

The Great Simplification

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[00:00:00] **Nate Hagens:** Good morning. I have an upcoming Frankly on the best and worst technologies or inventions by humans ever. And I expect what I might come up with might be surprising, but what won't be surprising, because I'm gonna spill the beans now, is my inclusion of dogs, among the top inventions by human ever.

[00:00:27] Inventions. Of course, dogs aren't really an invention or a technology. They were wolves that co-evolved with humans. A fascinating story in its own right. but I had an intense experience with one of my dogs the last few days, or nights, to be more precise, and so I wanted to share that story, but also a bit of wide boundary context and perspective on man's best friend

[00:01:09] So I have three dogs, Frank, Kai and Murphy. Murphy mostly goes by Muffy because the neighbor's five-year-old girl, when Murphy was a puppy, had her front baby teeth removed, and, Murphy became Muffy. and it kind of stuck, and it turns out Muffy is probably a much better name for her in any case.

[00:01:31] She is a swamp collie to the core, swims in the duck pool with or without the duck poop in it. She's incredibly sweet and passive and completely food motivated. And as most of you know, I live on a farm, and when I'm on a Zoom call or a podcast or whatever, she variously sneaks out and, partakes of the leftover chicken and horse food buffet.

[00:01:58] So despite having her on reduced dog food rations, she is ninety pounds, a full-figured golden retriever gal, and I dearly love her. Last week, my partner had thrown some corn cobs out for the chickens and ducks to peck at, and I was up north, a few hours away, and I got a call from her that she was taking

The Great Simplification

Muffy into the emergency vet clinic 'cause she had ate the cobs and was throwing up, stumbling around, et cetera.

[00:02:27] And apparently, I learned on the Google that corn cobs are extremely dangerous for dogs 'cause they don't digest and they can get stuck. Of course, I'm turning around, driving back, envisioning emergency surgery, which isn't great for an aging dog, nor one's checkbook. and I'm being open with you, admitting that was one of my first thoughts after getting the call.

[00:02:53] a bit more on that later. Long story, only slightly less long, two nights at the ER dog clinic up in Minneapolis. X-rays were negative, and she stabilized and is now at home resting, but there's still something, I need to research. But I haven't talked about dogs here in a while, and they have been on my mind twenty-four/seven since Thursday night.

[00:03:22] So here are some observations and insights I have only somewhat joked in the past that I like humans, and that many of my best friends are humans. And this is to imply that some of my best friends are not human, which specifically refers to dogs. This has been the case, my entire life since I was a toddler.

[00:03:47] For over fifty years, I've never been without a dog other than the brief times, I lived overseas. I can be my total full self with a dog. They give and receive unconditional love. They are, at least for me, among the few true full escapes from the increasingly psychopathic expressions of our current socioeconomic system, along with, in my case, perhaps old-growth forests, an evening with really close friends or a great fiction book.

[00:04:30] But before I go further, I think it's appropriate for this channel to give a macro perspective. There are over one billion dogs alive at this moment on planet Earth, and the weight of man's best friend globally weighs about the same as all

The Great Simplification

the wild land mammals on Earth, all the mice, all the elephants, and everything in between.

[00:05:03] And as much as I love my dogs, that sentence gives me pause. And if I was writing this instead of speaking it, I would have spelled it paws, P-A-W-S. To picture a billion dogs conjures an image of various muffies on couches around the world, but that would be incorrect. Turns out only around two hundred million or twenty percent of the world's dogs are what we might refer to in the Global North, and around seven hundred and fifty million of the one billion dogs are classified as street dogs or village dogs, animals that have no owner in the way we typically express it, and they're either scavengers or fed from scraps or community dogs.

[00:06:04] Of the hundred million dogs in India, around two-thirds are street dogs, and I befriended and adopted temporarily many of them when I was there for six weeks, in twenty-twenty four. I hope I can show a pic here of Rafi and Sammy and some of the others. I got in repeated trouble for feeding them, because then they get habituated to whoever was staying in that particular, hotel room.

[00:06:34] But it was like a little bit of a band of Pied Piper. I would go for a walk in the Auroville forest, and there would be several dogs, like, following me. Of course, I loved it. but I think the dogs in India, at least in Auroville, are typically well-fed, as the hotel and tourists place the excess idlis or rice or scraps are fed to them at night The thing that struck me at the time often as a gut punch, when I was there was how these dogs have to tolerate the heat.

[00:07:10] And I was there in what was winter for India. so the thing is the median dog on Earth, is a thirty-pound roaming scavenger in Asia or Africa that has never seen a leash. And so my dog Muffy is an anomaly. A ninety-pound golden retriever with a two thousand dollar vet bill is about as representative of canines globally as a Minneapolis suburbanite is for humans.

The Great Simplification

[00:07:42] A final point of context, before I get to some other, insights. I expect the comments and feedback, for this video will be polarized between dog lovers, and there are a lot of you, and ecologically-minded folk, and there is a overlap in that Venn diagram. dogs and cats in the United States eat as many calories as roughly sixty million Americans and account for something like a quarter of the environmental impact of American meat consumption.

[00:08:19] I personally rationalize having three dogs and three cats and three horses, because I never had children. But it is an ecological certainty that man's best friend has a non-negligible global environmental impact. Now to my experience and some insights. First, I have to say, because I haven't witnessed it in the last five to ten years, the quality and technology at these vet clinics is freaking impressive. Of course, this always happens at night or on the weekend, and it was too late to go to my normal vet, and they don't have the ability to do stomach surgery regardless.

[00:09:02] But especially in the bigger cities, the high-end clinics can do just about everything. And the people working there, I found them exceptional. most were quite young. What a difficult job, I think. but it did feel like an animal version episode of, what's that doctor show? The Pit, or something.

[00:09:23] Just like everything else in modern culture, there was a high standard deviation of situation, of dog, and of human owner. One couple while I was there had a, had some sort of doodle with a tiny puncture wound in its side, and they were fussing over it to such an extent, it reminded me exactly of the woman, I forgot her name, the tall one in Best in Show, who was so proud of her canine champion, but kind of oblivious to the social surroundings.

[00:09:53] Because fifteen feet away, there was a dog who had to be euthanized because the family couldn't afford the seven or eight thousand dollars for the necessary surgery. And another family, like five family members, was sobbing

The Great Simplification

'cause their cat had an inoperable tumor and had to be put down. The clinic was all open air, with ten techs floating around on various tables, and thankfully, the euthanasia rooms were in the back. My whole life, I have had more emotional response to animal pain than to human pain.

[00:10:35] I can't really describe why. I remember watching the Clint Eastwood movie, *The Outlaw Josey Wales*, with all these gunfights and people getting shot, but when he spit chewing tobacco on a dog's face, I felt like I had been punched. Ditto with *Dances with Wolves* when the wolf was really curious, and became friends with Kevin Costner, and then later in the movie was shot for no reason by the troopers.

[00:11:03] That one moment in the movie is the only one that I really remember, and it was imprinted on my amygdala. I feel sad even thinking about it. I also remember when he went, "Tatanka, So there are a few member-- memories from that movie. I think the reason we react this way in movies and in vet clinics and in our own lives with our pets is they love us unconditionally.

[00:11:29] All our flaws and shortcomings in human interaction are unknown and forgiven in our relationships with dogs. Cats are probably a different story, but, to each his own. I've had dogs my entire life, and when they inevitably pass beyond the rainbow bridge, it feels acutely like a loss of a family member because it is.

[00:12:02] So some of the thoughts I had while sitting, waiting in the emergency clinic room, for X-ray results and such is what is the Great Simplification going to mean for our non-human friends? and I think about this from time to time. And I don't have much money, but I have some savings, and I was already, and I feel terrible for, feeling this way, but I was already doing the math on how and where I would come up with the eight to ten K for an emergency, weekend stomach surgery on, Murphy. And I wonder, with some stress, if I dwell on it, in the next recession, which I expect is coming soon, how many people will abandon

The Great Simplification

their pets or bring them to the pound, because they just can't afford to feed them, let alone fancy, vet bills.

[00:13:00] The carbon pulse has supported widespread human populations and improved lifestyles. And in our wake, to feed us, there are one and a half billion cows and a billion pigs. And to keep us company, there are a billion dogs. It's really kind of an epic story. And in the same way, our ancestors on the Pleistocene wouldn't believe their eyes if they were suddenly transported to Times Square or Piccadilly Circus.

[00:13:32] The wolves of five to ten thousand generations ago would not believe the extreme diversity of what we call dogs today. And the vast majority of dog breeds have been developed during the exact hundred and fifty years of the carbon pulse that has boosted everything else. And I wonder, 100 years from now or, later, if the mean reversion will have most or all dogs look like the generic dogs we see today in African villages.

[00:14:02] It's really hard for me to imagine connecting The Great Simplification and my vet, experience. It's hard for me to imagine purebred golden retrievers in all their present breeding abundance are popular or even available to all but the wealthiest in coming decades. Because elite dog breeding too is a product of built complexity and massive, incredibly cheap energy surplus.

[00:14:34] Which leads me to the most personal point of this, frankly, separate from all this, but related. A few months back, I was at a gathering of existential risk participants. Everyone there was working on some acute risk angle of the metacrisis, and we had been talking, like fifteen of us, for over ten hours one day about the state of artificial intelligence and how it would potentially merge with military and tech bros and potentially, one day obviate the need for markets or even nation-states.

The Great Simplification

[00:15:13] And everyone was asking questions about the how and the when and various technical detail, details. And I remember thinking, acutely thinking and voicing aloud a single sentiment that overwhelmed my body at the time. I said, in front of this group of advanced, older, mostly male professionals, "All I'm thinking about in response to everything I just heard is I really want a puppy right now."

[00:15:48] and saying it brought some laughs and dispelled a bit of tension in the room. But I didn't say it as a joke. for me, having a puppy, n-not even a golden retriever, but pretty much any puppy, is one of the single most unbridled moments of joy that I can witness and experience. I never get tired of seeing and playing with puppies.

[00:16:16] And the more I thought about it, the more I realized that a puppy ten thousand generations, plus or minus, removed from its wolf ancestors is, for me, possibly the truest, purest antidote to AI and surveillance and the psychopathic economic systems and the dark clouds that we increasingly see on the horizon.

[00:16:43] Because I know some things for sure. The puppy is real, not algorithmic or AI. The puppy will love me no matter what I say or do. It won't care if my frankly bombs or if I eat a whole pizza. if I eat a whole pizza, it'll probably be thrilled, because I'll give it the, the crusts. It won't care about my social media or my paycheck as long as I am kind to it and provide for it.

[00:17:11] The puppy will not care about the metacrisis. In fact, it will be, for me, a complete antidote to it So Muffy is home. I do really want a puppy, and perhaps for me that'll be a lifelong condition. And dogs are definitely going to stay on the best invention by humans list. Though, as you will see, in the longer list, there's an inflection point from tech turning from good to bad that goes hand-in-hand with scale.

The Great Simplification

[00:17:50] that, that one will be out in a few weeks. If you have a dog, appreciate it. Give it a scratch and a hug. Spend some time with it today. Definitely do not give it a corn cob. I'll talk to you soon