

The Great Simplification

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

[00:00:00] **Iain McGilchrist:** There's much that can be said against humanity. I don't think, I don't see the ways in which we have got things terribly wrong, but I think another way in which we can get them wrong is to suggest that somehow the whole thing would be better without humanity. Humanity has a very particular role to play, and the measure of its capacity to take on such an awe-inspiring role is that it can get it very badly wrong as well.

[00:00:28] Unless we consider those things and have answers that make sense, I think we're stuck. We've got to make those changes if we want to survive as a society, as a civilization.

[00:00:45] **Nate Hagens:** Today I am pleased to welcome back philosopher and neuroscientist, Dr. Iain McGilchrist, to further explore and unpack how his theory on the divided brain is defining our present moment, including our left brain cultural demands for more and more stuff and faster experiences, when maybe what we really need is to slow down and find spaciousness as we navigate the more than human predicament.

[00:01:14] Dr. Iain McGilchrist is the author of a number of books, but is best known for the master and his emissary, the divided Brain and the making of the Western world, and his book on neuroscience, epistemology and ontology called The Matter With Things. Our Brains Are Delusions and the Unmaking of the World.

[00:01:37] Iain is a Quantam fellow of All Souls College, an associate fellow of Green Templeton College, and also a fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrist. Additionally, he has been a research fellow in neuroimaging at Johns Hopkins Hospital, as well as a fellow of the Institute of Advanced Studies. Iain has

The Great Simplification

published, in addition to those two massive books, many original articles and research papers in a wide range of publications on topics, in literature, philosophy, medicine, and psychiatry.

[00:02:11] In this conversation, e and I, again went our way through high level questions about meaning and purpose and beauty and truth as a way of exploring the current missing gaps in our cultural values and sense of direction or lack of. We briefly discuss how AI is further confusing our ability to orient within these core principles and how our cultural search for immortality.

[00:02:42] Is really a manifestation of the emptiness we feel in the present moment. Drawing all this together, Iain explains that while these topics on the surface may seem esoteric, they are the core questions we need to be asking ourselves as we plant the seeds of humanity's future. With that, please welcome back Dr.

[00:03:05] Iain McGilchrist. Iain McGilchrist, my friend. Welcome back.

[00:03:10] **Iain McGilchrist:** Oh, Nate, thank you so much. Lovely to see you again.

[00:03:13] **Nate Hagens:** You too, sir. We had a podcast scheduled two months ago and my knee surgery recovery, caused us to delay it. and the world is a different place than we had, when our original conversation was scheduled.

[00:03:30] And I wonder how this conversation will be different 'cause of that delay. We're not gonna talk about Iran and war and things like that. But just outta curiosity, I'll lead with this. how have you changed since January? 'cause I know I've changed, and how might that influence our conversation?

The Great Simplification

[00:03:51] **Iain McGilchrist:** Well, I haven't had a knee operation, and I hope that all the, big screen stuff, aside, I hope that you are, you are comfortable, and it made it a good recovery.

[00:04:02] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah, I'm healing. Thank you.

[00:04:04] **Iain McGilchrist:** I think things have changed for me. I'm not sure how much they have to do with immediate news of political events, although obviously they are very concerning and we don't know where they're gonna end.

[00:04:19] But I think there have been a few things that have become, clearer to me. One is the absolutely paramount importance of value. That's something I wrote about right at the very end of the big book, no matter with things. and I was in a way slightly surprised. I knew I was going to have a chapter called The Center of the Sacred, but I wasn't sure that I was actually gonna have a chapter on value.

[00:04:54] But it now seems to me that there is nothing more important for us to be thinking about and trying to understand than value. And as, as a result of that, I, fool heartedly, channel McGill. Chris has booked the historic Sheldonlain Theater in Oxford for two days at the beginning of May, to talk about exactly that, the true, the good and the beautiful.

[00:05:24] there'll be a couple of lectures by me and, a number by, colleagues, and there'll be very extensive q and a. And for those of you who can't make it to Oxford, it can all be attended online. So I think that's something to think about. it's the thing that excites me at the moment, I'd say,

[00:05:44] **Nate Hagens:** and I assume you're not talking about economic value.

[00:05:47] **Iain McGilchrist:** Well, of course it's absolutely fascinating that in a certain sector of the population, value simply means money. Hey, hello. How crass

The Great Simplification

can you get? It has been so debased that it just means money. And of course money equals power, and power is the only value of the left hemisphere. But we can come to that.

[00:06:11] if we lived in a, heaven forbid, in a left hemisphere dominated culture, then value would be money and power. and that's where we're at. I think the other thing, to strike an even more sober note, I've always been. Clear that a spiritual orientation in life is exceptionally important. but in the last year or so, I've become more convinced that it is not enough that individuals have their spiritual orientation, that they meditate, that they are in touch with things.

[00:06:58] they have a sense of something transcendent and so forth. That's all incredibly important of course, and it's more important than. Belonging to a church. In other words, we need it to be in the very stuff of everyday life.

[00:07:13] **Nate Hagens:** I do resonate that we need a spiritual foundation and that could be the widening of a cultural mitochondria towards the sacred.

[00:07:26] And I did plan on asking you from some offline conversations I've been, 'cause these words never meant anything to me. I came across the word pantheism and panentheism, which is, everything is in God, meaning the whole universe is in God. And so I'm just wondering if you wanna maybe, if you're interested in unpacking that,

[00:07:54] **Iain McGilchrist:** let's deal with Penant, at the start.

[00:08:00] it's compatible with Buddhism, which is another very important spiritual tradition for me. And it's certainly compatible with Christlainity. And I think it means two things really. It means God is in everything and everything is in God. And that's interesting.

The Great Simplification

[00:08:27] Kept distinct in one's mind from pantheism. Pantheism is simply the idea that the whole sum of things is God's just the whole caboodle. to me that very much lacks, something the sense of there being always more than we can see here, understand, know, be conscious of, and God is not to be reduced to the sum of everything.

[00:09:01] God is greater than that. God is we, what God is. we can have inklings and intuitions, and we can come on to talk about that if you like, because I think that's an important topic. And so we're not entirely ignorant, but of course we can never encompass one's what God is. And in the Christlain tradition, Saint Augustine said, if you understand God, it's not God you have understood, which I think is pretty important.

[00:09:35] and also the whole idea of the word God can be of putting, because it comes with various personal and cultural baggages for most people. And so actually in the chapter called The Sense of the Sacred, don't even talk about God for about 30 or 40 pages. Because of not wanting to throw the thing off kilter by people going, oh, it's all that stuff.

[00:09:59] But it isn't Oh, all that stuff at all. It's something that really should not be named. I mean, in the Hebrew tradition, God is the unnameable name, the name of God is the Unnameable name, and in the beginning of the Do de Jing, it says, the Dao that can be named is not the real Dao. So I hope that my position there is comprehensible, even if it's somewhat mystical.

[00:10:23] I mean, there's a lot more to say about pantheism. I mean, it suggests this idea that the infinite can be present within the finite. It's, easy to see how the finite can be present within something infinite. But I think the important other side of that, the other side of the meaning of pantheism, which I think is entirely orthodox in Christlainity and is more emphasized in the indeed Orthodox tradition of Christlainity IE the eastern, tradition of Christlainity than in the Western

The Great Simplification

tradition, is that, that whatever God is both transcendent and imminent, is both bigger and greater and outside of the cosmos that we know and yet can be within it in some form.

[00:11:14] and of course that does not compute according to the left hemisphere, but I don't really care because it makes. Enormous sense to me in many great poets, philosophers and mystics and the saints, from whom I have learned

[00:11:32] **Nate Hagens:** we could spend two hours on this conversation. And I have a whole nother list of questions, that I plan to ask, but I will ask one that overlaps with our first conversation, which I believe the podcast title was Wisdom, nature, and the Brain.

[00:11:48] in Genesis, I believe Genesis 1 28, there was some phrase about, be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it, the fishes of the sea and the animals, which is pretty anti the environmental message because we did that mission accomplished. We're in ecological overshoot. So I'm wondering how that, dovetails with the comments you just made.

[00:12:15] **Iain McGilchrist:** Well, first of all, there are two accounts of creation in Genesis. they're clearly by different hands, and one of them is true, contains that expression. I don't think that it, I mean, I'm not a Hebrew speaker, so I'd love to be able to go right back to the original words, which are of course not Christlain words in any case, but are taken up into the Bible, of Christlains.

[00:12:44] But I don't know that it necessarily means subduing the sense of Tyra over, I suspect what it meant was something more like, To be like a good husbandman to be somebody who looked after

[00:13:02] **Nate Hagens:** well, that would be a hell of a translation error. I hope you're right. But I, you know, that's a good question.

The Great Simplification

[00:13:08] **Iain McGilchrist:** There's much that can be said against humanity and, I'm the first to, see all my life have been before people got terribly excited so much about the environment I was, as a teenager, terribly troubled by what, what was happening in that respect. So I don't think, I don't see, the ways in which we have got things terribly wrong.

[00:13:34] But I think another way in which we can get them wrong is to. Repudiate humanity to, as it were, suggests that somehow the whole thing would be better without humanity. I have a belief, which again, we can come onto that humanity has a very particular role to play, and the measure of its capacity to take on such an awe-inspiring row is that it can get it very badly wrong as well.

[00:14:04] **Nate Hagens:** Well, that, that is the entire premise of my platform here is that humans can, in theory, be stewards and not dominion the way that it has been. It's not anti-human. it's pro what we can do differently in the future.

[00:14:20] **Iain McGilchrist:** Nate, I was a, haggan before I knew it.

[00:14:25] **Nate Hagens:** So the first time you were on this podcast I just mentioned, I highly recommend that listeners go back and actually watch both of your episodes if they haven't.

[00:14:35] in the same way that, Lynyrd Skynyrd once probably got really tired of playing Freebird. I'm gonna ask you for a very brief mcg Gilchrist 101. you are known for your, erudite, exposition of the left hemisphere, that offers a narrow vision that can mistake control and manipulate our environment for understanding in contrast to a wider boundary, right hemisphere.

[00:15:06] since that recording. There have been huge accelerations in technological advancements, especially large language models in ai, as we mentioned earlier, along with unstable international relationships and

The Great Simplification

deteriorating biosphere stability. So I have some questions planned for you that will rely on this foundation.

[00:15:29] So could you give a brief two or three minute overview of the left versus right hemisphere of the brain as a reminder for listeners? Yes. And then maybe discuss how your thinking as developed in terms of whether you think are currently left hemisphere dominated or right hemisphere deficit. Cultures and societies are capable of steering such large scale systems through these multiple compounding predicaments.

[00:15:55] **Iain McGilchrist:** Well, to be very brief and the long story is laid out in my books, but, all the things that people used to say about hemisphere differences are, please take this message to your heart wrong. So the left hemisphere is not a little bit boring, but dependable and so on, and the right hemisphere, emotional and all that.

[00:16:16] In fact, interestingly, the right hemisphere is the one that controls inappropriate or excessive expression of emotion. The left hemisphere is often very emotional. It gets angry very quickly, and it is also delusional. I mean, frankly, delusional. So the difference is not between, the sort of things that we used to say between doing this and doing that.

[00:16:39] It's in what manner to what end, and with what values does each hemisphere pay attention to the world? And that thing of paying attention is the key. So depending on how we attend is what we find. And when we find things that respond to a certain way of attending, we tend to pay that kind of attention in the future.

[00:16:59] How did this come about? Evolutionary for a very simple reason that every creature has to solve a conundrum, how to eat and stay alive. I know that doesn't sound difficult, but it is promise. Every creature has to be able, like a bird,

The Great Simplification

looking at a seed on a background perhaps of grit, to be able to go for that seed and get it accurately and immediately.

[00:17:22] Ahead of any other creature for that, it needs very narrow beam, highly focused attention to a tiny detail. Everything else excluded. But if that's the only kind of attention it pays, it won't survive because at the same time, it needs to be looking out for the predator. The one that's going to make that bird, its lunch while it's getting its own, that will harm its kin, will harm its mate, and it needs, in other words, to be able to see the other 357 degrees arc of attention.

[00:17:52] So that is the right hemisphere. The right hemisphere pays this broad, sustained, open, vigilant attention to the world. And the left pays this narrowly targeted attention to a detail. Why does that matter? Because as I say, attention changes the world. And what we have is two experiential worlds. We're not usually aware of the being these two worlds because they're fused below the level of conscious awareness most of the time.

[00:18:18] But they can be brought into focus by illness, by disease, by injury, by experiment, and so on. And what you have is in the left hemisphere, a world that is made up of fragments. Those fragments are static. they're useful, they're something, we already know what they are, and we need them now. And they are completely fungible.

[00:18:40] In other words, they're not individual or unique. They're just examples of a seed, a rabbit, something I need now. They are categorized in that way, and they are entirely explicit. The other world, the world of the right hemisphere is one in which nothing is ever entirely fixed or certain. It may be something we hadn't thought of.

[00:19:00] That door is always open. I sometimes say the left hemisphere closes down to certainty. The right hemisphere opens up to possibility. it also sees

The Great Simplification

everything as interconnected, never decontextualized, never abstracted from its embodiment in the real lived world, and it sees what is implicit. And that might sound well, okay, but the explicit really what's important.

[00:19:24] Why don't we just make the implicit explicit, but let me just say this, everything that makes life worth living, everything is degraded when it's made explicit. Sex, love, friendship, art, architecture, music, poetry, myth, ritual, religious faith, all these things, once they're made explicit in the kind of language you use for a dishwasher manual, it's lost.

[00:19:48] It's no longer there. I first saw this when I was teaching English literature at Oxford, that when you take a poem apart and you take the meaning outta the context, you're left with a handful of dust. Now that means that the right hemisphere has a much better grasp of the whole, and the left hemisphere can be brought into play where we need to get our hands on something quickly and use it.

[00:20:12] Its value is utility, but all the other values of connection, of truth, of goodness, of beauty, of love, all these things are understood better by the right hemisphere. Now that's very basic. And anybody who's a neuroscientist listening to me look, go and read the, subtle version that I've written.

[00:20:31] It took me, three decades of research and I think I know the literature very well, and I, these are robust, differences.

[00:20:42] **Nate Hagens:** It's taken me three years and I still haven't finished, your three, books, but I am, a good way through. thank you. That was very clear. You probably are tired of answering that question, but it is foundational to a lot of work, so, yes.

The Great Simplification

[00:21:03] as a return gift, I'm gonna ask you a question that you might not have been asked that I just thought of, and then I have another follow up. Were the people at the time that contributed to writing the Bible was the distribution of left brain versus right brain dominance, presumably different back in those days.

[00:21:23] just speculate on that.

[00:21:25] **Iain McGilchrist:** Well, it would be of course a speculation, but the evidence is that

[00:21:34] obviously both hemispheres were functioning, they are for all of us,

[00:21:37] **Nate Hagens:** right?

[00:21:38] **Iain McGilchrist:** different aspects of a culture correspond to different ways of the hemisphere. So let me just say this. It's really when we start philosophizing, when we ask what is a human being? What are we doing here? What is this world when we start to philosophize.

[00:21:56] We, we are forced in a way to adopt one or other of these pictures. And the easy one to explain the one that's just like falling off a log and there's money for old rope, is explaining the reductionist materialist position of the left hemisphere. That's why, certain, fairly well known figures in the, pop science field have, a field day, because they just explained none of it means anything.

[00:22:22] It's just stuff bumping into one another and, you know, get used to it. the vision of the right hemisphere is subtle, and complex and much harder to express. Now, you asked about the Hebrew world, and in the Hebrew world, there are two gifts, Haika and Agatha. This I learned from the absolutely, amazing wisdom of Rabbi Abraham Hessel, who if people don't know his work, the Sabbath, they should read it.

The Great Simplification

[00:22:57] of course I'm not a Jew, but I came to an understanding, a better understanding, not of course, a full understanding of the Judaic tradition, probably in the last 15 to 20 years. And it was revolutionizing. Anyway, to come back to what I was saying, there are these two spirits. And that sort of inform things.

[00:23:18] They're gifts and Aika is the one that Regularizes legalizes, propositionalize truth, but Agatha is the one that as it sees it from within the business of living, it, if you like, this is, I do compare the two to the right and left hemispheres in some detail. But let me just say that haka is pretty much like what the left hemisphere does, and Aida is much more like what the right hemisphere does for us.

[00:23:49] And interestingly, in that tradition, it has always said that Haika. should be respected, but it should always be under the, if you like, the EG of, aga. And this is very much like the conclusion that I have that we shouldn't despise the left hemisphere. It's a very good servant, but it is a very poor master 'cause it sees so little and it thinks it knows everything like people who know very little, quite often do.

[00:24:17] So it's very important that the left hemisphere should be under the aegis, the oversight of the right hemisphere. So that's what I'd say about that. But in, as you know, from the master in his hemisphere, in the second half of which I review Western history through the lens of the hemispheres, I think I see that three times our civilization.

[00:24:38] And I'm talking from the Western civilization, I'm talking from the Greeks through the Romans, through to, postmodernism. I see the various changes and turns in the history of ideas and suggest that broadly there has been a pattern three times that at the beginning of a civilization in the sixth century BC

The Great Simplification

in Athens, in the year.in Rome, and then again in the 14th, 15th century in Western Europe, there was a sudden.

[00:25:10] budding forth is too weak. a phrase for it, an eff, fluorescence, sort of outpouring of creativity, which covered mathematics and science, poetry and drama. lawmaking mapping, the stars navigating, you name it, the arts flourished and the sciences flourished and everything worked very well together.

[00:25:35] And then. Each of these three cases, what happened eventually was that the rigid, narrow-minded view of the left hemisphere, no, it's like this, became the, the dominant way of thinking, as it were, edged out the more subtle view of the right hemisphere. And in every case, the civilization, began to decay.

[00:26:00] And in the two that we know the story of in Greece and Rome, it eventually collapsed altogether. We are at the point of possible collapse, possible renewal.

[00:26:10] **Nate Hagens:** Let's get to the, heart of, why I invited you back, other than I would invite you back continuously because you have, worthwhile things to say on just about anything I would ask.

[00:26:22] **Iain McGilchrist:** Oh.

[00:26:22] **Nate Hagens:** But as I continue to make this podcast, and I continue to see, what I refer to as The Great Simplification in encroaching, upon more humans and more than humans, I am personally increasingly confident that human beings full awareness to the present moment is actually the holy grail of being human.

[00:26:48] And that human attention. writ large as individuals and as society may become an even more degraded shared commons than our energy and

The Great Simplification

ecosystem resources that I talk about. So what do you think of the idea that the state of our human attention is becoming increasingly fragmented, and what are the implications for us being able to tap into our already for most people underrepresented right hemispheres?

[00:27:20] **Iain McGilchrist:** Well, of course, I do, resonate with that, because I think that our attention is being fragmented and I think it's important, I suppose I'd want to just say something about the very word attention, that there are different ways in which we attend. I've already mentioned that one of them is a spotlight on a particular thing that we're fully aware of in the middle of our consciousness, but the other is a much bigger, broader area, and it has been, rather comically asserted in a peer reviewed paper, which I sometimes quote, that we are aware at some level, 99.44% of all that we are aware of is.

[00:28:16] Unconscious at this moment in time, the bit that we are aware of is just less than half a percent or about half a percent. So there are different kinds of attention. but if we have never attended to things and it's possible to do so, we are as if we were asleep. And it occurs to me very often that in religious traditions particularly, it is often said that, you know, you are sleepwalkers.

[00:28:50] You, you are, you know, you are as those who have eyes but do not see. And I think that what that is getting at is that we can go through life in such a way that we don't. We don't allow ourselves to be aware of what is there for us to attend to. Now there are these fabulous, very dramatic demonstrations, in, by recent psychologists of how we can not be aware of something that is just absolutely barn door.

[00:29:27] the most famous is a clip called Gorillas In Our Midst. Yeah. so, there's a couple of, teams, a black team and a white team with different color shirts, and they're passing a ball between one another in a quite small space, in a lobby outside it looks like a lobby outside where some lifts are in our offices.

The Great Simplification

[00:29:47] And you are asked to, count how many times a white team pass a ball to a person in the black team. And, at the end of it, you know, you're asked, well, how many? And you know, I forget what it is, 14 or something.

[00:30:01] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah.

[00:30:01] **Iain McGilchrist:** And they say, yeah, that's right. But what about the gorilla? And you sort of go. The gorilla, and then they replay the same clip.

[00:30:09] And unbelievably, there is a man dressed in a gorilla outfit who comes into the middle of the thing right in front of the camera, dis dances a little jig, beats his chest, and then walks nonchalantly off outta the picture. And the fact that you were attending to something else meant you didn't register it.

[00:30:29] **Nate Hagens:** I used that 20 years ago, when I was in getting my PhD, and I showed that to my students, 10 years ago when I was teaching college. But just at this moment, I realized that's, a microcosm for our economic system. We're putting our attention on this, on economic value, on profit, on money, and the, you know, we're missing the gorilla, which is the value and the environment and all the other things that you talk about.

[00:30:58] Is that right?

[00:31:00] **Iain McGilchrist:** Absolutely right. And our attention is guided by what it is we value, which is why I. Absolutely core, is central to the situation. We find ourselves in what's sometimes called a poly crisis. I prefer to call it a meta crisis in the sense that all these little crises, big crises, but nonetheless little in comparison,

[00:31:26] **Nate Hagens:** I, call it the more than human predicament.

The Great Simplification

[00:31:28] **Iain McGilchrist:** I like that. Yes. Yes. it is the human predicament and it is the more than human predicament. I wish it were also something that took into account the more than human, more than it does. But anyway, so the fact that our attention is snatched all the time, if we allow it to be by somebody who wants to sell us something, is extraordinarily disruptive.

[00:31:55] And there's two ways in which it can be disruptive. There are things that we do actually need to focus on for quite some time consistently in order to have sufficient depth of understanding of what we're doing. So if we're reading something that is, demanding. all beautiful, all powerful.

[00:32:20] We need to stay with it for a while before its full richness is revealed and to be, just reading a snippet or worst of all, just reading a three paragraph summary or something is to have missed an opportunity for an experience that might be life changing. But there's the other thing, which is that there are certain things, and this is so, so important, that you can only realize and realize carries with it.

[00:32:57] The sort of idea of bringing outta potential into full actuality. You can only realize if you stop

[00:33:11] acting, thinking and filling up the space with what you think is important, and instead cultivate silence, openness, awareness. And that awareness is not some passive, not doing anything. it is an activity in which you are not filling the space with your thoughts, but listening, I mean, this is just so important.

[00:33:38] So. Unless we do that. And it's the background of the traditions of both meditation and prayer. people misunderstand, prayer is making requests, but as, St. Francis said, when you pray, you should ask for nothing. Nothing. So it's more about audition, it's listening, it's opening up and stilling that talkative voice of the

The Great Simplification

left hemisphere so that something else that you hadn't anticipated has a chance once to come and meet you.

[00:34:10] And it's only in that coming to meet you through the openness of your attention to it, that something then begins to grow. That is the creative process. We're all capable of it, but we hardly ever in the modern world give it a chance.

[00:34:24] **Nate Hagens:** I never thought about prayer that way. that's interesting. But let me ask you this.

[00:34:31] We are social primates. and so far in this conversation we've mentioned at least three concepts. One, the concept of value, and beauty and all those things. Another is the left right brain dynamic. And another is awareness to the present moment and how critical that is. How possible is it for individual humans to.

[00:35:03] Primate or how, necessary is it to do these things with others? And if you're in a group or a culture that is really leaning one way on, on those three concepts that we just discussed, it's really an uphill battle for an individual human to swim against the current there. So how does those things value left, right brain and awareness, differ between individuals and groups, and what's the relationship between that?

[00:35:35] **Iain McGilchrist:** It's a very good question. and I suppose it, it comes back to something I said very early on that, well, I think it's wonderful that we should have individual practices. We may need something more embodied in the culture. we're not, we're not, atomistic individuals. Of course. We can't thrive like that. We are, as you say, and as Aristotle said, the social animal. And there's a lot of evidence that one of the three really, important things for human flourishing is to belong to a social group. and I don't just mean demographically and statistically, but to live it.

The Great Simplification

[00:36:23] so to, to share one's life with others who have similar values, to share meals together, to pray together, to look after one another's families together. and so to really embody a lived experience, and I in the ma the master Ry, I quote the case of, I, I think it's called tto, in in New York state.

[00:36:49] this, community where, Rosato or Ra Ceto, I forget in which, despite having much higher levels of obesity, smoking and drinking, the population had much lower levels of both physical and mental illness. And it turned out that they were an almost entirely cohesive, community that had come there from Italy.

[00:37:15] And so some had come and then others had followed, and they maintained the sort of life that for a thousand years would've been a community life in Italy, very different from our modern capitalist, destroyed, mockery of a society that, that we now live in. So I think it is very important that we share these things with others and that they are not just ideas, they're not just theories.

[00:37:46] They're not just, part of the map. They are part of the territory, the terrain, in fact, rather than the territory. I would prefer are things that are embedded in. A place and a time and a people and a history and that these things are important. I mean, we're taught to neglect all these things. In fact, we're taught to revile them, but actually we won't survive that.

[00:38:12] we're sort of, we're like a civilization that is pouring acid into its own foundations, try and dissolve the rock, you know? And there is this, it's amazing how these things keep coming back to me. But, you know, the famous parable of the house that was built on sand and I think that our house was built on rock, but we are destroying it.

[00:38:34] And when the rains come and the floods come, and the winds beat on the house, and it will fall down and great will be the fall arrow.

The Great Simplification

[00:38:43] **Nate Hagens:** But let me ask you something I didn't anticipate on asking you, but you just briefly mentioned the word embody. And yesterday I had a conversation with a dear friend who told me that, the lack of embodiment or getting out of our body is part of the fall from grace for our culture.

[00:39:05] And I'm like, what does that even mean? What does embody mean? I hear it all the time. And she said, well, just go to extremes. If you are a hundred percent in your mind and you just have this font of thoughts and ideas are coming in your mind, you are not aware of your feet or your belly or your breathing or nothing.

[00:39:25] And on the other side, if you are a hundred percent deep in meditation, if that's even feasible, like maybe I'll get 40% there, you aren't having those thoughts bubbling up and you're aware of your feet and your skin and all those things. How does this embodiment versus thoughts, integrate with all the other things that you've, shared so far?

[00:39:51] **Iain McGilchrist:** I suppose the first thing I'd say is that there isn't a sharp dichotomy between the thoughts and the embodiment, which might be disguised by the advice due to look at the extremes. but there are things that are extremely different, but nonetheless, part of the same phenomenon, and I sometimes use the example of the dipole that is a magnet.

[00:40:15] It has completely opposite north and south poles, but they're integral to being a magnet. And you can't have one without the other.

[00:40:21] **Nate Hagens:** Right. Well, if we didn't have a body, there would be no thoughts. Clearly

The Great Simplification

[00:40:24] **Iain McGilchrist:** there would be no thoughts. And, it was, vo in the 18th century, a philosopher of the Enlightenment who said it is emotion that has taught us to reason, which is interesting.

[00:40:38] and is in line with some research by, a contemporary neuroscientist, Antonio Demio. And it's fairly obvious, really, that thought and feeling are intertwined with one another and should be for some purposes, the most abstract kinds of thoughts. mathematical shapes. they would appear to be separate.

[00:41:04] But the interesting thing is that if you read the accounts, and I'm interested enough to have read the accounts of many mathematical discoveries by great geniuses and indeed scientific discoveries, particularly those in physics, by very important, minds, that there is something that guides them to a, conclusion, which is not just a chain of, reasoning that can be laid out on paper.

[00:41:32] there are leaps of sort and imagination. imagination is perhaps the key word here that takes 'em to a conclusion which they just know somehow is right, before they've been able to justify it. Now, that is not to say that it is always right when you have an intuition that something must be the case.

[00:41:51] They often speak of beauty, mathematician, speak of beauty all the time. and interestingly, so did Darwin. it's on every second page of the, descent of man, the descent of man. So, what I wouldn't wanna, deny is. It's not infallible, but it is a guide. And that we arrive at truth through bringing together science and reason with imagination and intuition.

[00:42:28] And we've been taught, to look down on intuition and to think of imagination is perhaps secondary. It is not secondary. It is primary. If you lack imagination, you cannot live. You can't, in fact even do math and science properly. You actually do need imagination and imagination. Forgive me if I said this before, but it is exactly not fantasy.

The Great Simplification

[00:42:53] fantasy takes you away from reality. Imagination gives you your only chance of entering deeply into it. This was something that was seen by, hagel and shelling and probably more importantly by Wordsworth and Cole, who again embodied this rather abstract thinking in the most beautiful language in, in poetry.

[00:43:14] **Nate Hagens:** So there's so many different, overlapping, intertwining concepts here. We talked about awareness. you mentioned that prayer opens up a little window of possible creativity, and now you mentioned, imagination. And we mentioned the aperture of when the left brain is locked in. It narrows our boundaries instead of wide boundaries.

[00:43:41] A, how does this affect humanity's ability to engage with the metris or the more than human predicament? And b, more importantly, or the core of my question, how is the advent of AI and the scaling of AI even narrowing our apertures further and reducing our imagination and all the things, it's almost like the anti of what the direction we need to go despite its power and abilities

[00:44:12] **Iain McGilchrist:** just because of its way of emphasizing data points.

[00:44:20] ai, AI takes us already, unless we're very careful into a world where manipulating information is thought to be the same as thinking, understanding, and even knowing. There is this fascinating thing that most languages other than English make a sharp distinction, which they bloody well should do between two kinds of knowing, the knowing that the French call *awa*, which means knowing the facts and *con et* which means knowing by experience.

[00:44:55] And so, you know, I know *savoir* that Paris is the capital of France and so does ai, but I know *Connet*, Paris because I lived there for several years and that's the kind of knowledge that AI hasn't the slightest ability to get. Now, I think

The Great Simplification

half the problem in the anglophone world is that we have the same word for these two utterly different things.

[00:45:18] And you know, the same things true in German between, canon and so forth. One way of thinking about it is that. Putting it very simply. One is knowing from the inside and knowing from the inside is something that absolutely, by definition, AI can never do. It hasn't got a life, it hasn't got a body, it doesn't have emotions.

[00:45:40] It doesn't have, the capacity to feel joy, to rejoice, to, to grieve, to be bereaved, to think of approaching death. All these things which are not in themselves, although some of them we would like to reject negative, they are part of what makes us capable of a deep understanding. And it is something that is simply outta the question for ai.

[00:46:03] So it can go through the motions of saying what a human being it thinks, would say because of examples it's had in this situation. and that's all you are getting. But what you are getting is not really in essence, in different from the brazen heads that were made in the late 18th century that could speak.

[00:46:29] So they'd have a head and it could move and a tongue and it would say things and this is fine. I mean, of course it's vastly more sophisticated, but all it has done is approach asymptotically, a reality. But it can only ever do it asymptotically. And as long as it's on the other side of the chasm, it never can reach it.

[00:46:53] A, and an analogy for this that occurred to me recently is that a lot of people don't really register the fact that if you have a ly of an inch and you extend it to 30 billion, 300 billion miles, you are no nearer, not just a little nearer, but no nearer infinity than you were when you started.

The Great Simplification

[00:47:16] **Nate Hagens:** Right. So that's ai.

[00:47:19] But what about the people, the humans that intensively use ai? is, their left brain being, you know, super actuated? And is there a, yes. I mean, is there a, not a biological, but is there some sort of a cultural speciation that might occur in the next decade? I mean, I can think of three different camps.

[00:47:41] People that intensively use AI and are just devotees, people like myself that begrudgingly have to use it for certain things professionally, but other than that, don't use it. And there were people that don't use it at all. although that's difficult in our modern society because it's embedded everywhere.

[00:47:58] But what impact will this have on our brains?

[00:48:01] **Iain McGilchrist:** Well, we know it already is having impact on our brains. some very recent information, but it's, it's been repeatedly found that, using social media and using mobile phones has an impact on the development of, a child or a teenager's brain. So we know these things and it would be completely illogical if it were not the case.

[00:48:27] Our brains respond to what we, give them. the brain is not a fixed entity like everything else. It is in a process. Everything is processual. There are no things like that, which is one of the meanings of the title. The matter with things instead of things we should think of relationships that are always in process.

[00:48:52] They are foundational. Things are entirely secondary. They're just a verbal slight of hand, enables us to point to certain kind of chunks of phenomena and say, that's a thing that I'm not against using the word, I use it myself, but it's not, things are not foundational Processes and relations are foundational.

The Great Simplification

[00:49:12] So when we, the brain is a long way around us saying the brain is constantly changing in response to the environment, and the environment is changing in response to how we use our brains. See, we've so far removed ourselves from this. The deep knowledge that is so important that we need to live somewhere.

[00:49:35] In which we are in touch with nature. Because I mentioned earlier that one of the great foundations of human flourishing and of human health is that business of social connectivity. But the second, is, being in connection with nature. And we've cut ourselves off from that. And we surrounded ourselves, frankly, with things in which we no longer care about, whether they're beautiful.

[00:50:01] In fact, we have to search quite hard to find beauty. And even in some respects, not all artists, but a lot of artists in the last a hundred years have given up on beauty altogether, repudiated beauty, and said it's nothing to do with the PO point of art. I think it's very much the point of art, beauty starved, and beauty is one of the things that gives meaning to life.

[00:50:25] So, yes, the way in which we lead our lives out, the surfaces, the surroundings, the, and particularly the two dimensional screen, which only ever represents life to us. It can't be life. And this is again, foundational difference between the left and right hemisphere. The right hemisphere is life as it presences to us.

[00:50:49] Not just is present in a passive way, but comes into being for us. And, the, left hemisphere only has a representation. and that's a lie. You know, a representation is a deceit 'cause it says it's present when it's a, it's represented, but it's not because it's no longer there. It's an attempt to make something present that actually is not present and you can spend your whole life living in a representation of something rather like the matrix, I guess.

The Great Simplification

[00:51:17] I've never seen the film, I'm afraid, but, and not in the reality of the life that is represented.

[00:51:23] **Nate Hagens:** You should maybe watch the film because it rhymes maybe at a deep level with your work. In a recent, frankly, I came up with the term soft feudalism that we're not actually in a feudalist society yet, but we kind of are, because of what you just described.

[00:51:40] Just to live in this society, we have to go through all those motions and it's being extracted. The attention, the dollars are being sent to the riders of the Superorganism. But let me ask you this, most humans do. Get meaning in their lives from the things that you work. Your work describes truth and beauty and goodness, and people like soup and babies and forests and slumber parties and playing cards with a beer with their friends and, you know, the smell of soil and all the things that are real.

[00:52:18] Yes. So people like those things, but they're part of this soft feudalism culture that is like this vortex pulling us out of that. How do we deal with that? Do you have advice?

[00:52:32] **Iain McGilchrist:** I like that image of soft feudalism. I think it's a good one. And you know, the first thing that comes to mind is that, I was brought up, I'm sure you were.

[00:52:41] Most people are to believe that feudalism was a system under which, people labored unbelievably hard without relief. And in, in, in writing the matter with things. I decided to, investigate what life was like. And there are scholarly books that have been written and I, I mentioned them and attribute my, my, i, my, my thoughts to those books in the matter with things on the life of the peasant, right up to the NG regime just before the revolution in France.

The Great Simplification

[00:53:23] And what I was amazed to discover is, and this was said very frankly by the writers. we were taught to think that things were very bad before machines came along. But actually it was industrial revolution that caused people to be exploited very harshly. It was only with the coming of the industrial revolution that people.

[00:53:47] Really were, you know, grindingly hard, unforgiving hours and that the medieval peasant had 180 days of holiday in a year. Or at least, lemme put it this way, the peasants in the E.O regime before the French Revolution had 180 days holiday a year. I imagine that must include Sundays, but that still leaves a lot of other days.

[00:54:11] And they also took it for granted that they would have a couple of hours break in the middle of the day when they would sleep or do whatever they wanted to do. They would have a long lunch. So the idea that life was miserable until machines came along and liberated us is the inversion of the truth.

[00:54:29] **Nate Hagens:** And even if the fruits of their labor got moved elsewhere to the Lord, of the day, they still experienced truth, beauty, and goodness.

[00:54:41] **Iain McGilchrist:** And they also had food. I mean, come on it. Yeah. That because it was possible before capitalism for a small community to live on. Not that much labor. It's only with the advent of capitalism when people thought, oh, I can get rich by making more than I need and selling it.

[00:54:57] That the idea of exponential increase meant that people started to work very hard. So it was with capitalism in the 18th century and industrialization that things began to get really grim.

The Great Simplification

[00:55:10] **Nate Hagens:** I think the Lord today, not religious Lord, but the, futile Lord is the economic Superorganism that I refer to, and it continues to be a hungry ghost.

[00:55:25] that's kind of insatiable. And so getting to back to the level of the individual in a recent, frankly, episode, I don't think I sent you this one, but I discussed the importance of spaciousness.

[00:55:37] **Iain McGilchrist:** Yes.

[00:55:38] **Nate Hagens:** But the feeling that time, some bit of time belongs not to the Lord or to the Superorganism, but to you and the ability to pause and reflect and do nothing maybe, so

[00:55:51] **Iain McGilchrist:** important.

[00:55:52] So,

[00:55:52] **Nate Hagens:** so, so how might this, how might gaining a sense of spaciousness based on your research and scholarship change one's relationship to the things that you mentioned that you're gonna have a seminar at Oxford about truth and beauty and goodness and the other intangible things that make our lives meaningful.

[00:56:11] **Iain McGilchrist:** Well, those are the most important things. They are the sources of meaning and purpose in life. I think we have to slow down. And I, and listening to me speak and listening to myself speak, I feel like I'm speaking incredibly rapidly today, partly because there's so much always in our conversations, there's so many places to go.

[00:56:32] And I feel, ugh, come on, let's get there. But actually, the thing is to, and I try to follow this in my life, is slow down to make space for what appears

The Great Simplification

unproductive, but is the only productive time, which is when you are receptive, when things can germinate, when something can come about between something that is calling to you and you are answering this calling and answering idea seems to be very important.

[00:57:00] There's a resonance, a response, a responsibility between what is in here and what is out there. And those two things, which are never entirely separate, are constantly coming together into the reality that I experience, that you experience, that we all experience. And it's in that resonance that the only real can come about.

[00:57:30] It's always created afresh. And it comes about through, first of all, being. Silent long enough to hear something. So I think that if you know that there's this saying, ask and it shall be given unto you. I don't think that it meant whatever you want, God will turn up with it like the a, a pleasing super butler.

[00:57:51] I didn't think this is what it meant at all. I think what it meant is if you ask a question and listen, an answer will come to you. That something speaks to you. Even if you are silent, it is being given to you. I see life as a gift. it's the best way to understand it. I didn't ask for it, but it came to me.

[00:58:17] And I, I don't know how, you don't know how, but there it is. What is this life? It is a gift, and it is not a problem to be solved. it is a mystery to be embraced and we must learn once again to embrace it and to be thankful for it. I know you mentioned to me that you've been struck by my remark that Thanksgiving is not for a day, but for every day.

[00:58:44] and I do think that's a very important attitude of mine to get into. I say every day, a prayer that was written by, Dietrich Bon Hofer, which is largely, an acknowledgement of the existence of God and, praising him for what he gives and, without any kind of, Quibble about what that might be.

The Great Simplification

[00:59:12] So, I mean, this is a man who was suffering. He was in a fort somewhere in a prison cell, waiting to be hanged by the Nazis. And you know, he's the prayer and it's very short, but he'd end, father in heaven. Th be the praise for the quiet of the night. Thine be the praise for the new day. Whatever thou give us this day, oh God, thy name be praise.

[00:59:36] I think that's very important. I'm not in a position to stipulate what comes. Some of it will be joyful, some of it will be grievous. And I have to take them both

[00:59:49] **Nate Hagens:** so much to say. first of all, when you say that prayer, based on what you said earlier, it presumably opens up creativity and imagination and maybe some thought that, coalesces for you rather than just the direct expression of gratitude.

[01:00:09] but secondly. Yes, you and I don't speak live, too often and we are aligned in a lot of things. So there's an excitement and a social, ping pong. And so spaciousness and slowness is not, really embodied in a, in our two hour live conversations. And yet I, I recognize how important it is. but let me ask you this.

[01:00:35] With the Superorganism and the economic system and the soft feudalism where individual humans do value, truth and beauty and goodness, and the things that you write about is the first step in recapturing agency for yourself, dealing with time and spaciousness and not trying to convert every minute into either dopamine or profit or transaction, but to actually pause and reflect and stop and take time.

[01:01:15] Is that like an ability for us individual humans in the technology monster that, we're a part of to, to recapture a little bit of agency?

The Great Simplification

[01:01:26] **Iain McGilchrist:** I think we do have to do that. if we are to recapture what you call agency, which I imagine is what some degree of. Freedom of choice about how our lives go. Yeah.

[01:01:40] Freedom of

[01:01:41] **Nate Hagens:** choice.

[01:01:42] **Iain McGilchrist:** Yes. Which is very important. I recently just only a week or two ago gave the opening keynote at a conference at Duke on cognitive freedom. And I addressed first of all the question of can we be free? I mean, is it true that we are fully determined? And my answer to that in brief is we are not fully determined at all.

[01:02:07] I mean, of course there are determinants in our life. Of course there are. But we have, freedom to choose. And the second part was what are the enemies of our freedom to choose? And I think some of them are political, unfortunately now, and some of them are AI induced particularly, but I think to regain some sense of who we are and what we're doing here, while we still are, we do need exactly what you say, spaciousness and time.

[01:02:49] And it may be very hard to allow that because I should be being productive. But this. Mania with productivity is enormously unproductive. It only produces the mediocre anything can produce the mediocre. A machine can produce the mediocre, but it takes a real living, imaginative human being to go beyond that.

[01:03:11] I learned recently that there is a Hindu, saying, he doesn't actually say it in these words in the Bava Gita, but the sentiment is there that hell is more faster. And that is the world we live in. It's, there's gotta be more and it's gotta happen faster. And I say, no, there's gotta be less and it's gotta happen slower.

The Great Simplification

[01:03:32] And by we don't understand the paradoxical nature of reality. Oh, please God. Can people understand about the coincidence of opposites? The first chapter in the last part of the matter with things? When I got to the point of saying, so, okay, armed with all this, how do we look at the universe and what can we say about it?

[01:03:57] And one of the things is that right at the core of reality is the coming together of opposites. And that less can be more. That unknowing can be more than knowing and that there can be something rich in non-doing as Buddhists say. And these are not the same as idleness and ignorance. Ignorance is what you have before you have knowledge.

[01:04:23] And unknowing is what you have after knowledge if you're lucky. And it is the beginning of wisdom. EE emptying yourself is there is this concept in Buddhism of shta, which means emptiness when it's translated into English. But that's a problem in English because emptiness sounds negative.

[01:04:45] And again, the word negative is an interesting one. 'cause I believe that negation is actually very creative. Anyway, the story from another day perhaps. But, emptiness is creating a space, a fertile space, best image to me by the womb as a place in which new life can grow. And if it's full, no new life can grow.

[01:05:09] We need to be like that. We need to be the space where new life can grow. And it comes to us through imagination. It comes to us through audition, through listening, through, through being patient and being attentive. What more can I say?

[01:05:25] **Nate Hagens:** So in all of those words you've just said, those are practices where people can.

The Great Simplification

[01:05:34] Change their relationship with time a little bit and create some emptiness. Yes. And from that is, that's the womb from which other things can grow in that human. And presumably if enough humans have that practice, then that changes the initial conditions of the future.

[01:05:51] **Iain McGilchrist:** Yes, that's right. And in my own experience, when I have wanted to write something, my attempts have usually been completely fruitless for a very long time.

[01:06:01] You have to be pre prepared for making space for something and it not happening, but eventually it comes. And my God, be careful what you want to happen because when it comes, it's there it is. And you can't accept, be a channel for it

[01:06:18] **Nate Hagens:** in my own experience, other than riding when riding my bike or in a hypnogogic state and I have a little voice recorder, in my bed, I hate to admit.

[01:06:28] but my best ideas of integrating things. Come when I'm doing nothing and not trying to think about things.

[01:06:36] **Iain McGilchrist:** Yes. I think that's right. Yeah. and you know, on that, I think there's a phenomenon of the, you know, the thoughts that come to you in the shower. And of course it has nothing to do with the shower.

[01:06:47] It's just that is the period when you are beginning to return to everyday wakefulness. And what you have experienced while you are asleep speaks to you. And, you know, the number of times I've had thoughts, well, I've just been, I just got outta bed and getting into the shower, and yes, that's the answer.

The Great Simplification

[01:07:04] **Nate Hagens:** Well, unfortunately for some people being in the shower might be the only time where they don't have access to their phone or some other bit of technology, that is hijacking their awareness and time.

[01:07:17] **Iain McGilchrist:** Yeah. But sadly, I think you can now have a phone that you can use in the shower.

[01:07:23] **Nate Hagens:** so recently there, as we've discussed a little bit, been a growing percentage of our population that are, obsessed, fascinated with extending human life through technology.

[01:07:39] And my question for you, Iain, is, has modernity lost its capacity to understand tragedy and death as real things rather than just some failure of engineering? and what, does that attitude and, that trajectory say about our mental states and our connection to life, itself? And I know you've, you know, said things, in your recent, writings that those who find little meaning in life actually paradoxically clinging to it, more, what are your thoughts on all that?

[01:08:18] **Iain McGilchrist:** Yes, I just do find that it's the people who hold a view that life is pretty much meaningless. They want more of it, and that it, you know, there's a sort of sense of humor in not understanding these paradoxes. and my, one complaint about Christlainity is that there's not much humor in it. And when you compare it with Judaism and compare it with Zen Buddhism, and sometimes I feel that, you know, God allows me, to see the, amusing side of myself and my predicament.

[01:08:54] but to, return to the, point that you are making, first of all, I wouldn't see death as tragic at all. I think tragedy is, things that happen in life. I think that death is. The fulfillment and the natural conclusion of life that when I say the fulfillment, I think that without it life would not be what it is.

The Great Simplification

[01:09:19] if we imagine that we just carried on living forever, I think many things that do positively happen in our lifetime, we wouldn't experience and we wouldn't achieve. I also think that death is, by no means, wholly or mainly negative. If you actually think what that would mean, that you could never, ever stop being you are condemned to go on as you forever.

[01:09:51] No, I'm extremely happy to say, in a world in which we think that bigger portions are always better, that life comes in exactly the right size portions for me. And I'm in my seventies now and I'm entirely happy with that and completely at peace with the idea that I will die fairly soon. so, I think we don't understand what we are here for.

[01:10:19] And because we don't, we think that life is meaningless and therefore that the only value can be just having more, you know, we don't value it for all the beautiful things it can give. Instead, we value it like a product, you know? this is about to run out. Oh, I want to renew my, you know, and so extraordinary efforts are made to keep this ridiculous, frail, single human being going for.

[01:10:48] Some imagined future. I mean, I very much think they must be optimists if they imagine that when, if they survive, when they come round out of their cryogenic state, they will like the world they come into and the uses that they're going to be put to by those who have brought them out of it anyway. And that's an another matter altogether.

[01:11:08] But no, I don't think we understand the beauty of the fact that life is complimented by death. And I also, I mean, let me just say this. I don't think it has anything particular to do with religion. I have also believed that it is extraordinarily unlikely that this consciousness that is my consciousness, is simply an isolated whatever it is, has a record if you like.

The Great Simplification

[01:11:38] and not just a dead record, but one that is actually, going forward. So everything as I say, is a process. And I believe that we, our lives are like that. And the image, forgive me, I've probably said this before, but it, helps me a lot, is one that comes from, shelling the, early 19th century, idealist philosopher.

[01:12:01] I'm not sure he really was, but anyway, and he makes quite a lot of use of the image of an Eddie or a whirlpool. And the reason that he does that is that an eddie or a whirlpool is not a thing. It is a movement, but it is also contained in the essence that you, in, in the way you can see it, you can photograph it, you can measure it, and it has power perhaps to move stone.

[01:12:27] So it's definitely real, but it's not in the water in the way that any other object, a ball or a person or a fish would be in the water. It is the water for the time that it's there and the water, two things, the water moving through that whirlpool moves and moves on, but also the whirlpool itself in the end will move on.

[01:12:49] These movements are continuous and it's wonderful that there should be this differentiation in the whole, for a moment in time, which is me and is you, but we shouldn't want to hang onto that as though somehow it was more important than the part it plays in a bigger hole. See, this is another absolutely.

[01:13:14] Essential insight. I think that, you know, really when I heard er say this really knocked me for sakes, dividing the united uniting. The divided is the whole work of nature and he compares it to the inbreath and the outbreath to the sisterly and the Aly, the two beats of the heart. But of course, this knowledge is already there.

[01:13:41] It was there in Hagel with the idea that the bud is not destroyed by becoming a flower, but was fulfilled in becoming a flower. That the flower is not destroyed when it becomes a bud, but is fulfilled in becoming the bud and the

The Great Simplification

bud is fulfilled when it empties out into a new life. This is a processual image of things being first of all enclosed, then turned outwards, then Reen unfolded.

[01:14:06] David Bow in his wonderful book, wholeness and the Implicate order, which I read when it was, I think first written in the eighties, meant an enormous amount to me. 'cause I thought absolutely, intuitively this is right. That what is unfolded needs to be unfolded. And the unfolded needs to be refolded.

[01:14:25] The implicate needs to be made explicated, but the explication doesn't destroy the integrity of the whole, but is reunited at a higher level. I'll image. Put there by Nicholas of er, sometimes called ous, a 15th century German scientist and mystic, and philosopher who, is hugely important.

[01:14:53] **Nate Hagens:** So connecting a few things you've just said, the unfolding and the bud becoming the flower. Early on in, in, the passage you just, articulated, you said that humans don't know what we're here for. what are we here for?

[01:15:11] **Iain McGilchrist:** I can rely on you, Nate, to ask the best questions. finally enough, I do actually have an answer for it, which probably means I'm wrong.

[01:15:24] but I, but my answer is something like this. it's just not a myth that, life is hugely improbable. It just is from a purely scientific point of view, hugely improbable. So improbable that the chances of it coming about in any one universe are infinitesimal. So that has led philosophers to invent multi universes on the basis that if there's enough of them, an infinite number, then everything can happen.

[01:15:54] To me, that is a massive out cop out. But let, lemme just hold with it. life is not only. Unlikely, but it is vastly extravagant because it requires getting over an energy hump even to get started. So why would it get over that hump if it hadn't yet got the goal as it were, of where it was going to lure it forward?

The Great Simplification

[01:16:20] Now, we now know, we used to know this in physics only, but now we know this in biology, that in fact, biological systems are not mechanisms when they meet an obstruction, they don't just mindlessly go on battling away at it. They realize that they need to get rounded towards something that they're destined to go towards.

[01:16:40] and that doesn't mean that they're determined, but it just means that there is a lure, a, t loss as, Aristotle, sorry, would've said, towards which they're being drawn. So, what we're, what we're seeing is something that is a vastly improbable. Secondly, requires, something somewhat magical about getting over the energy hump in order to carry on.

[01:17:08] developing. And that, however you look at it is, it doesn't disprove the second law of thermodynamics. Don't get me wrong. But on the other hand, it does an extraordinary job of kicking against it and moving in exactly the opposite direction for a long time. It's reverse of entropy, really. Now, why all this fuss?

[01:17:30] people say, well, the only thing, and this is the left hemisphere speaking, is it's all about increasing the power to remain in existence. it very much coming back to the conversation we're having living for longer and longer. That's the left hemisphere's idea. Let's have more.

[01:17:49] But there is no sense in this because very primitive creatures, I often refer to this, I'm afraid, Actinobacteria in the base of the ocean, some examples of them are a million years old. So they're not the socks of, homo sapiens for in terms of persistence in existence. So evolution has got to have been about much more than that.

[01:18:14] And as Whitehead rather Whitly observed, if it's persistence in existence, you want, the key thing is never to have been alive because rocks last for billions

The Great Simplification

a bit. So what is life for and why does it complexify? And my answer to that is that whatever else the cosmos is, I think it's fairly safe to say that it is creative.

[01:18:35] We know it started from something absolutely minute and extraordinarily simple and it's complexified into incredible richness of structure and of even the elements that are there in chemistry, nevermind anything else. So that is one of the things it does, and it complexifies in a way that produces the possibility for great beauty and that beauty needs to be appreciated.

[01:19:04] And with that appreciation comes also the capacity for understanding truth and goodness. So those values that I think are not made up at any stage, what we call it any one time in history, beautiful, may change. Of course, that's a completely separate issue, although there's much more consonance over time than you might think and over cultures about what is considered beautiful.

[01:19:29] But let's just shelve that one entirely. I'm not talking about what we find beautiful. I'm talking about the fact that there is beauty at all, which was the question that Darwin kept on asking. So what that requires is something that can respond to it. Beauty needs to be received, love needs to be received, truth needs to be understood and perceived.

[01:19:53] **Nate Hagens:** But beauty, love, and truth are all human concepts constructs? No. Right? No.

[01:19:58] **Iain McGilchrist:** not at all. No. No. There are things that we didn't invent, but there are things that we are, we have the power to discern, to discover, and that literally means to uncover them. And they're there for the uncovering. And the reason we have this extraordinarily complex, Imagination and intelligence. Is that only with that, are we able finally to respond to, I think what I see as the nature of the ground of being, which is creative and relational and guided towards certain ends, not fixed ends in the way that a, a deistic God would

The Great Simplification

be like a divine engineer who'd got a piece of machinery, he was winding up and it all, I mean, there'd be no point in having a creation if that were the case.

[01:20:55] I think the ground of being is unfolding its potential. What is at the moment only potential in it. Actualizing it. And in that process it is discovering its own nature. And we are discovering our nature. And this is not something separate. We are part of that duality, not a duality. it's a dance. how can you tell the dancer from the dance says Yates, and there is a dance and we, are part of that dance.

[01:21:26] And the other part of that dance is the ground of being. And in this complex and beautiful un unfolding of things, we see more of truth, goodness, and beauty that can be responded to.

[01:21:39] **Nate Hagens:** So humans in our modern anatomical form are around, well, 300,000 years old is our species, but life's been on this earth for a billion years.

[01:21:49] So rabbits and gazelle's and leopards and whales, are also living up to their potential on this trajectory. and how does this dovetail into pantheism at the beginning of our conversation.

[01:22:03] **Iain McGilchrist:** Well, the first thing I'd like to say is that I didn't mean in what I've just said about humans to think that we are a sort of sealed off separate entity from the rest of, evolution.

[01:22:14] And that you can certainly see a capacity to recognize beauty in a certain degree in other creatures. And even goodness, even self-sacrificial goodness exists in primates and in dogs, and so forth. So, I think truth is a little bit more difficult. I think it does take a human being to understand what is meant by truth.

The Great Simplification

[01:22:39] Although truth, as I say, is not a matter of, propositions, but a matter of a disposition. It means being true to something. So truth is not asking us to discover some facts that we can write down and give to another person on a piece of paper, and then they've got that truth. Truth is something that unfolds to us through a relationship.

[01:22:57] And what it is the word true is, you know, that ancient thing in German of loyalty of being true to what there is. I mean, I, that's what I believe we're here for, is to be true to the, extraordinary beauty of what we've been given and to respond to it. If we do respond to it, we have in some sense fulfilled it.

[01:23:17] We have some sense that contributed to its enlargement. If we don't, and we have, that's fine. But in my view, we've squandered our life now.

[01:23:31] Quite a lot. I believe, not only in pantheism, but in panpsychism, which is, nowadays not at all unusual. I think, most card carrying, university faculty philosophers nowadays, have a lot of time for the view of the panpsychism view.

[01:23:53] **Nate Hagens:** I don't know what that word means.

[01:23:56] **Iain McGilchrist:** Panpsychism. Okay. So panpsychism simply means that psyche is not something that it is in everything.

[01:24:03] So it is not something that emerged at a certain point in time out of matter. If matter had nothing to do with consciousness at all, if it, if there literally was nothing to do with consciousness and then suddenly it appeared outta matter, you are talking about a miracle that has no meaning for me. The only reasonable explanation is that consciousness was there all along, but that it is has evolved.

The Great Simplification

[01:24:31] And so there is consciousness at different levels in everything. But once again, in our sit it takes a different form.

[01:24:40] **Nate Hagens:** Well, it, how did, consciousness always exist? It, I mean that,

[01:24:47] **Iain McGilchrist:** yes,

[01:24:49] **Nate Hagens:** there are a lot of people that talk about that, and I guess I've never really understood that, so maybe you could help me understand it.

[01:24:54] **Iain McGilchrist:** Well, another way of putting it might be pan Experientialism, which is pretty much the same thing as panpsychism. It means that there is always an inwardness as well as an outwardness. So in science we deal only with, things that we can observe from the outside in measure, but obviously there is very much more to life than that.

[01:25:17] In fact, all the important things, don't fall under that category, which is why science is wonderful. And, I don't let anyone ever get away with quoining me as, diminishing the value of true science. But it can't answer all our questions at some.

[01:25:36] **Nate Hagens:** look at the hundreds of pages of references in your book, so keep going.

[01:25:40] **Iain McGilchrist:** yeah. I'm a scientist, but I know perfectly well like most good scientists that it can't answer all our questions, but, so Pan Experientialism is simply the idea that there is something eventually that it is like to be, even, a subatomic particle. I mean, it, its experience can't be at all like mine, but it has that inwardness as well as an awkwardness.

The Great Simplification

[01:26:05] and it doesn't matter how you argue about it, you can't. It seems to me, unless you say, and now a miracle occurs, you can't say that matter suddenly gives rise to consciousness because consciousness is utterly different from anything in our outward view of matter. The way I reconcile these two things is that I believe that consciousness and matter are different manifestations of the same underlying ontology.

[01:26:39] So there is something that has both outwardness and has inwardness and in evolution that takes many forms, but consciousness is always there matter is. A phase of consciousness. And I use that phrase, the phase, not meaning a temporal phase, you understand? But as physicists talk about phases, like the phases of water and so on, it matters.

[01:27:11] It's simply a phase of consciousness. and people might say, well, it doesn't look like consciousness, behave like consciousness. But I'd say, well, you know, water has three phases. It can be translucent and can run across your hand, or it's hard and opaque and white and won't move until given a massive shove or, and it's suspended in tons in the room you are in the room I'm in.

[01:27:32] We can't see it, but it's doing very important work in keeping us alive. So water has many phases and consciousness has phases. And what matter offers is resistance and persistence. And for a creation, I think there needs to be a degree of persistence. Not forever and ever in that form, but some degree of persistence more than consciousness on its own can have my thoughts disappear.

[01:27:57] But, you know, the table I'm sitting at will be there tomorrow absent a, an earthquake, which doesn't often happen on sky. so these things are important and resistance is also important. I think that nothing creative happens without a push against. This needs to be a feeling of moving in two directions.

The Great Simplification

[01:28:19] It comes down again to the paradox of countries.

[01:28:23] **Nate Hagens:** I don't follow everything, but I am I, you just gave me an idea there that, you said that consciousness existed. there wasn't a miracle that one day it sprung up. and that it is, you earlier said that we are moving towards our potential, or I'm paraphrasing.

[01:28:45] **Iain McGilchrist:** Yes.

[01:28:45] **Nate Hagens:** And that you just said that for consciousness to evolve or to move forward, there has to be a resistance. Yes. Maybe the left brain dominance of our culture Yes. And the Epstein files being released and all those things Yes. Are the resistance that expands our consciousness in the direction. I don't know.

[01:29:09] What do you think about all that? No,

[01:29:11] **Iain McGilchrist:** I think it's a very good point. yes, Nate, I, one of the things I feel very strongly is that we never know what good may come outta something that we think is negative, and we never know what harm may be done by something we just think is a beyond approach.

[01:29:31] and if only people understood that a bit more, we wouldn't have this extreme positions taken in, sociopolitical debate. But that's another matter. So. I completely agree that resistance can be often is the thing that tips us into the necessity for creativity. And I do think that's important because I think we tend to be fairly, naturally conservatively, sitting back on our laurels when things are easy.

[01:30:03] And I think that my generation, happened to live in a very fortunate pocket, if you like, where a lot of the things that, parents and their parents had to

The Great Simplification

endure, had been temporarily dissipated. And we knew generally peace and stability and so on, it seemed obvious that things were getting better.

[01:30:26] So I think that. The conflicts that we now experience could have their good side, but only if they, move us in a positive direction. And I know that one of the things you wanted to discuss is, you know, so how do we develop in a, more positive direction? What can be done that would help us out of the fix that we find ourselves in?

[01:30:52] And, you have, a system which I'm not sure I entirely understand, which, has different boxes, and so on.

[01:31:02] **Nate Hagens:** Well, 'cause I'm just thinking about it. But, there's a framework of six different fronts. like that we need to work on energy and poverty and ecology and governance. Yes. But underneath that is a social foundation of capacity building and networks and finding the others.

[01:31:21] But underneath that is the, what I'm calling a guide to staying human and things like agency and awareness and embodiment and, yes. Connectedness with nature. And I just wanted to ask you that fundamental aspect of being human alive today, what would you put in there? what would be your, couple, three core categories there?

[01:31:48] **Iain McGilchrist:** I would cut the cake in a slightly different way, but that's fine. So I would say there are three kinds of response, broadly. One is a politically engaged, politically active response, which almost certainly involves, aligning yourself with a, a transnational organization that is devoted to important causes to do with mitigating, destruction of nature, and, alleviating poverty and so forth.

The Great Simplification

[01:32:28] All of these things are undeniably good. I mean, the only thing I'd say about them is that a, they're not enough on their own because they are externalities and we know that the internalities of organizations, even very good ones like churches or Oxfam or can have their very dark sides. So, and that it's not enough.

[01:32:50] And also it's, I'm afraid I'd say that so far they've had limited, impact. So I think we need more. And what are.

[01:33:08] Modeling something that is different from this and that could survive even if civilization began to fall apart at the seams. What would that look like? It would be small communities that knew how to live with fewer demands on the planet, able to grow their own food. truly leading, a life that is a bit of an ideal but can come about in which lives are shared.

[01:33:46] and there is reciprocal care. and, there is a, sacred, I believe that's important foundation to it, whatever you call it. 'cause I think without it, it won't last. I think that is the touchstone or rather more It is the foundation stone of, any good community. And, so that's fine.

[01:34:12] and there are such things beginning to happen quite a lot actually. at least in, in Britain, I know of some with whom I have a peripheral connection. and then the third thing, which sounds the least important, because the left hemisphere does not get it, is something that you don't need, a money for.

[01:34:35] You don't need, to write a project and get funding. You just need to start on yourself because it is the inner. Now you see, it's the inner life of everyone who's listening. if anybody's listening to the end of this long conversation, my message to you is never, think that the what you do with your inner life is unimportant.

The Great Simplification

[01:35:02] We don't know how important it is for you, but we also don't know how important it might be for us all. I love the saying, a famous saying, but forgive me for repeating it, of Margaret Mead. Never doubt that a small group of committed individuals can change a society. In fact, nothing. Else ever did. So that's what we need to remember is that just a few percent of people, if they're committed to and express a way of being that is more orientated towards those things, I think are the foundational values.

[01:35:46] Then things will begin to change anyway, and we get things back to front. We think let's start doing the things and yes, we have to do things. I get that, but we've forgotten that really, unless they come from the right place, they won't be those things. and, you know, this is the whole thing that, you know, though, I give my goods to the poor and, give my body to be burnt or whatever it is, and have, not charity I'm, but a tinkling symbol to, I mean, although I'm not a huge fan of St.

[01:36:17] Paul, I think the, the point is that there is a truth. That what is important in the end are not propositions, which we can endlessly debate, but a disposition of the heart. And it's cultivating that disposition of the heart in all the ways, you know, through, through engaging with beautiful art, engaging with your friends, giving yourself to causes that you think, matter.

[01:36:48] And leading a yes, a prayerful or meditative, I don't, you know, it's not important to me that it must be prayer, but I think my feeling is that adds something. but at least if we could be, meditatively aware rather than just rushing headlong to achieve and failing to achieve, all that really counts.

[01:37:11] **Nate Hagens:** So let me ask you a question, Iain, that in our first conversation a few years ago, I never would've thought to ask because I, it would've, well, it's still a dumb question because I have no idea the answer. Buting one, a few of the connecting a few of these threads, the concept of transmitting,

The Great Simplification

the concept of consciousness, the very important, foundational work of inner work that you just said.

[01:37:41] Does that work in a few people, a few dozen people, a few thousand people. A few million people. Does that alter the consciousness in the world? Absolutely. Just, and how.

[01:38:01] **Iain McGilchrist:** We can be very easily influenced by something that seems to us powerful. And unfortunately, because we consider power to be this very limited idea of having influence over the world and make things happen so that it's better for me, we see the tools that we create through technology as important and they, in a very short space of time, really, I mean, measurably have changed the way we think in the last five years.

[01:38:37] I mean, it is extraordinary and very much for the worst, I'm afraid to say, very much for the worst. I think it's a calamity and I think it, you know, it demands, a revolution in the way that we think about ourselves. And you know, I'm awfully sorry. I wish I could say it some other way, but I do think that probably that will be difficult for most people to accomplish unless they return to an authentic spiritual tradition.

[01:39:08] And I, it doesn't of course, have to be the Christlain one, although for most of us living in the anglophone world, it will be because that is our heritage. And we've been taught to despise it in various ways, but actually it's given rise to some quite extraordinary things. And as Christlainity disappears from our culture, we realize as things become, harsher and more horrible and we can't trust people anymore, and, decency disappears, we realize what that culture actually contributed, as well as the colossal power of its art.

[01:39:42] **Nate Hagens:** One other part, rivals it, and that would be the Amazon Forest.

The Great Simplification

[01:39:47] **Iain McGilchrist:** I mean, nature is profoundly beautiful. And you know, if you wanted really to destroy people and leave them rudderless and unsure what they're doing here and cause existential angst, which we now see massively, expanding you, you tell them to live apart from nature, to, spend all their times with two dimensional machines, to get into echo chambers and so on this, and to learn to hate their own heritage.

[01:40:15] I, I must say this, disturbs me. it's very easy for people and we welcome it when people criticize, Western culture and and I used to be one of the western culture's, you know, most stringent critic. For most of my life I have been. And then I realized that actually we need to backpedal a little on that.

[01:40:37] And we need to point out that it's actually given rise to some. Pretty amazing things, and there's a lot there to be proud of. And every culture has its dark side. What we need to do is to pick up the good that's there. And this is something that Paul Kings North, I think is very good at emphasizing. and, if you come across this book against the machine, you'll see it has a massive, puff from me on the back cover, because I did think it was one of the most,

[01:41:06] **Nate Hagens:** I didn't know that you knew him, but I did it frankly, on you and him earlier this year.

[01:41:12] but his conclusion is pretty stark, right? That, not that we should reform the West, but in some deeper sense that the West has to die for something truer to emerge. So what do you think about that?

[01:41:23] **Iain McGilchrist:** Well, that often happens. it's a little like the shedding of the chrysalis and, the emergence of the embryo.

[01:41:30] And, so sometimes that is, the best one can say, but I don't, I wouldn't celebrate it and I wouldn't accelerate it. I think I would accept it as what it is, if

The Great Simplification

that is the course on which we're sat. But I don't think we should embrace that course. I think it will cause untold suffering.

[01:41:56] I have children and grandchildren. I don't want to see, see the civilization collapse because it will not respect anybody or anything that, that the sheer violence and destruction, the evil that will be unleashed is a necessary part of the downfall of a civilization. So I don't quite share that with Paul.

[01:42:20] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah,

[01:42:21] **Iain McGilchrist:** I agree. On the other hand, I ho I wholly agree with Paul, that it may be what's happening and it may be necessary. I, on those things, I'm with him, but I would like us not to go there if we possibly can. But it will take, a, big shift in, in our, our way of thinking. And I do think very much that a few voices can change the way the world goes.

[01:42:47] they need to be more widely held or heard than they sometimes are. But, you know, one of the, advantages of the internet is that, voices can reach, a very long way and, Indeed, I couldn't have written, the long books I have if it had not been for the internet, because I'd have needed to be living near, one of the six copyright libraries in Britain, where I could go and read all those papers and books.

[01:43:20] **Nate Hagens:** So I wanna be respectful of your time, at the core of my work, and actually somewhat inspired by you and your work is the hope to build a sort of scout team of deeply self-regulated, co-regulate humans who lead with love and as you say, gratitude, equanimity as opposed to fear in response to what we, face.

[01:43:47] Yes. So what do you think would actually change about a person that undergoes such an orientation and how might others around them talking about

The Great Simplification

widening the scope of how this change in consciousness happens, how might others experience, being around that person?

[01:44:08] **Iain McGilchrist:** Things I could point to would be that there would be an increase in humility.

[01:44:16] In the sense of a very realistic awareness of, yes, we do know a lot, but how little we do know of all that there is to be known. I think that's very important. I think another would be compassion, something that is notably absent. We are all capable of making mistakes and sometimes we may get them right.

[01:44:39] and I may be mistaken, so why not be a bit more humble and a bit more compassionate? And I think the third thing really would be a return of, or wonder into our lives. It's a topic much talked about, I think talked about by Paul, but also talked about by Rod Drea in his book, living in Wonder.

[01:45:05] I think it's something that has been lost from our lives, through the rise of a intellectually impoverished, morally bankrupt philosophy, namely reductive materialism. and the view that we know it all and, and that if we don't know it quite all, what we will do, you just wait in, in, in a few years.

[01:45:29] I would point out that, physics was about to be wound up in the 1890s because physicists were agreed that they knew it all. They weren't prepared for the bombshell that was just about to go and break. So, I, think, you know, having a proper sense of the limits of our power and the limits of our wisdom, this is very important.

[01:45:53] The left hemisphere absolutely doesn't have that. It thinks it knows everything and it really doesn't. it knows very much less than the right hemisphere and understand even less than it knows. I mean, an understanding is

The Great Simplification

not the same as knowing and, you know, yeah. But those are the two kinds of knowing.

[01:46:15] But then there's also understanding, and this is what is really meant by intelligence, intelligence is being able to understand the whole of a picture in a way, to be able to see how things relate. And I mean, for me, I'm always interested in etymology and intelligence comes from the Latin inter ledge to read between.

[01:46:37] Now that is to me totally brilliant because. The left hemisphere can't read between. It just reads data and what's explicit. Mm-hmm. But the left Hemi, sorry, the right hemisphere, lemme get this right. The right hemisphere is able to read

[01:46:52] **Nate Hagens:** between,

[01:46:53] **Iain McGilchrist:** in, in two sentences. It can read between the lines.

[01:46:56] It can read what is implicit, what has not been said, but is just as important or more important than what has. And it can also read, it can situate itself among a whole range of things and see them through 360 degrees. That is the reading among the reading between and understand has exactly the same meaning.

[01:47:16] I won't go into all of that, but it means not to stand beneath something, but to stand among something. In medieval English had the same meaning that TER and German has, which is not just underneath but among. So anyway, those are, we need to get back to valuing not just information and not just knowledge from the outside, but knowledge from the inside cultivating our souls.

[01:47:43] and that's what, that's a job we've been given. I mean, we can neglect it if you like, but I think we're impoverishing ourselves. This has many things to

The Great Simplification

teach us and I haven't got time now obviously to say anything more than a few words, but I just want to mention to people, if they're at all interested, they can see a talk.

[01:48:03] I gave the Royal Society of Arts in London in 1210, just after the publication of the master in his *Ry*, called *Whatever Happened to the Soul*. And I'm trying to suggest that the concept of the soul is not something that is outmoded and can be dispensed with quite the opposite. It is something we need to rediscover.

[01:48:21] So we need to do these things, grow ourselves, open ourselves. To forces that are there, that are ready to speak to us, gifts that are ready to be given to us. What gets in the way is our own selves. So get ourselves outta the way as much as possible. not lose yourself, of course, but to lose your ego and the striving to achieve and instead focus on giving.

[01:48:49] and if we can do that and we achieve that, degree of, humility, of awe and of compassion, we will have grown in stature. And those around us will feel it. And we are the beginnings of a movement. We have to do it perhaps in a secular way, but I keep saying it's the, for the asking, if you really want to discover it through one of the ancient religious traditions.

[01:49:15] I mean, it's too much to suspect, to expect that we can, you know, reinvent what was found through the imagination and the suffering of generations and generations of our Forbes.

[01:49:29] **Nate Hagens:** So from a neuroscience and philosophic perspective, if 1% of humanity was able to adopt awe and compassion and humility and beauty and goodness and truth and some of the other things, and, truly started living differently, or 5% or 10%, or some other subset, certainly what would change?

The Great Simplification

[01:49:55] not mechanically, but culturally. what could you envision?

[01:49:59] **Iain McGilchrist:** What I could envision would be. Principle, the drawing back from dependence upon the machine. Not the machines can't do often incredibly useful things, particularly in, in medicine. in my work, I'm obviously very interested in brains and a lot of the research couldn't be done without machines.

[01:50:22] So, I don't think they need to disappear, but we need to recalibrate our dependence on them, and we need to examine what we have to give as living human beings and make sure we nourish that in all the ways we can. That means our educational system should not be largely confined to giving data to children, which they, if they can then regurgitate it pretty much verbatim, we'll score them high marks in an exam.

[01:50:58] That is not an education, it is not an education, it's just instruction with data in.

[01:51:12] This is very, important. We now lead these Rus disconnected. We like a ship, a drift, somewhere in the ocean, but we need to get back to community. And the core of that community is a family. you know, we're all in, in that position of being very fallible family members. I imagine I've never been a good husband or a father or anything, but to the extent that I've tried to be one, then that has been important.

[01:51:45] And I'm sure most people can do a lot better job than I can, but if we don't actually bring children up to believe in a world which is not just sitting in front of screens and so on, but is relational, is it to do with love? And, you know, and love isn't just a soppy thing. love isn't all, soothing.

[01:52:10] Violins love has, its, it's rigor and it's sharpness. And so, one thing I feel is that children nowadays are actually being abused by not being enculturated in

The Great Simplification

the best sense of taught how to behave in a way that is acceptable in company. and parents want to be the friends of their children.

[01:52:36] But that is a sentimentalism whereby you are putting yourself before your children and you feel comfortable like that, but you are selling your children short. So some of the things that I need to say are not comfortable to people in the present culture because it is a sentimental culture. And sentimentality can be cruel.

[01:52:58] Sentimentality by espousing sentimental positions, we can be on the side of the destructive forces. So we, of course, we need to love, but we need to bring children up to be, to appreciate boundaries. And boundaries are part of what makes us what we are. I mean, a boundary is simply the thing that. We draw around an entity to say this is that entity.

[01:53:24] Entity. But they don't have to be rigid boundaries and they don't have to be impervious to other things. And as we get older, they become less and less. I hope they get ingrained in a way that means we don't have to be thinking about them all the time. But I do think that, you know, loving children, spending time with.

[01:53:41] Doing physical things with them. you know, I may have said this before, but I mean, I need to, you know, be, pay a, a very deep tribute to my mother who, because my father was a very hardworking doctor. He was out at the house a lot, but my mother spent enormous amounts of time with me when I was growing up in ways that shaped me to be who I am and my brother too.

[01:54:08] she read with us, she cooked with us, she played with us. She, we gardened together. we talked together, you know, and she was a really important living presence for me. And I'm not sure that this is as easy for women nowadays to bring about for their children. and that's a whole other conversation.

The Great Simplification

[01:54:30] But

[01:54:31] **Nate Hagens:** it, it makes me wonder what the biological body and skillset and temperament and all the things that is Dr. Iain McGilchrist would've become in his life if as a child he was surrounded by iPads and AI and all the technology instead of your mother's time and attention. I'm just curious. You know, we don't know the answer, but,

[01:54:57] **Iain McGilchrist:** well, we don't know.

[01:54:58] But I, I certainly wouldn't be who I am. I mean, for better or worse, but so, so those are the sort of ways you see, we think. Automatically big. We think corporate, let's, you know, put our money into Greenpeace or something. and I'm not saying that's a bad idea at all, but what I'm really saying is that unless we change our whole way of looking at what a human being is, what we are doing here in this world, and we've talked about that, or at least my ideas about what we're doing here today, unless we, consider those things and have answers that make sense, for a while, because everything is only for a while, then, you know, I think we're stuck and we've got to make those changes if we want to survive as a society, as a civilization.

[01:55:52] **Nate Hagens:** I'm gonna ask you one more question. Sure. And thank you for going over our allotted, window. So both of our work, we emphasize direction rather than prescriptive action when it comes to, addressing and meeting the more than human predicament, the meta crisis.

[01:56:10] **Iain McGilchrist:** Yeah.

[01:56:10] **Nate Hagens:** Why do you think. That aspirations and orientations matter more at this stage.

The Great Simplification

[01:56:18] And how do we cope with the inherent ambiguity of all this? I mean, the, we're recording this, Tuesday, March 24th. We don't know what's gonna happen with Iran between the time of now and when this is aired, but the ambiguity contrasts so deeply with our left hemisphere's desire for a step-by-step action plan and solutions.

[01:56:41] what advice do you have on all that?

[01:56:45] **Iain McGilchrist:** Well, I don't know, but I think that, let me say this, never underestimate the power of the heart. It sounds sentimental, but it isn't. I'm against sentimentality, but I'm not against the heart. And in some ways I could be seen as a person massively orientated to intellectual things that is inescapable part of my history and trajectory.

[01:57:18] But the heart is also very important. And sometimes the heart can receive messages that the brain or the intellect in the brain doesn't get. You know, the heart has its reasons, that reason knows not as Pascal said. So those reasons are not reasons in the sense of an argument, but they are. Very much this idea of a connection, you know, the idea there is that something that, that, that shines light into you, into us, into the world that we're in.

[01:58:01] And we need simply to accept it, not resist it and deny it. I mean, I think that is a very important message. We don't have to do heroics. We don't have to be massively well read. We don't have to be, in fact, that can often be an impediment. What we need very much is to listen to what calls to us. And I think that I've always felt that certain things spoke to me or called to me.

[01:58:28] So when I was a teenager, this was very much the case with nature. I felt that when I walked in the meadows, when I was around trees, when, I mean, I, felt they were living and talking. I mean, not talking in the sense of what were they saying? Of course not. But they were calling to me in a way.

The Great Simplification

[01:58:48] And it was up to me to answer. And I hope that in a way I did. And it's been a lifelong love of mine. But the other thing that started to talk to me in that sense was the Christlain mythos, which I really hadn't my father, was I thought that religion was a little bit ridiculous. And my mother called herself, A seeker. She didn't have knowledge about spiritual matters, but she was open, which I think is the important attitude of mind. But things started to speak to me and they've carried on doing so. the dialogue always you see between the things that really matter and ourselves. And I think this is another way of saying that there is a telos, an end, not a prescribed end.

[01:59:38] it's as now not known even as it were to God. It is a tendency, and I think the creation has a tendency, I think that, evolution. The evolution of the whole universe and the evolution of biology of life have tendencies. And those tendencies call to us and we can make idols of our own, desires.

[02:00:04] We can say, I want money, I want power, I want influence, whatever it is. but if we can avoid doing that and listen to the things that really deeply and rewardingly speak to us, I can only say from my own experience, then there's something very good there that, that can be built on. We are not, we're not asked to do heroics.

[02:00:28] I mean, sometimes it's over facing. People say, but the world's so great, you know, and I'm so small, what do I do? and actually even that world is tiny in relation to the cosmos, but that's all completely irrelevant. In fact, if there hadn't been a cosmos society that there is, there wouldn't have been a planet like the earth.

[02:00:45] So, that kind of thinking gets you nowhere. But it's the typical left hemisphere of thinking, you know, big is important. small, I can't measure it from the outside is not important. But it's, you know, the old saying, what really counts

The Great Simplification

cannot be counted. And the really important things are what are missed in all, spreadsheets and calibrations and goals and so on.

[02:01:12] You know, people often say to me, look, I think what you are really saying is that we need more wisdom. And I say, I indeed do believe that. So, how do we get more wisdom and immediately think sort of, yeah. Okay. So, let's have a committee that meets, once, a fortnight and they get together and, we must have targets and we must have criteria to know whether we've met those and we must apply for funding and so on.

[02:01:42] And immediately, wisdom has gone out the window because the one thing you cannot do with wisdom is operationalize it in any way at all.

[02:01:49] **Nate Hagens:** So you mentioned the importance of the heart and you said some people will look at you, as an erudite, neuroscientist, and a thinker, but you increasingly are leaning on your heart, and you recommend that to others.

[02:02:06] And I fully agree. I'm just curious, when you were slaving over writing your book, sitting down, writing all those hours, day after day for years, how was your heart then, or were you mostly in your mind and is following your heart and the heart leading your actions? Is that something that happens with age and maturity and experience, or can it happen at any time in a person's life?

[02:02:33] **Iain McGilchrist:** Well, I think it can happen at any time, but I think without a certain basis of experience, the heart can more readily lead one places. One might be better not to go. So. I'm certainly not counseling anything you want. as I say, love has its rigor. the heart has its discipline and, interestingly, as I say, I, hate this thing that happens all the time as people say, oh, he's so left hemisphere.

The Great Simplification

[02:03:10] I, he thinks, she's so right hemisphere. She feels this is so, so wrong. and both of them are involved in thinking and feeling and the best thinking and feeling is done by the right hemisphere, definitely. so it is not like that. but as I pointed out earlier, it's actually the right hemisphere that inhibits inappropriate or extreme emotions so far from being the one that gets carried away and is a bit la it's actually the one, the only one that can offer us a true compass.

[02:03:43] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah,

[02:03:43] **Iain McGilchrist:** you know this 'cause you read part one of the MAT things, but that is the neuropsychology and in it I have a whole chapter on judgment, which is about whether the right or left hemisphere makes better decisions and judgments about what it is it's experiencing. And the answer is that right hemisphere infinitely surpasses the left, which is frankly deluded when left to its own devices.

[02:04:07] And some of those delusions defy belief if I hadn't seen them and they aren't very well described or tested and even filmed. But you know, people who don't know that literature, I often say, well, don't worry about part one 'cause you can save yourself a lot of time. I wrote less than one page summaries at the end of every chapter.

[02:04:25] It's all that you really need to know. That's true. But just read some of the stuff that people act. Happen to them when their right hemisphere is not working and they believe the most extraordinary things.

[02:04:40] **Nate Hagens:** Well, unfortunately, some of the world's leaders are giving evidence of that, at the moment.

[02:04:46] I think so. Correct. as I feared hoped expected, I only got to half of my questions, today. but it gives, a chance for a future conversation. Yes. Do you

The Great Simplification

have any closing thoughts, Dr. Iain McGilchrist for our viewers that we might not have covered today? Or things you might encourage people to hold, as they continue to navigate everyday lives through this, accelerating reality?

[02:05:14] **Iain McGilchrist:** I think probably I've said, all that I can say at the moment. although I always respond to questions, so I wonder if we could do something again. Probably not so far in the future that I've forgotten what it was. I said this time around, because I worry a lot about repeating myself as you know.

[02:05:34] But, sometimes, it's necessary because it's the most succinct way of getting across a point. But all I think I would say to people is, you know, have compassion on yourselves, have compassion on others, and you are not asked to do everything. You are asked to do what you can, but at least to do that.

[02:05:55] And that is to grow yourself and your soul. And in doing so, you will be doing good. You do not yet know for others, to others and by others. So, good luck with that. I think on a more, a lighter note that we all need a bit of luck and, yes, I, I could do with a bit, I could do with your prayers actually.

[02:06:26] So those of you who are so inclined, please pray for me. I know a lot of people write to me and say that they are doing, and it's a great strength to me, so. And I think it helps in ways I don't understand. I don't pretend to be able to understand, and I think that's also important. So there we go.

[02:06:42] **Nate Hagens:** Thank you for more wisdom, tion and, heart, and to be continued, my friend.

[02:06:50] **Iain McGilchrist:** Thank you so much, Nate. It's lovely.

[02:06:52] **Nate Hagens:** If you'd like to learn more about this episode, please visit [The Great Simplification dot com](http://TheGreatSimplification.com) for references and show notes. From there, you

The Great Simplification

can also join our Hilo community and subscribe to our Substack newsletter. This show is hosted by me, Nate Hagens, edited by No Troublemakers Media, and produced by Misty Stinnett and Lizzie Siri.

[02:07:14] Our production team also includes Leslie Ba Lutz Brady Hyen, Julia Maxwell, Gabriela Slayman, and Grace Brumfield. Thank you for listening, and we'll see you on the next episode.