

[01:51:07] We have increasing evidence that these tend to work pretty well in improving group decision making and reducing things like political polarization, and I like to always give examples, which I think are clarifying. For instance, if in the 1980s you had a citizens' assembly or a citizen's jury of a couple of randomly selected people sitting over the top of Exxon, when they decided to bury the information they had about climate change and the modeling they'd done themselves, do you think the citizen's jury says yes.

[01:51:38] Almost certainly not. You know, they have children, they're gonna basically, potentially suffer for the impacts of climate change. They don't have a vest interest in seeing the company do the best possible. And likewise, if you, in the 1945, had a group of people who were randomly selected from the US population, plumbers, nurses, farmers, et cetera, who were asked, should we detonate the first atomic weapon, the Trinity test in the Santos of New Mexico?

[01:52:06] And at the time we couldn't write the possibility that this triggers a runaway effect that basically ignites the entire atmosphere, killing all of life on earth, not just human extinction, the extinction of the entire biosphere. And we also know at that time that the Nazis are no longer pursuing their own nuclear weapon.

[01:52:24] They're no longer pursuing a nuclear ich. Do you think that jury says, yeah, go

[01:52:29] **Nate Hagens:** ahead, take that risk? no I don't. But though, but this is an issue of scale and these citizen juries, to be effective are, at the small scale when

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the dominance hierarchy of the global Superorganism, or Goliath, in your term, are at the highest scales.

[01:52:48] So there's like a mismatch of where the democratization would need to, wield influence.

[01:52:54] **Luke Kemp:** I would say there's no reason you can't run these at a higher scale, right? Like we already do have representation. This is the main thing that's happening here is rather than having a representation process, which selects for people who want status and generally speaking, selects people high in the dark triad and for status-seeking behavior, instead you're just doing sortition.

[01:53:12] You're randomly selecting people, you are having a process's more likely to have genuine deliberation. And on top of that, you've also had, I believe, Audrey Tang on the podcast. Yeah, I was just gonna say, yeah, it puts forward a whole bunch of, you know, different digital tools we can use that can kind of supplement having these dead, these democratic assemblies or juries with having more direct democracy with deliberation across a wide sway of people.

[01:53:38] I think this is the one thing that gives me a lot more hope is that we actually have the technology to really effectively do democracy at scale. And one thing to bear in mind here is that we put absolutely no money into actually innovating in this sphere. Despite all the talk of freedom, democracy being key to the west, to the us, to the uk, to Australia, et cetera, we put at least an order of magnitude more into facial recognition technology than we do into improving democracy.

[01:54:05] We put least a hundred times more, probably a thousand times more into our militaries than to improving how we represent people at scale.

[01:54:13] **Nate Hagens:** When you say that we, it's the people in the dominance hierarchy that are doing those investments

[01:54:19] **Luke Kemp:** Precisely, but the key message here is that if we actually tried, if we actually rewarded this like we reward startups in the space of ai, imagine what we could do here.

[01:54:28] I see no reason that we live in a world where we can potentially split the A and builds intelligence and silicon, but for some reason we can't do democracy at scale or escape arms races. I think that selective imagination is really down to dominance hierarchies in Goliath. It's not down to what we're actually capable of.

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[01:54:47] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah, I would agree with that. Lemme go to the root though, that one of the things that you outlined earlier in this conversation about lut storable surplus, would there be a way to make resources less lable, that you kind of infer at the end of your book?

[01:55:07] **Luke Kemp:** Yeah, so one way to do so is simply to make sure data is less liable.

[01:55:13] And this could range from things like having data unions. So essentially, rather than your data just being collected on mass by both intelligence agencies and big tech, they have to purchase it from you. And rather than having this really unequal relationship where you basically have to negotiate with Apple, which we kind of do, whenever you sign off on one of those contracts, which has reams and re as legal text, and you have no other option to accept it, this would be people are represented by a union, which basically sells their data for far better payment in return.

[01:55:44] So that would be one key thing is basically making different resources, less lable. You could also, for instance, reduce caged land, you know, make it easier for people to move, have more open borders, and have less mass surveillance. And suddenly states have to actually make it more appealing for citizens to stay where they are and to pay taxes where they are.

[01:56:03] And on top of that, you could find ways to make weapons less monopolize, I think in particular by making the military more transparent. Right now we have this problem where we can't often have de democratic oversight over the military because half the decisions are being made with secrecy, supervisions.

[01:56:21] You need to have light and transparency in order to democracy.

[01:56:25] **Nate Hagens:** Back to your previous point, the caged geography, the implications of a warming world and the potential billions of climate refugees in the coming 50 years, that makes that one a little bit more problematic. I, would infer,

[01:56:45] **Luke Kemp:** I believe a lot of this comes down to how we react and treat people who are moving.

[01:56:51] When we think about the paralytic, it's highly likely, one of the reasons we survived was because we moved, if you had a drought in one area or a volcanic shock, you could move and join a group elsewhere. And we see this

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amongst, ooh, I think it's potentially the ZA or the kuisan who use what are called the Zaro partnerships.

[01:57:09] So basically they have these long distance friends, and the idea is that they do this long distance gift giving, reciprocal relationships. And if they have a disaster, they can very easily move and join them, but also vice versa. Right?

[01:57:20] **Nate Hagens:** But that worked in the, in hundreds or maybe thousands of people, not mil millions or billions.

[01:57:26] It's just a different scale of problem. Yes,

[01:57:29] **Luke Kemp:** definitely a different scale. But the key thing here is that we have that impulse. And we even see this in the uk, right? Yes. Like people started opening up their homes during Ukraine, the Ukraine war, because we realized there were people like us who were suffering immensely for no fault, their own.

[01:57:44] And I think the key issue here is not that. We can't handle immigration. I think there's good technical discussions of how to do that properly, but it's usually that it has this authoritarian impulse that triggers in many of us that we feel threatened. And the easiest way to have a scapegoat there is by looking at minorities rather than the true root cause, which is essentially the rich and the power holders.

[01:58:06] **Nate Hagens:** This has been, just a tour de force of, overview of things that rhyme with, the core tenets of this podcast. It seems what I'm hearing from you, like any hope of meaningful reform, is mostly in the hands of those with the most power in the system, like kind of a catch 22. What can an average person who's listening or viewing this program, do to make a difference at least directionally, with the, themes that you're unpacking?

[01:58:37] **Luke Kemp:** I'll start with the phrase that it seems to have the most resonance with people, which is, don't be a dick if you have the ability to work for a big tech company or for the fossil fuel industry or an arms manufacturer don't. And the idea that if I don't do this, someone else will. That's a bad sign.

[01:59:00] That's the kind of logic that really is reserved to people who are. Guards at concentration camps.

[01:59:07] **Nate Hagens:** People that work at Exxon and Shell are not dicks, I'm sorry, Luke. they're people like you and I, have friends that work there. and I have friends that work at Apple and Google and Home Depot and Walmart.

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[01:59:21] And I think we'll have to disagree

[01:59:23] **Luke Kemp:** there. Like you can very easily both be a decent person in some ways, but you can, if you know this is actually doing the wrong thing, this is contributing to global destruction. You go ahead and do it anyway. You can find ways of justifying that. But to be frank, we should start calling people out for this.

[01:59:39] I don't think you're actually gonna have a large scale change in human behavior if we let people off the hook by, yes, sure you can work in Exxon. You still seem like a nice bloke. You can work at urban ai. You can work as a lobbyist. The raw, brutal fact here is you are contributing to global destruction in a pretty direct way.

[01:59:57] And we shouldn't as a society tolerate that.

[01:59:59] **Nate Hagens:** So are we, by flying and using the electricity to make this podcast?

[02:00:05] **Luke Kemp:** I think both you and I know that's a very, different scenario. It's an incredibly indirect way that we often can't really, unfortunately get by. I mean, for me. I kind of have to have electricity, I have to work with Pengu, which I know is the corporation in order to have any kind of impact.

[02:00:22] But at the same time, I'm not gonna work for Shell, I'm not gonna work for open ai, I'm not gonna work for any agent of doom, which I know is directly contributing to the problem. And likewise, I mean, we can all say that we benefit from a history of colonization and racism. We can still very easily say if someone is racist and saying racist things, we call them out for it.

[02:00:43] I think it's a fairly simple impulse to say, don't directly contribute to your career, to global disruption. That's not a high ask at all.

[02:00:53] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. we, I mean the spirit of your comment, we agree, but the specifics, I think you could have a job at Exxon, doing quality control or human resources or whatever it is you're doing, and have a second life where you're doing, work in service of life.

[02:01:11] And so I, I don't think working at x, y, Z corporation is necessarily means you're a dick. but I hear your underlying point.

[02:01:19] **Luke Kemp:** I think this comes down to a similar idea of you can be part of a regime, which does horrible things. You can be a guard at a concentration camp, but still be a good family member when you go home.

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[02:01:29] I'm sorry. But to me, the former kind of overrules the latter. And if we really think the collapse and the death of potential, millions of billions of people in the future is a genuine possibility, it seems kind of weird to say. No, don't worry. You being a good father, brother, sister, mother, colleague, et cetera, that outweighs the damage you're doing in your job.

[02:01:54] Sorry, but it doesn't,

[02:01:56] **Nate Hagens:** well, that's not what I'm saying. But if Exxon and Shell disappeared tomorrow, 'cause everyone didn't wanna be a dick, we would have a collapse and the death of millions or billions.

[02:02:05] **Luke Kemp:** But the thing is, no one's asking for that. Like everyone's asking for slow decarbonization. This is actually the kind of arguments they use.

[02:02:11] I don't think we should perpetuating that. Like yes, we have fossil fuels right now today, but the key thing is we do have alternatives. We may disagree on how viable is alternatives are for the current level of global energy consumption, but Shell, BP and others have done everything in their power. To cloud the public discussion, to sow disformation and doubt about the climate science and to basically extend their profits.

[02:02:35] I don't think we should be letting them off the hook by saying, but we kind of need fossil fuels right now. We need energy and we need to have a good discussion of how do we most effectively get energy in the future? And those corporations done absolutely everything in the power to stop us from having that.

[02:02:49] **Nate Hagens:** It's not just corporations though, Luke, it's, you look at the surveys recently in the United States and Europe, and people want, they prefer access to cheap and available power and energy. These are citizens, not corporations. So there, there is this dynamic, especially with the middle class in the global north and west that have become addicted slash habituated to this level of, comfort and convenience.

[02:03:16] **Luke Kemp:** I think there's something I'll have to disagree on when in the book I note a whole bunch of surveys, which when you look across pretty much every OECD country, but also countries like China, people want to have more climate action. And that's just simply people who are relatively uninformed doing a large scale survey.

[02:03:30] When you do things like deliber of Democratic experiments, like the French Climate Assembly, people tend to support even more. Radical ambitious action. Likewise, there's pretty strong majorities in favor of a ban on killer robots

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across at least 25 countries, including all the major producers. Likewise, when you actually talk to people across places like Israel, the US, and Russia, they actually want to have the abolition of nuclear weapons.

[02:03:56] So I just disagree with you, right? I don't think this is a fact of everyone is kind of addicted to the current system. People want energy, sure, but people don't necessarily want it to come from fossil fuels in the long term. We'll need to have a move away from that. And I think once again, you're kind of laying off the hook by saying, well, this is a very useful resource that we need, and hence, it's totally okay that BP and numbers have consistently and systematically so di doubt in the science, hampered every effort to have regulation.

[02:04:27] Likewise, with open ai, like, I'm sorry, like they say that they believe this could cause human extinction. Dario Modi philanthropic gives the likelihood at 25%, but they still go ahead and try to build these algorithms despite the fact, once again, the emerging evidence here is when you actually do large scale surveys, people actually don't want to try to build a GI.

[02:04:48] So I think we have very different images here. Of human nature and what people actually want.

[02:04:53] **Nate Hagens:** No, I, completely agree with you on the a GI. It's just the, recent surveys in the United States, at least on people voting both left and right, and I could put 'em in the show notes, show a distinct, all of the above preference for energy.

[02:05:09] and I think this has resulted in what's happening in Europe as well with the preference for energy security over climate mitigation. I'm not happy about that. Yeah. I wish that the, world would, not only climate, but all of the planetary boundaries that were exceeding, that we would vote in a democratic way to reduce our consumption and change our values and live more locally and have less damage.

[02:05:34] I just don't see that trend happening at the moment.

[02:05:38] **Luke Kemp:** I think, so I'd have to look at the exact servers. I haven't come across them, but there's a difference between wanting more reliable energy and saying that you want to have fossil fuels in the long term. Lemme just double

[02:05:49] **Nate Hagens:** click on that. When I talk about, the importance of fossil energy, it's to the current complexity and brittleness of our current system.

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[02:06:00] And I personally think that the energy transition is far less about what kind of. Renewable energy and battery or combination, on the actual physical supply. And it's much more about our relationship to energy and consumption. The average American uses 100 times more calories exo somatically than our bodies need, and it's our relationship to ourselves and our relationship to nature.

[02:06:30] And that comes down to values. So my question to you is, you know, if we had a massive shift in values of the type that you and I espouse, how does that fit into the dominance, hierarchy structure? what do you think about that?

[02:06:47] **Luke Kemp:** That is a, fantastic point. Agreed. When you look at this from a long direct perspective, the average ice H Hunter gave, it captures around about 4,000 calories per day.

[02:06:57] The average European captures, I think, close to 230,000 calories per day. I think most this comes down to as mentioned, conspicuous consumption, that we both have systems that, of course consume a huge amount of energy and just simply living requires that as well. But. A lot of what we purchase and consume ends up being acts of conspicuous consumption, ways of signaling status.

[02:07:22] And you of course see that amongst the richest of us, Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, et cetera, they, there's no way they'll ever use a billion dollars, let alone multiple billions of dollars. A lot of it ends up being ways of competing and of course getting more and more status. And that's why you have things like private yachts, jets, et cetera.

[02:07:40] Remember coming across one statistic recently of the top 1% being having more emissions attributed to them than the bottom 66% of, and this is in terms of wealth holders globally. What does this mean in terms of values? I think while most of us do want to have some degree of cheap energy, if you actually went and surveyed the average Australian or Ethiopian or American and you asked them What do you want?

[02:08:07] They're probably gonna come with things like, I want to be able to own a house without having to work for 40 years. I want to have free education in some degree of job security. I wanna have close family relationships, et cetera. Our system is not built on providing those. And one of the reasons people I think, want energy is because those things are no longer accessible.

[02:08:28] At the very least, you want to have cheap energy and cheap goods as a replacement of sorts.

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[02:08:32] **Nate Hagens:** But even wanting a house, even that impulse is linked to social status and conspicuous consumption in this culture. Because if something else was socially approved that 10 families lived in one residence and they had some great times together, then that would become the new norm.

[02:08:50] And we don't have that. I mean, to have every human have their own house is probably gonna be unsustainable.

[02:08:56] **Luke Kemp:** Agreed. Although, interestingly, I definitely know some communities where, people like the idea of coming together and like shared community residences. this ranges all the way from the rationalists who are very involved with ai.

[02:09:06] They often have these kind of like community houses. Effective Altru do the same thing. Yeah. Degrowth is often do the same thing as well. And even for me, some of my fondest memories actually are in university in the share house. Yeah. I agree. I, long story short, I think part of this comes back down to tapping into that embedded principle of least effort, that often what we want are pretty basic things.

[02:09:30] You know, you and I probably take more happiness out of having a stroll in the woods, having a good time with friends, including not with, you know, large amounts of energy being consumed, having a conversation like this. Precisely. And if we can lean into that and lean into finding new and better ways of measuring progress, rather than having an entire system built upon energy, construction consumption, I think that we can tap into and encourage that side of our human nature.

[02:09:55] I don't think we're working against our evolutionary inclinations. I think we'd actually working with them

[02:10:01] **Nate Hagens:** with what's next for you after this, this book? And I imagine you're quite in demand now, given, how, your, book has been in numerous email threads this week? for me,

[02:10:14] **Luke Kemp:** yeah. It's been unfortunately busy, which also meant I had less time to prepare for this podcast sort of light.

[02:10:20] however, going forward, I'll be taking on a new project, a new book, which is gonna be focusing upon the deep history and future of mass surveillance. I spoke before about the different trajectories of the life, so self termination, global societal collapse, some kind of democratic fundamental reform.

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[02:10:42] And last but not least, silicon golia. I think even if in the long term we collapse in the short term, we're heading towards silicon go life mass surveillance states are close to the default condition going forwards. And I think that's one of the most pressing and urgent challenges of our time, is to understand how do we combat that?

[02:11:01] And importantly, how do we make sure we navigate potential future catastrophes without turning to things like mass surveillance and more societal control.

[02:11:10] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. I. Totally agree with you. I'm quite concerned about that. And I have many people planned, to come on the show that are experts in AI and surveillance and such.

[02:11:21] fantastic. So is that gonna take you another seven years or,

[02:11:26] **Luke Kemp:** I hope not. I'm hoping it'll be close to two or three years. In those seven years I read an enormous amount of global history, which is gonna carry over to the second book. So I believe the second will be far easier to write than the first,

[02:11:38] **Nate Hagens:** except that in those two or three years, an enormous amount of global history will probably happen,

[02:11:45] **Luke Kemp:** almost certainly.

[02:11:45] So I'll be spending a fair bit reading about the modern world, which is okay.

[02:11:49] **Nate Hagens:** It's good to have a change. So since you came on the show, a little more than six months ago, we discussed existential risk. And now today your new book, has there anything major changed about your worldview?

[02:12:04] **Luke Kemp:** There's some minor things that have changed.

[02:12:06] So for instance, there's some studies that came up recently talking about how inequality seems to be not just amend upon things like agriculture, but also basically the availability of land, making the resources more scarce. The main major thing that has changed probably came up towards the end of this conversation as well, is I have a lot more hope about people and I have a lot more hope in general about the future.

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[02:12:29] Well, when I first started as mentioned, believe. A fairly grim view of humans and how we conduct ourselves without authority. But that's completely changed for me. But I also think that in general, we have a lot more of an opportunity here to take that third trajectory to emancipate ourselves from life and not to end up in either collapse or silicone golia.

[02:12:54] And that's been for several things. I've been reading a lot more into things like open democracy, the work of a Ang Ali, Landour and others, and even seeing lots of the small initiatives that are coming up and even seeing the response to the book as well. I think that there's a lot of political appetite here that people understand we're in a difficult moment, that there is this kind of populist worldview of people not being properly represented, even in modern day democracies, that they're being screwed over by elites.

[02:13:24] And I think there's a genuine political opportunity to actually have deep widespread change. So, while people will probably hate this, and I'm sure there'll be comments about hopium and me being drunk, on hopium, I've become much more hopeful.

[02:13:37] **Nate Hagens:** Well, I mean, that is where we align. I am a general believer x, dark triad that, that humans are capable of much more than we're evidencing.

[02:13:48] Now, the question, and the rub becomes, does more political awareness of the dynamic that you are describing, what happens to the dominant, the people in the dominance hierarchy and the structures? And does it accelerate, some of the Goliath unwind that you observed in historical civilizations, or does it ameliorate it?

[02:14:10] That's a, that's an open question, but I'm a hundred percent aligned with you that, this is not who we are. take our society and divide it by 8 billion people. There's a difference between the median and the mean of, human behavior and humanity. And thank you Luke, for your continued, heart and head, unpacking all this.

[02:14:36] And I hope to have you back on a, round table in the not too distant future.

[02:14:40] **Luke Kemp:** My pleasure, Nate. And likewise, thanks for all of your work in this space to be continued,

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[02:14:44] **Nate Hagens:** my friend. Sounds good. If you enjoyed or learned from this episode of The Great Simplification, please follow us on your favorite podcast platform.

[02:14:53] You can also visit The Great Simplification dot com for references and show notes from today's conversation. 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 Batt-Lutz, Brady Heyen, and Lizzy Sirianni.