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[00:00:00] **Christine Webb:** If I can dream big a world beyond human exceptionalism, I mean, all of our major systems would have to be reimagined, right? I think our education systems would have to be radically rethought to emphasize ecological literacy as much as other forms of literacy so that children can grow up very aware of the animals and plants they live around.

[00:00:20] I worry a bit that the mainstream environmental and climate discourse emphasizes sacrifice things we have to give up long-term adverse consequences and not the other side of it, which is all that we stand to gain in repairing and improving our relationship with the rest of nature.

[00:00:44] **Nate Hagens:** Today I am joined by Primatologist Christine Webb, to discuss how science and broader society have been shaped by the belief of human exceptionalism, that humanity is separate from and superior to the rest of the web of life, and what it might mean to question and perhaps even alter this worldview.

[00:01:04] Christine Webb is an assistant professor in the Department of Environmental Studies at New York University as a part of the animal studies program. Prior to joining NYU, she was a researcher and lecturer in the Department of Human Evolutionary Biology at Harvard University. Christine's research follows two intersecting lines of inquiry, understanding the complex dynamics of social life in animals, especially other primates, and examining how the dominant narrative of human exceptionalism has shaped scientific knowledge of the more than human world.

[00:01:38] These two lines of research culminated with her 2025 book, the Arrogant Ape, the Myth of Human Exceptionalism, and Why it matters. In this conversation, Christine and I explore how modern human behavior our institutions and our cultures are rooted in the long held belief that humanity is the pinnacle of the natural world.

[00:02:00] We also discuss our. Shared sense that as the ecological crisis accelerates, our species is being increasingly called upon to profoundly shift how we understand other animals and our place. Among them critically, Christine explores how decentering humanity from our worldview might actually allow us to better understand ourselves as well as navigate more effectively through the global crises, in we, which we find ourselves today.

[00:02:34] Before we begin, if you are enjoying this podcast, I invite you to subscribe to our Substack newsletter where you can read more of the system science underpinning the human predicament. You can find the link to subscribe in the show description. With that, please welcome Dr. Christine Webb. Christine Webb, welcome to the program.

[00:02:54] **Christine Webb:** Thank you for having me.

[00:02:55] **Nate Hagens:** So you have spent years researching the social, emotional and, cognitive lives of our closest living relatives. all the various non-human primates, but your work also centers on merging the environmental science, evolutionary biology, and social qualities of all animals, including us humans.

[00:03:16] In the book he released, last year titled The Arrogant Ape explores the concept of homo sapiens exceptionalism, and the question of who gets to draw the line between human and non-human or subhuman, and if that's a line that needs to be drawn at all. So let's start there on a very interesting topic.

[00:03:38] Can you discuss why you find this conversation and distinction to be so important?

[00:03:42] **Christine Webb:** Sure. So human exceptionalism or homo sapien exceptionalism is this belief that humans are somehow separate from and superior to the rest of nature, that we're not actually animals, but something separate altogether. And I find this conversation so important and timely right now because human exceptionalism is hidden in plain sight.

[00:04:08] It's everywhere and nowhere all at once, and it's so powerful that it often goes unnoticed. It's so normalized that we often don't talk about it, at least in like the mainstream climate and environmental discourse, but it's my belief that human exceptionalism is at the root of the ecological crisis. And when it comes to the ecological crisis, we're so often focused on visible causes like fossil fuels and overpopulation, and not the invisible worldviews or belief systems that make it possible.

[00:04:46] **Nate Hagens:** Is human exceptionalism evenly spread amongst all the humans in all the countries, or are, certain demographics, more guilty of, that lens?

[00:04:58] **Christine Webb:** Yeah, it's definitely not a human universal. So the book title, the Arrogant ape, might be misleading to some because it suggests, it's like this species wide characteristic.

[00:05:09] But human exceptionalism, I would say is a worldview, a belief system of the dominant culture, which in the book I described as western industrialized cultures. But even within those contexts. There can be incredible variation in belief systems. So it's, I wouldn't even say it's a particular culture necessarily.

[00:05:28] I actually think of human exceptionalism as a, way of being and a way of moving in the world that different people can adopt.

[00:05:35] **Nate Hagens:** Is it correlated, with American exceptionalism?

[00:05:39] **Christine Webb:** I don't know if there's been any studies looking at that link, but they definitely have core patterns and, you know, reasonings in common where both set one entity apart from the rest of nature or the rest of the world.

[00:06:05] Claiming to have a unique history, unique status and unique entitlement to use the others towards their own ends. So there's a lot in common there.

[00:06:16] **Nate Hagens:** So I have a lot of questions related to your academic, work and, your book, and your views on this. But it's rare that I have a biologist yet, let alone a primatologist on the program.

[00:06:32] So I'm just curious, like what sort of animals have you been able to work with and what sort of primates have you worked with in, in your life?

[00:06:40] **Christine Webb:** Sure. I've worked with primates in all kinds of different contexts and many different species. I've worked with laboratory recess, macca, I've worked with chimpanzees and zoos.

[00:06:52] I've worked with wild chakma baboons, and most recently with chimpanzees and bonobos in sanctuary settings in Africa.

[00:07:00] **Nate Hagens:** Jealous. but let me ask you this, especially living in New York City, do you ever undergo a phase shift in your perception of going through the motions of your life? You and I are human and most of the creatures we love are human.

[00:07:16] and we're, so, we're in that realm, but we're also. Primates and great apes. So do you ever like, walk around New York City and all of a sudden there's this phase shift where you see all the people around you as members of their great apes, that lens? Do you know what I mean?

[00:07:34] **Christine Webb:** Absolutely. I, have it quite frequently.

[00:07:37] I mean, I'm used to paying very close attention to behavior and when I'm on the subway or in a restaurant I'm attending, not often to what people are saying, but to their body language and how they're acting and absolutely, we're like a naked ape. and there's also a, an experience I have typically after I've spent a lot of time in the field when I come back to New York City and I start noticing things in the environment that I would've overlooked before.

[00:08:07] So. Most recently, I've been noticing there's a lot of hair weaves, like stray weaves on the ground in New York City, everywhere, every block. And the only reason I notice them is because when I'm in the field, I'm hypervigilant about snakes and these look like snakes. And now when I see them. My heart stops for a moment, and then I think, okay, no, it's just a hair weave.

[00:08:30] I can move on. So there are ways in which, you know, I sort of become more my, I get more in touch with my own ality. Right? and that changes my perception of my physical environment too.

[00:08:44] **Nate Hagens:** Did you ever, Google the, cats and cucumbers where people will sneak a cucumber next to a cat and they'll video its reaction and it turns around and jumps because the same thing, it thinks it's a snake or something because of the shape.

[00:08:58] **Christine Webb:** I know I haven't seen that, but that I can identify it.

[00:09:01] **Nate Hagens:** We, have so many spend drills like that, that are carryovers, From our ancestral environment. So what are some traits, Christine, that we think we broadly humanity, think are unique to humans, but really aren't

[00:09:19] **Christine Webb:** historically? It's a very long list of characteristics that we thought.

[00:09:23] Are human unique, ranging from the capacity for rational thought, rationality, tool use culture, self-awareness, consciousness. I would say today the supposed cognitive rubicons that are thought to separate human from animal are things like language, maybe art and religious sensibilities. These seem to be the, remaining strongholds of human exceptionalism, but even these characteristics or traits have been found in other forms of life language, for instance, right?

[00:10:01] We know songbirds have language. We know prairie dogs have language,

[00:10:05] **Nate Hagens:** so other animals have art.

[00:10:06] **Christine Webb:** I would say yes. I actually just had a student write her whole term paper on artistic capabilities and other animals. I mean, I just mentioned songbirds, right? We tend to think of bird song as automatic and mechanical, but.

[00:10:22] It's incredibly nuanced and complex, and most songbirds learn their songs, which means they're highly creative, innovative, and what the human ear can hear is a very coarse overview of what birds are actually producing. If you slow down birdsong, there's like an acoustic richness there that is far beyond the realm of our hearing that suggests great.

[00:10:49] Ingenuity.

[00:10:50] **Nate Hagens:** I know people, that are working using AI to, map neural nets of language from, elephants and whales and everything. And on the surface it's hopeful that we will understand, oh my gosh, these people like elephants have first names and all this. And I'm just deeply afraid that we will discover that and as a species we'll just shrug and not care about it.

[00:11:23] Do you have any thoughts on that?

[00:11:24] **Christine Webb:** I'm deeply afraid that we are developing this technology without more conversations around the ethics of this technology. Like why do we want to decode whale communication? Why do we want to speak with them? Is it to help them? Is it to take their interest seriously or is it to further exploit them?

[00:11:47] So I think. There are big ethical conversations that need to be happening. And I also, there are some scientific concerns as well with mapping human language and its rules to decode the language of other forms of life, which might have their own distinctive features and evolved traits that, I mean, even translation scholars will say that it's very difficult across human languages, right?

[00:12:16] because you have to take context and the relationship between the receiver and the emitter very seriously. And there's something about, you know, the decoding through these large language models that's abstracting the social context and therefore, I think not going to give us as much insight into.

[00:12:38] What these animals are actually saying.

[00:12:40] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. One of, one of many money concerns there.

[00:12:44] **Christine Webb:** Yeah.

[00:12:44] **Nate Hagens:** So, a, central idea in your new book is that animals are members of complex social systems that experience stress and fracture and repair just like human animals do. Can you give, our viewers a brief overview of what you've discovered in your work about animal consciousness and their ability to respond to these disruptions in their environments and social systems?

[00:13:11] **Christine Webb:** Sure. So one of the behaviors I've been studying for many years now is called reconciliation. Reconciliation is when two former opponents of a conflict will come together again after that conflict and engage in a friendly manner. So they'll start grooming one another. Maybe they'll share food with one another, and that this.

[00:13:37] Behavior actually serves to restore the relationship to baseline levels of, tolerance and affinity. And it's amazing when you look at the form, the behavioral form that reconciliation takes in other primates because as human primates it's pretty identifiable, recognizable to us. chimpanzees might embrace, right?

[00:13:59] They'll touch one another. They even have this like mouth to mouth kiss or mouth to body kiss. And my work has been interested in looking at reconciliation and also consolation, which is one, like an uninvolved bystander, affiliates with the victim of a conflict. And this is seen as the best behavioral marker of empathy in the animal kingdom because.

[00:14:22] The individual who's consoling the other has to have some understanding of the other's mental state, that they're stressed out or afraid and are seeking some kind of reassurance. And so I've been incredibly interested in, empathy and also individual differences in empathy.

[00:14:40] **Nate Hagens:** Presumably in, I'm certainly no expert on this, the, expression of reconciliation would be greater in Bonobos than in chimps and humans.

[00:14:52] **Christine Webb:** That's a great question. I'm not aware of any studies that have systematically compared overall rates of reconciliation in Bonobos and chimpanzees, but what I will say, and this relates to a current project I'm working on across chimpanzee and Bonobos sanctuaries, is that there's so much variation within species in these tendencies that often gets overlooked.

[00:15:21] So. Some groups of chimpanzees will reconcile more than other groups of chimpanzees. Some groups of Bonobos will reconcile more than other groups of bonobos, and that within species variation is greater than differences between the species. We have these stereotypes about chimpanzees as being more aggressive, you know, male dominated and bonobos as being more peaceful and conciliatory.

[00:15:48] But I think actually when you look at socio-cultural differences within the species, they tell a much more nuanced story.

[00:15:57] **Nate Hagens:** So what is humanity? you know, your book is about, decentering, human exceptionalism. What does humanity stand to gain if we normalize cultural values and the stories, that decenter human exceptionalism?

[00:16:14] **Christine Webb:** I mean, just to build off of my, last point, right? If we think that only. Humans are capable of culture, and for a long time we were only focused on material culture, like the ability to use tools. But if we widen out more broadly to consider social culture, so like group differences in social norms and ways of resolving conflicts, right?

[00:16:39] We think that humans are unique in that capacity. Then we're gonna completely overlook the sociocultural variation within chimpanzees and bonobos and that variation alongside of biodiversity, right? When we talk about like the need to conserve or save biodiversity, that's only focused on saving biological entities, but what about the social and the cultural lives of these animals?

[00:17:10] Aren't those worth preserving aside from just. Bio, the biology or the biological diversity, shouldn't we also be valuing their cultures? And there's incredible conservation initiatives right now that are looking to preserve animal cultures as well, to talk about cultural heritage sites, you know, that chimpanzees might have.

[00:17:33] And all of the ways in which anthropogenic disturbance is not just disrupting biodiversity, but social and cultural norms. And that's a more specific answer to your question, but like if I zoom out to think about, okay, beyond just a better appreciation and understanding of other forms of life, how can moving past human exceptionalism better our world?

[00:17:59] Then? I think so much of it has to do with the fact that we need a different relationship with the world. We don't just need new institutions. Systems. Systems like systems. We need a different relationship with the world that is more level and humble. And I think that's why human exceptionalism is so important.

[00:18:25] **Nate Hagens:** What would that look like? I mean, I, fully agree with you. what would a world outside of human exceptionalism actually look like in the next century? And do you think it's possible?

[00:18:37] **Christine Webb:** If I can dream big, a world beyond human exceptionalism? I mean, all of our major systems would have to be reimagined, right?

[00:18:47] Our economic systems would have to change so that we're not like valuing the life of a tree or a forest only once they're cut down. our legal systems would change. I mean, they're already changing in some parts of the world to recognize the intrinsic rights of other forms of life. We wouldn't divide the world into like persons and things are property, but.

[00:19:12] Following, you know, what's already happening in the rights of nature movement, we would be thinking seriously about the personhood of the more than human world. I think our education systems would have to be radically rethought to emphasize ecological literacy as much as other forms of literacy so that, you know, children can grow up very aware of the animals and plants they live around.

[00:19:38] I think our language would change. We wouldn't use terms like natural resources and ecosystem services, you know, pork and beef. We would talk about individuals and we wouldn't have these commodified, you know, versions of. Ways of talking about other, life forms.

[00:19:58] **Nate Hagens:** I, totally agree. It's just amazing that people are like, yeah, let's go and get some chicken wings or beef and pork.

[00:20:06] And at the same time, these people are animal lovers and they don't visualize the suffering that had to happen for that little, you know, sanitized plastic package in the supermarket. so I think language is definitely a part of it. Let me ask you this kind of a difficult question. I think most humans would claim to be against human holocausts, but we wouldn't.

[00:20:35] Vote to spend a dollar to bring back extinct species like the passenger pigeon or something like that. What do you really think makes us insensitive to beings? Unlike us? And it was not that long ago that humans with different skin color were treated much the same. What do you think is at the root of this?

[00:20:54] **Christine Webb:** I think so much of it is lack of exposure and familiarity with beings who are radically different from the self and that, you know, there's a very intentional reason why factory farms and scientific laboratories are hidden from the public eye. They're located in places that are very hard to find because it keeps that lack of familiarity and exposure.

[00:21:24] True, right. But if we were exposed to those other animals, if we got to know them as individuals, and if we were witnessing harm. We might care a great deal more.

[00:21:38] **Nate Hagens:** Do you have experience with that, either yourself as a younger person or some of your students that you have a large enough sample size where you see those humans that had exposure to the web of life frequently as children have a different lens with which to view the world as adults?

[00:21:58] **Christine Webb:** 100%. I mean, many of my students taking my class right now, we've actually just talked about this week. You know, they had experiences growing up where they visited a slaughterhouse or saw a documentary maybe when they weren't supposed to see it, and it transformed, you know, their. Consumption habits, they became vegan on the spot basically because from an early age they were exposed to something that we often don't talk about, don't see.

[00:22:27] as you said, you know, we go to the grocery store and we buy chicken. Not even the chicken or a chicken, it's just chicken.

[00:22:35] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah.

[00:22:36] **Christine Webb:** yeah.

[00:22:36] **Nate Hagens:** Her name used to be Flora be,

[00:22:39] **Christine Webb:** Now it's

[00:22:40] **Nate Hagens:** cut up in pieces.

[00:22:41] **Christine Webb:** Yeah.

[00:22:42] yeah, I, think it definitely that kind of experience or even, you know, not, such a gruesome level, but like experience living with companion animals, getting to know that the fact that they have rich internal lives, they are emotional cognitive beings.

[00:23:00] Right. That kind of empathy that develops between a child and a dog, for instance, can extend out to many other forms of life.

[00:23:07] **Nate Hagens:** Do you have friends that are chimpanzees?

[00:23:10] **Christine Webb:** Oh, yeah. Absolutely. I have friends, many different species.

[00:23:14] **Nate Hagens:** So you write and speak frequently on the problems with, conventional sciences, normalization of harm for the sake of discovery and why we should be going about research animal research differently.

[00:23:31] Can you expand on, what you mean by that and what sort of shift that you've experienced in your personal relationship to science as you've, challenged this model of research?

[00:23:42] **Christine Webb:** As I mentioned before, I've done work in laboratories with non-human primates and those experiences, I always had ethical dissonance around it didn't feel right to be studying them in this context from an ethical perspective, but as I had more and more experience.

[00:24:05] In that kind of work, and also exposure to the animal ethics literature, I started to realize that it wasn't just an ethical problem, but also a scientific problem. So when it comes to these comparisons between humans and our closest living relatives, what characteristics separate humans from other animals?

[00:24:25] Those studies are often comparing the cognitive abilities of captive great apes, so let's say chimpanzees who are living in highly restricted manmade environments to the cognitive abilities of typically weird or western educated, industrialized, rich, Democrat. This is an acronym for, you know, let's say American children who are sitting on their parents' lap during the test.

[00:24:52] The problem with this kind of work is that it's assuming that each of these samples is representative of the broader population, right? When a captive chimpanzee is not representative of chimpanzees on the whole, nor is an American child, representative of humanity on the whole, the chimpanzees also lack control and autonomy over their lives.

[00:25:15] Whereas these children are typically just coming into the lab for the day. They're going back to their families after the study. The chimpanzees are separated from the group during the tests, not to mention from their biological mothers at birth often, right? This is not a valid scientific comparison.

[00:25:33] **Nate Hagens:** It's almost like the Heisenberg principle, though, that in order to observe it, you're gonna affect the experiment. So maybe this is one of those things that just has to remain a mystery because how would you actually study? Real chimps in the wild, in, in that way.

[00:25:52] **Christine Webb:** There are definitely ways that we can study the cognitive abilities of chimpanzees in the wild, right?

[00:25:59] By looking at how they travel and plan and build nests. I mean, there's actually really wonderful kind of behavioral experimental work in the wild that can happen. I can absolutely, I mean, Carlene Yma, she's a researcher in the Netherlands. She's, been at the forefront of, this move to like really study chimpanzee cognition seriously, and in their natural evolved contexts.

[00:26:26] but just to say that, you know, I think there might be some questions that we can't ask that we won't actually get to the bottom of because we can't study it up close and personal. But there are so many other questions and doors that open, right? if we will study this cinema, Ecologically valid way that will actually tell us something interesting about these animals' lives and not just reinforce notions of human exceptionalism.

[00:26:55] **Nate Hagens:** Can you tell me any time that you were working with Bonobos or chimps or Maccas or, anything where you were like totally surprised in the moment of what happened and what you learned and, the behavior

[00:27:09] **Christine Webb:** many times? one that comes to mind now that I wrote a bit about in the book was an interaction I had with a young male baboon named Bear.

[00:27:21] This was in the Namib Desert. And at the time, yeah, like I said, he was juvenile. Now he's an adult. He was acting like a young male baboon and causing a lot of. Conflict both within his own group and also with the team of human field researchers that was following this, his troop that summer. And one day that escalated to a point where it was a bit dangerous.

[00:27:47] So Bear and a bunch of other baboons surrounded one of my colleagues and they were barking and slapping her legs. And it was very tense moments. So tense that we almost thought we should stop following this troop altogether for a little while, like give it a rest because tension, it seems to be escalating.

[00:28:10] Nonetheless, we decided to stay with the troop, but that the next day we would follow them from a greater distance and I was with that troop, following them from a greater distance, went over the ridge, marches bare, and a bunch of other baboons straight towards me, and I was in a very precarious position.

[00:28:30] I couldn't easily get out of their way and they're coming straight for me. I was pretty terrified actually, given what had happened the day before. But I tried to remain as calm as possible on the surface and bear approached. And as he got right up next to me, he put his hand in between my hiking boots and he looked up and he beared his teeth into this most awkward forced grimace.

[00:28:58] And as a primatologist, I know this expression is something that baboons do to reconcile with one another. It's a way that they mitigate conflicts and show friendly intentions. And in that moment, I believe Bear was empathizing with me, right? He knew I was afraid, even though I was acting like I wasn't.

[00:29:23] But more than that, I think he knew what I knew. He knew that I knew what had happened the day before with my colleague. He was trying to put things right. Now, this is something that we call theory of mind, the ability to know and understand what another knows. And for many years during my graduate training, I learned that theory of mind is one of these things that makes humans separate from other animals is something only we have.

[00:29:50] But in that moment, bear taught me not only that baboons have theory of mind, but that they can have it for a member of another species, which is pretty incredible.

[00:30:01] **Nate Hagens:** It is, incredible. Yeah. Please continue.

[00:30:04] **Christine Webb:** No, I, it's just to say that my mentor, Franwell, he told me never underestimate what other animals are capable of.

[00:30:11] And, that has been true time and time again. They will always prove you wrong. They will always prove otherwise.

[00:30:16] **Nate Hagens:** So, was there a moment in your career or before where you had a big shift in your worldview surrounding human exceptionalism and, science? Or did you just enter that field as from being.

[00:30:29] Little girl and a teenager with, the beliefs you have today?

[00:30:32] **Christine Webb:** Yeah, I mean, I can definitely trace a gradual trajectory from the time I was a young kid, loving other animals being captivated by evolutionary theory. I'm an only child, so I spent a lot of time, you know, outside by myself and like befriending other animals and treating them as siblings.

[00:30:50] Right. Dogs we lived with, they were like my brothers and sisters. but I will say I, I met a few other scientists, who also gave me permission to challenge conventional scientific norms. they are all well regarded scientists doing different things, studying other animals, plants, and we got together, we were working on a grant project and basically just started giving each other permission to like, say things and talk about.

[00:31:30] Animal experiences, our own experiences as researchers in relationship with the beings we study. That I think really opened my mind in a way. There was something about that like community of other scholars and scientists giving each other permission to challenge scientific orthodoxy That was also really formative.

[00:31:54] in my thinking around human exceptionalism,

[00:31:57] **Nate Hagens:** one of my core values is, recognizing, embracing and protecting, the web of life on top of all the other challenges we have in its own right. But there's. The human poly crisis metris, and you and your writing and work have made the connection that the same logic used to distance humans from other species is also used to justify harm within human societies, particularly

due to the influence of cultural norms and institutions and, values in shaping, contemporary scientific knowledge.

[00:32:38] So let me ask you this, having spent some time, significant time in the Netherlands, I understand, have you noticed any pervasive cultural differences between American and Dutch societies, especially in the context of human exceptionalism?

[00:32:53] **Christine Webb:** I absolutely, I mean, I just voted in the most recent Dutch election.

[00:32:59] It's the first time I was eligible to vote because I'm a citizen there. And,

[00:33:03] **Nate Hagens:** okay,

[00:33:03] **Christine Webb:** they have a party for the animals. they have a, huge number of political parties, but they actually have two parties that are dedicated to animal interests. that felt radical to me in, the best of ways.

[00:33:20] Right.

[00:33:21] **Nate Hagens:** I can imagine. And I can just, I can only imagine if I go to my local voting booth and there's a party for the animals here. That would seem like a sci-fi episode.

[00:33:30] **Christine Webb:** Yeah, no, absolutely. There was something surreal about it, especially given my work and everything. And, you know, the, Netherlands is not without its own social hierarchies and, issues, right?

[00:33:43] I mean, there's huge immigration, issues and, you know, divides around, the treatment of, immigrant populations and the integration of those populations into Dutch culture. But it is a less hierarchical society in general.

Right. People don't boast about wealth and privilege. It's sort of frowned upon, to set yourself apart from others in that respect.

[00:34:16] that's, that is, again, I'm speaking in very general terms about cultural differences and I think, you know, as you were describing before it, there's, there are absolutely links between human exceptionalism and other forms of discrimination or dehumanization amongst human groups. This is not just my thinking, but the work and empirical results of many scholars and studies that have pointed to both a causal and a correlational link between beliefs in a human animal divide and bigoted attitudes towards human outgroups.

[00:34:51] So I think it's a, helpful reminder because in my classes, for instance, my students are often like, how can we dream of addressing human exceptionalism when we're treating other humans? So badly all the time, like how can we dream of actually helping other forms of life? And it's like, no, there are these forms of discrimination stem from common roots.

[00:35:11] And actually by studying them side by side, we give each movement greater force and power.

[00:35:19] **Nate Hagens:** What's at the core of that root, do you think?

[00:35:22] **Christine Webb:** A false divide between human and animal who gets to count as fully human. I mean, are women human? A lot of people in ancient Greek society would say absolutely not, right?

[00:35:37] They're not, they don't vote, they don't have a political voice. They're not even human, are enslaved people, human, but they're certainly not treated as having fully human attributes like reason and rationality and language. And so, yeah,

[00:35:51] **Nate Hagens:** this is, a naive question, but I'm a podcast host, so I'm able to ask it.

[00:35:59] is there any empirical evidence that in the pre agricultural times, on the Pleistocene, that we did not have that distinction, that it was the web of life? I'm sure there's some indigenous cultures today that, that have that, but what, can you say to that and when was the fall and why?

[00:36:19] **Christine Webb:** Yeah.

[00:36:20] Again, human evolution. Human history is, it does not lend itself to any kind of one story. Yeah. or I've, been reading the dawn of everything. I don't know if you know this massive book. Yeah. But essentially it's like there are so many storylines possible here. I will say, just 'cause I wrote a little bit about it in the book, when you look at some of the earliest cave paintings of our human ancestors,

[00:36:49] **Nate Hagens:** which are awesome to look at,

[00:36:51] **Christine Webb:** they're amazing.

[00:36:52] They're incredible. And I mean, I would just also love to be see one in person too, because I think the way that the light hits them and the way that sound travels through the cave, it's like a, full body experience, right? Very different from what you get, just looking at it on a, screen. but curiously, there is a, lack of human figures in those paintings.

[00:37:18] They're often almost always just of other animals. The only one that you can think of, like the hands, but that's like one of the only rep human representations for the most part, like these caves, it's just filled with other.

Animals. And to some scholars, they've, taken that to argue like this is evidence of a cosmology or a worldview that is not so human centric.

[00:37:41] and certainly when you look at, you know, the ethical relationships and, traditions of contemporary indigenous societies like sort of modeled and protected that less anthropocentric way of knowing. That's further evidence that you know this, that there are indeed possibilities of cultures and societies beyond this pervasive belief.

[00:38:14] **Nate Hagens:** I agree. which is one of the reasons I'm doing this work. Can you speculate how everyday life might be different 50 years, a hundred years from now in the United States or, whatever. If our cultural values were more rooted in the view that humanity is a part of the web of life rather than the broadly broad held view that we're at the apex of some natural hierarchy,

[00:38:41] **Christine Webb:** I think life would be much richer for all of us.

[00:38:45] I worry a bit that again, the mainstream environmental and climate discourse emphasizes like sacrifice, things we have to give up long-term adverse consequences and not, you know, the other side of it, which is all that we stand to gain in repairing and improving our relationship with the rest of nature.

[00:39:08] you know, in addition to sort of these radical shifts in our economic and legal systems and our food systems that, you know, we've kind of been talking about, I could also. Imagine, just celebrating instead of all these human holidays, right? We have like just President's Day here in the US yesterday.

[00:39:32] We have Veterans Day and we celebrate birthdays and anniversaries, and it's all very human centric, in the world beyond human exceptionalism. I could imagine us celebrating the solstice and the equinoxes, basically the migrations,

right? The rhythms of life that make our own lives possible. and I've been trying to institute that a bit more in my own life and see how that.

[00:40:01] Changes my experience at the seasons, and it's very powerful.

[00:40:06] **Nate Hagens:** So you and I, among other things, share an appreciation for teaching others, about our research. And you have previously noted that students of yours, enjoy being able to discuss the pretty much often ignored moral and philosophical questions and tangled with science.

[00:40:26] And I'm of a, similar mindset that we need some sort of cosmology that gives us directionality for this sense of interconnection in place in the grand scheme of life and, the universe. so how has gaining an understanding of human exceptionalism changed the way that you and your students move through the world?

[00:40:47] and what lessons might you impart on those confronting this, internal bias for the first time?

[00:40:52] **Christine Webb:** Yeah, I'd like to say two things about that. One is at the most basic level, I think it changes. I think it changes what we attend to in our environments. We live in a society where there is so much demand, competing demands on our attention at all times that we don't actually see so much of what's happening around us.

[00:41:24] It's so easy to, not see the pigeons, you know, in New York City, for instance. but if you actually learn to pay more attention, then you start to see the world entirely differently. Things that might have appeared completely magical or unrealistic before, like you can actually start to see, and you can even form relationships with beings who are radically different from yourself.

[00:41:54] I mean, one of my colleagues here at NYU, she studies the relationship between humans and koi fish. You can have an individualized relationship with a koi fish. how enriching and, wonderful is that, and you know, I think that we're, combating this thing called species loneliness, right? Like we are in the us loneliness has become a bit of an epidemic.

[00:42:18] But if we can attend to the more than human world, like there's so many more opportunities for relationship and engagement and friendship. so that's one thing I wanted to say. And then the second thing I wanted to say concerns our education systems. Again, I think that part of what we need to do is teach children to hold on to what they already know to be true about the world, right?

[00:42:51] Kids come into the world, they're not little arrogant apes. They aren't human exceptionalists.

[00:42:58] **Nate Hagens:** Across all cultures, right?

[00:42:59] **Christine Webb:** Yeah, it's, I mean, I'm, familiar with studies that have been done in several cultures that give me enough confidence to say that human exceptionalism is, not the lens that kids come into the world wearing.

[00:43:11] It's something that they learn through greater experience in an exposure to their culture. so I really believe that it's about giving kids permission to hold on to what they already know to be true. and this comes back to like my own experiences and my students' experiences part of a world, seeing the world beyond human exceptionalism.

[00:43:37] It's like reinstating that childlike, and I don't mean childlike in a pejorative sense at all, but it's like reinstating that childlike sense of wonder and

awe and curiosity and mystery and connection and appreciation. I mean, that is. What we stand to gain in changing our relationship to the rest of nature.

[00:44:02] And it's, such a richer, better way of being. Trust me, I don't experience it all the time, but when I do, it's, a, sacred thing.

[00:44:09] **Nate Hagens:** I do trust you. And because I feel that way and have for most of my life.

[00:44:15] **Christine Webb:** Yeah.

[00:44:15] **Nate Hagens:** And I guess the learning for me is I just assumed that everyone was like that. and so I've learned that is not necessarily the case and mm-hmm.

[00:44:26] Questioning anthropocentrism can be a culturally divisive topic as I've learned through personal experience. so what sort of strategies have you used or encourage your students to use in order to decenter humans while at the same time, not also becoming overly anti-human?

[00:44:46] **Christine Webb:** Again, it depends on. Who I'm talking to.

[00:44:51] I find that with students, particularly those who are interested in careers in science, even if I can't get them totally behind the ethics, like the ethics of moving beyond human exceptionalism and why that's important for our moral sensibilities and imaginations, I can get them to listen When I talk about the science, when I say, do you wanna do good science?

[00:45:23] Well then we should look beyond human exceptionalism. We shouldn't study animals in these conditions. We shouldn't use human intelligence or consciousness as the benchmark for these capabilities. We need to be taking

animals, sensory worlds, and you know, experiences. Seriously. I think there are ways of convincing people, but the things that they care about.

[00:45:47] Maybe that's just doing good science, right? Will improve and be better beyond human exceptionalism. And I think there are ways you can do that. You can do that in conversations with, you know, corporate, like hedge fund managers, whatever you, there are ways that, you know, into this conversation, I think with most people.

[00:46:09] Not everyone, but with most people, depending on what their values are. It just depends on, the audience and who you're talking to.

[00:46:17] **Nate Hagens:** So I used to teach college, for nine years. And I'm just curious, during your time teaching and discussing these pretty deep questions, have your students said or asked anything that you hadn't considered before that really stuck with you?

[00:46:31] **Christine Webb:** Oh, I mean, so much of my thinking on these topics is shaped by students' questions and disagreements and criticisms. I mean. It was my students who really got me thinking about the links between human exceptionalism and different forms of dehumanization. It was my students who got me thinking about human exceptionalism as it relates to environmental techno fixes like solar geoengineering and you know, the colonization of Mars.

[00:47:03] So there was a lot of talk about like concrete actions we can take, but also about how when it comes to the ecological crisis, we're so oriented on finding the solutions. Like we think we've figured out the problem and now we just need to like in and, we might know the solutions and we just need to institute those solutions and have the like political will and, you know, capability of instituting those solutions.

[00:47:31] But I'm always like. I don't know that we fully understood the problem here, guys and my students. They've helped me frame it in that way. It's like, have we fully understood the problem here and recognizing human exceptionalism as a big part of that problem? I mean, before we jump to like figuring out what the next best solution is.

[00:47:54] I think that's something my students, they've given me the language and the kind of way of thinking about, those steps in the process that has been incredibly illuminating and helpful.

[00:48:05] **Nate Hagens:** In addition to, the human exceptionalism and the incentives and the prices, I wonder how much of the solutions, to, ecological overshoot and the shrinking of, the web of life with the 10 million potentially other species, alive on the planet is if we did.

[00:48:33] Do the right things and have the prices and, the institutions, appropriate for the broader community of life. It would imply a much smaller economy. And therefore it's politically untenable to go to that level. So I'm just wondering if this is one of those two or three steps ahead. We need young humans.

[00:49:01] To feel what you were describing. And then we're gonna go through what I call a great Simplification in coming decades. And then there is a larger percentage of humanity that revisits our ancestral link to the web of life and is a much larger percentage of the human population at that point. And I don't know, between here and there a miracle happens sort of thing.

[00:49:28] I don't know. I, don't know the question there, but do you have any thoughts on that?

[00:49:32] **Christine Webb:** Yeah, I mean, I absolutely think that a massive scaling down it will be necessary, right? Like I'm on board with the, Degrowth movement. And it connects to what I was saying before, you know, that degrowth isn't about less, it's about more of what matters, right?

[00:49:52] It can be less certain things, less consumption, for instance. But we know from. Huge bodies of research that's not what makes us happy or leads to a meaningful, healthy life, right? So there might be less consumption, for instance, but that doesn't mean less quality of life. That can mean more of what matters, right?

[00:50:16] Instead of spending time shopping, maybe you spend that time in your community building communities, interspecies communities, ideally. and so, and, it does, it comes back to, early childhood education and once again, giving kids permission to hold onto what they already know in their hearts to be true about the world.

[00:50:42] And maybe turning the tables a bit, having adults learn from kids. I mean, coming back to the Netherlands, do you know that the Netherlands has a children's mayor? There is a child mayor who has a political voice. Wow. I think they're 10 or 11 years old. They're voted. That's a

[00:51:01] **Nate Hagens:** great idea.

[00:51:02] **Christine Webb:** Right? They have a political voice and they're concerned with, you know, there, there's also a, they're involved in like biking laws so that biking feels safe for children and adults alike.

[00:51:12] But I mean, giving kids more of a say in the futures that they will inherit, it seems like a very rational approach, to political change to me

[00:51:26] **Nate Hagens:** instead of handing all the decisions off to the residents. Silverback, when we first spoke, you briefly brought up that primatology happens to be one of the few scientific specialties, within natural sciences where female scientists outnumber male scientists.

[00:51:46] So I wanted to ask you, do you have any speculations on why there are more women in your field and how it might affect. The scientific methodology or the holistic understanding and the communication within Primatology?

[00:52:03] **Christine Webb:** Yeah, I mean, it's certainly my experience when I go to primatology conferences that unlike most, you know, natural scientific fields, they are dominated by women.

[00:52:16] Women. And I think there are several reasons for that. One would clearly be the presence of icons, like the late Great Jane Goodall and you know, Diane Fosse, among others who were

[00:52:35] role models for, me and for I think many other women growing up.

[00:52:40] **Nate Hagens:** Did you know Jane?

[00:52:42] **Christine Webb:** Not personally. I mean. I've attended many of her talks and, but we never worked together unfortunately. But just the presence of these, powerful women scientists in our field, I think gave a lot of younger women confidence, okay, this is something that I can do, I could follow in their footsteps.

[00:53:03] I think beyond that, there's something perhaps given how oriented women are towards relationships, towards sociality and understanding relationships and building community. Right. And primates are incredibly social on average. Right. It's an incredibly social taxonomic group and there's so many

interesting social interactions that happen, and there's social interactions that are readily identifiable to us as humans 'cause we're so closely related to them.

[00:53:39] And I, often wonder if that's. Part of it too, that because women are drawn to, social relationships and there's just so much evidence of that within other primates that, you know, just the questions, the things that we're interested in are, things that either biologically or due to enculturation and socialization women are, more interested in.

[00:54:00] **Nate Hagens:** What do you think might shift if other fields of science were to adopt some of those same dynamics and strategies, both in terms of academic research and in the wider human world?

[00:54:12] **Christine Webb:** Yeah, I was just reading a paper about, Barbara McClintock. She was a plant scientist who wrote a lot about her empathic connection with the plants she studied and the ways.

[00:54:31] Which only through empathy and really getting to know her plants as individuals, again, not as this like neutral, detached, scientific observer, but as someone who is like immersed in their lives and in their individuality, that she could only have had the amazing discoveries that she did. I mean, she won the Nobel Prize for discovering, gene transfer, horizontal gene transfer in plants.

[00:54:57] And you know, that she wouldn't have even been able to come up with those, research questions and make those discoveries had she not been driven by an empathic connection, which I think is still kind of taboo in science. And so I think for one, empathy would be, seen as a rigorous way of knowing, not something to be avoided in scientific inquiry.

[00:55:23] and I also think, you know, the kinds of questions. We would ask this. This is actually an example in within primatology, even though there have been

more women studying it, you know, there are still many men in positions of power and as gatekeepers in the Primatological community. I mean, even, you know, it was Lewis Leaky who sent Jane Goodall to the field and funded her research it.

[00:55:47] She couldn't do it on her own accord. I've been working on this project lately around, animal birth and pregnancy, and these are fundamental life history events, right? Like survival and growth and reproduction and death. And yet they're often overlooked in animal studies. And even within primatology research and in, in trying to get this work published, you know, we've, been told on a number of occasions that it's a kind of a niche topic that maybe this.

[00:56:22] Topic belongs is more suited for a journal of obstetrics and gynecology. And it's like, no, this, we're all born, right? You were born, I was born. We're all born. It should be relevant for all of us. This is not a niche topic at all. And so I think, you know, a greater appreciation, for fundamental life history events that are typically like feminized or seen as, you know, only a, woman's thing would, be taken more seriously in, in research and seen as important topics in their own right, not as like niche or specialized, topics.

[00:56:58] that's one of, many ways in which I think my field and, fields beyond might change.

[00:57:04] **Nate Hagens:** Let me ask you kind of a random question. I, expect you're aware of the concept of shifting baselines. yeah. Daniel Polly's work and the size of fish and the floor to peer and humans getting used to the new smaller baselines.

[00:57:17] Can we flip that in the context of your work? That our own experiential baseline as humans has become, that human minds, at least in Western culture, have learned to not care about anything but the glowing screens in front of them

and the web of life is out there, and yet we're so year by year get more compulsion and addicted to these screens.

[00:57:46] I, I don't know, do you have any thoughts on that?

[00:57:48] **Christine Webb:** No. That I hadn't thought of that before, but it's, interesting and deeply concerning that. Like what we would consider to be adequate, like time in nature today would have 10, 20, 30 years ago been like highly inadequate and atypical because

[00:58:09] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah, exactly.

[00:58:09] **Christine Webb:** Just so now our lives are so dominated by, screen times and technology, but that it's sort of like normalized and we think if we just get out for like a hike once a day or once a week, that is, that's like sufficient balance. yeah, I think that's absolutely at play. I mean, it certainly in my own life, that's at play and is very concerning.

[00:58:34] **Nate Hagens:** It has to start with the children. And, then there has to be, Jonathan Het teaches at your school, I believe he's been on the show, talking about we actually need laws and restrictions on giving screens, which are the neurological equivalent of cocaine to 12 year olds. Totally. and having them ensconced in the web of life with soil and worms and birds and science projects with butterflies or all the things.

[00:59:04] **Christine Webb:** Yeah,

[00:59:04] **Nate Hagens:** I do think that's really important.

[00:59:07] **Christine Webb:** Absolutely. And like, you know, like Jonathan Hyde has written about to it, it can't just be it, we need regulations and it can't just be in schools. It has to also be part of our culture and community more broadly. Right.

So it's not that kids just go to school and spend all day outside and then go home and get behind their computer or play video games all evening, but it that it's like it has to be a part of.

[00:59:34] Our social fabric in a way that it's currently not. and you know, this makes me think about the way that kids learn human exceptionalism. It's not just because they lack exposure and experience to nature, but it's also because they're taking very seriously the behavior of the adults around them. Yes.

[00:59:53] So it's human exceptionalism is like not something that kids are taught explicitly. Oh, humans are better than other animals or human. Rarely is that true, right? Like rarely are we taught this explicitly, but we're learning and internalizing it by example, by observing what adults are doing around us and taking that as normal.

[01:00:13] **Nate Hagens:** My dad's 85 and he watches every one of these episodes, so I'm sure he will hear this. but I have to give him credit that when I was three years, four years, five years old, every Sunday night he sat me down on the couch and we watched, Marlon Perkins, mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom. and I got very familiar with all the animals in the world when I was a little boy, and loved them.

[01:00:41] and he approved and advocated that. So I was lucky in that sense.

[01:00:46] **Christine Webb:** Yeah.

[01:00:46] **Nate Hagens:** So, one, one topic I haven't asked you about is, the things that these, meta risks, global heating and questioning consciousness and what it means to be human, they can feel very existential when you're learning about them for the first time.

[01:01:03] And in your book, and in our previous conversation, you've expressed that storytelling is an important tool for teaching these subjects. Can you maybe share an example or a story you might use in a classroom setting to convey a concept related to your work that might be hard for others to grasp?

[01:01:21] **Christine Webb:** Yeah. I mean, storytelling is one of the oldest, if not arguably, you know, the oldest human endeavor way of sharing knowledge. And I think it's part of the reason for our addiction to podcasts and Netflix is like, we're. Really drawn to stories. An example that is just very top of mind right now comes back to critiques of solar geoengineering.

[01:01:54] and for those, I'm assuming many who listen to this podcast know about solar geoengineering initiatives. But the basic idea being if we pump enough aerosols into the sky, it will serve to dim the sun and lessen the effects of global warming. And I was telling my students about some concerns I have with this technology, and one just has to do with pollinators, right?

[01:02:23] Who honeybees, for instance, rely on the precise orientation of the sun into their hive to communicate to one another. The exact location and distance of food sources from the hive. And so what effect will dimming the sun have on honeybees and what effect will it have on, you know, bird populations who also use the sun to, to migrate and to navigate?

[01:02:54] And I think this is a, story that we're often not focused on when we're questioning or critiquing solar geoengineering. It's like what effect is this going to have on pollinators? And even if we take a very human-centric approach, this is our food system, right? So like what we need to be thinking about this question very seriously, but it's a storyline that often gets overlooked if we're only focused on human centered.

[01:03:23] Impacts and not on how this is going to affect the behavior of other forms of life.

[01:03:27] **Nate Hagens:** We're quite clever, and good at first order effects, but we're quite bad at second, third, and end order effects. and solar geo engineering. There will be end order effects if it comes to pass.

[01:03:41] **Christine Webb:** Comes to pass. Yeah. And I, wonder, I would actually be curious for your thoughts on this.

[01:03:45] You know, there are all of these supposed psychological barriers to humans understanding the long-term effects of climate change and like these collective action problems. Right. But I believe that it's also, I mean, there's been work by one of my colleagues, Jennifer Jaqui and another colleague of hers that looks at how this, even these supposed psychological barriers that like we're bad at thinking in this particular long-term or ripple effect way.

[01:04:18] Also varies markedly across cultures that like, maybe the dominant culture is bad at that kind of long-term thinking or ecologically, you know, compounded effect thinking. But that's not necessarily like a limitation of the human species or the human brain. It's also something that is highly culturally specific.

[01:04:41] **Nate Hagens:** Well, I'll come on your podcast, to, 'cause I have about an hour and a half answer to that. Okay. but it is, context dependent. Mm-hmm. And culturally dependent. I mean, the United States by far is the worst demographics with respect to our attitudes towards global heating. And a lot of that has to do with misinformation and other things like that.

[01:05:07] But there is a power, behavioral hierarchy that, Basically the wellbeing of citizens and the natural world are pretty far down the hierarchy right now on how we make decisions.

[01:05:22] **Christine Webb:** Yeah.

[01:05:22] **Nate Hagens:** And, yeah, it's, a complicated, it's a really complicated question. I do not think that we have an information deficit, and I think a lot of environmentalists think if we just had more information, more data.

[01:05:37] I really don't think it's that. yeah, I think part of it is what you are working on is that we have to start with the raw material of young humans grow up to feel that the web of life is our treasure. I mean, it's heaven on earth really, and it's diminishing, but it's still bizarrely wonderfully robust and awesome and magical even in 2026.

[01:06:04] **Christine Webb:** Yeah. 'cause it's, part of what I worry about, you know, if we're teaching young kids that, well, humans did, just, we didn't evolve to solve. Large problems like climate change that can become a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy or almost a justification for climate inaction. It's like, oh, but the brain, the human brain just isn't equipped to deal with such a problem.

[01:06:26] I hear this in my undergraduates sometimes, you know, it's like, and it's not only, I think, is it, you know, inaccurate when you take a broader, like, cross-cultural perspective, but it's sort of a tool to justify continued inaction. It's like, well, we just. We can't help it. This is just we, just evolved to be exploitative of our environments and this is like just part of the human condition.

[01:06:49] **Nate Hagens:** If you don't mind, I ask all my guests, the similar closing questions. if you have a few more minutes, what Christine, can someone listening to this episode, in your opinion, take off your primatologist hat and just put on

your human hat for the moment? What can someone watching this do now, today, this week, this month, to address some of the issues discussed in this conversation?

[01:07:15] Or is it all up to politicians and leaders?

[01:07:18] **Christine Webb:** Coming back to bit of what we were talking about before, I think it can happen in profound yet subtle shifts as the words that we use when we talk about other species. Are we using personal or impersonal pronouns? Right? The indigenous botanist Robin Wal Kimer talks a lot about.

[01:07:39] The intimacy of our grammar and the words we use to describe the living world mattering greatly for our relationship to them. And I've, started to do it right. I don't refer to other beings as it's, I will refer to them as she or he, or they and I, you know, don't talk about natural resources and ecosystem services, but I wanna think about our lifelines and our neighbors and our family and how those seemingly simple, but like really profound changes, our acts of recognition.

[01:08:12] And then the other, I know you said one, but like, I just wanna slide the other one in there. Oh, as many as you

[01:08:16] **Nate Hagens:** want.

[01:08:17] **Christine Webb:** It has to do with attention. And in my classes we do the slow looking exercise, but the exercise can take place in any sensory modality. So it can be slow listening or slow smelling.

[01:08:31] Basically you're just spending. More time than you usually would in a given day with another being. That can be a house plant, it can be a pigeon on the New York City sidewalk. It can, you know, be a river. and you're just engaged

in slow attention, whether that's looking or listening or smelling. Maybe it's 10 minutes, maybe it's an hour.

[01:08:57] And if you can make this a part of your daily. Practice or even weekly practice a little bit more time than you normally would. You will start to notice how it will shift your perception.

[01:09:09] **Nate Hagens:** So this is different. This is like the non anthropocentric version of meditation. Because in meditation you get in your chair and you empty your mind.

[01:09:18] But you're talking about going and sitting and looking at my bird feeder and watching the black squirrel there, which is kind of novel for here for a half hour, just watching and being aware.

[01:09:29] **Christine Webb:** Yes. Something like that. And I think the experiences of like mindfulness and then the slow looking exercise can be mutually reinforcing one another.

[01:09:36] Like I think if you're more present because you're have a meditation practice, it will make you more present with, you know, the birds on your bird feeder. So they're not opposed to one another. but I have my students do this exercise and it is pretty incredible. Just 10 minutes a day for one week.

[01:09:56] Just do it and see how it changes your perception and. Your orientation

[01:10:03] **Nate Hagens:** is something else alive, some other creature.

[01:10:05] **Christine Webb:** Yeah. I mean, and it depends, you know, your definition of alive. My, some of my students will spend time with like a rock formation in Central Park. I mean, and just,

[01:10:16] **Nate Hagens:** yeah.

[01:10:17] **Christine Webb:** Engage in deep, attention.

[01:10:20] You notice, you'll start to notice so much more.

[01:10:22] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. I, love that idea. And I actually do that already. so what, as a teacher, as well as a researcher, what specific recommendations do you have for young humans in their teens and twenties who become aware of all this economic environmental constraints to the global economy?

[01:10:41] **Christine Webb:** Yeah. It'll come back to this recurring theme of, this conversation, which is, I would want to tell them, hold on tight to what you already know and experience about the world to that. Sense of curiosity and wonder and mystery that so many children experience in nature and with nature, don't be fooled.

[01:11:06] That's not childish, it's not simplistic, it's not naive, it's intelligent and sophisticated and sustainable. and particularly in my field, right when we're talking about the minded life of these other beings, don't be deterred from engaging with these other beings, as minded beings who can engage with you back.

[01:11:36] It's not, anthropomorphic. It's not unscientific. It can be incredibly rigorous and authentic.

[01:11:45] **Nate Hagens:** What do you care most about in the world, Christine?

[01:11:48] **Christine Webb:** I care about subjectivity, subjective experience of all beings. My daughter paramount among those in my hierarchy of beings at the moment. but seeing how her subjective wellbeing is deeply interconnected with mine, with our broader human family and community and with our broader, more

than human family and community, that the, subjective experience, the interests, the needs, the lived experiences of all forms of life are deeply interconnected.

[01:12:36] that's what I care about a lot these days.

[01:12:38] **Nate Hagens:** And, this may seem like an odd question, but if you could wave a magic wand and there was no personal recourse to your decision with what to do with it, what is one thing you would do to improve, the future for humanity in the biosphere?

[01:12:53] **Christine Webb:** Could I say.

[01:12:54] Give everybody a pill that would induce more humility and awe and wonder towards the rest of nature?

[01:13:10] **Nate Hagens:** Yes, you can say that. Yes.

[01:13:11] **Christine Webb:** Okay. That's what I would do. I would say that.

[01:13:15] **Nate Hagens:** Excellent. So are you working on any super interesting research questions that if you were to come back on this program a year from now, you'd really passionate about it, relevant to human futures that you would, wanna take a deep dive on?

[01:13:31] **Christine Webb:** I would love to dive deeper into this question around birth and pregnancy in other animals, because I actually think it has a whole lot to do with the ecological crisis. Strangely, I mean, even the word natal and nature, right? They have the same roots. I think our tendency to overlook birth as a.

[01:13:54] Fundamental life history event that we all share, right? It's not just something that women do or who women who desire to become mothers do, but it's like birth is a, as an experience that we all share, looking at how other animals

experience this life history event, right? I mean, if you think about what actually happens, it's kind of amazing, like a being who smells different and looks different and moves differently, acts differently, comes out of the body of another being.

[01:14:30] Like how do other animals make sense of that event? Do they have a concept of birth? Do they know that they're pregnant? Do they help each other in this act? There's so many interesting questions here, and I don't think that they're wholly disconnected from some of the bigger social and ecological crises of our time.

[01:14:52] And it's a project I've only recently started working on, but like in a year, maybe two, it'll be more fully formed. And I would love to, to hash it out with you.

[01:15:01] **Nate Hagens:** That's fascinating. let's do it. Do you have any closing comments for people watching listening who understand and agree with the sentiment and research you've laid out today?

[01:15:13] **Christine Webb:** nothing further from me. I've been talking a lot, but I, and maybe this, yeah, I, was just curious because you said you took a two month hiatus. Were you engaged in, more attention to the more than human world? I mean, was that a part of, it for you? Getting ar getting away from the screens?

[01:15:32] **Nate Hagens:** Well, I'll, answer you. honestly, this is only the second time we've spoken. This podcast is fourth year, so this month is the beginning of the fifth year and we've never taken a break. So I, in December and January have to take a break. So I take like a two month break from recording and we build up the cookie jar.

[01:15:52] And you are the first, recording of, this year. Yeah. and I also had a total knee surgery replacement.

[01:15:59] **Christine Webb:** Okay.

[01:16:00] **Nate Hagens:** I've had plenty of time with the more than human world. I have horses and chickens and ducks and dogs and cats. So I, most of my best friends this year are not human. and I also live on some land where I can, I have a sit spot and of course now I have to hobble over there.

[01:16:21] But, As far as time away from the screens, sadly not so much of that.

[01:16:28] **Christine Webb:** Yeah.

[01:16:28] **Nate Hagens:** But I have done a lot of the slow looking, like you suggest.

[01:16:33] **Christine Webb:** Mm-hmm.

[01:16:34] **Nate Hagens:** And there's a lot of work to do, as you're aware. And I'm very glad there are people, with your heart and, North Star on the more than human situation out there working on these things.

[01:16:47] **Christine Webb:** Thank you so much. Yeah. And I guess then that would be my, call to action to the listeners right now. Like, get, get outta here. Get off the screen. Yeah. And go outside. Exactly. And at the moon, dip your feet in the stream. Go to the park. pay attention.

[01:17:04] **Nate Hagens:** I'm going to do that just now.

[01:17:06] **Christine Webb:** Yeah.

[01:17:06] **Nate Hagens:** Thank you so much, Dr.

[01:17:08] Christine Webb. If you'd like to learn more about this episode, please visit The Great Simplification dot com for references and show notes. From there,

you can also join our high low community and subscribed to our Substack newsletter. This show is hosted by me, Nate Hagens, edited by No Troublemakers Media, and produced by Misty Stinnett and Lizzie Ani.

[01:17:31] Our production team also includes Leslie Balut, Brady Hyen, Julia Maxwell, Gabriela Slayman, and Grace Brumfield. Thank you for listening, and we'll see you on the next episode.