

The Great Simplification

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[00:00:00] **Steffi Bednarek:** Climate psychologists get asked to work with groups who actually feel distress, and the implicit invitation is often, "Can you make this go away?" And it has something similar to how we manage the land, how we manage monocultures. Certain emotions are wanted, others are not. Nobody wants discomfort and distress.

[00:00:26] But that's the appropriate response to the external conditions. That's where I think IFS has a very powerful lens to say there's an ecology of parts, and I can be hopeful and hopeless, and these contradicting things can be there at the same time

[00:00:47] **Nate Hagens:** I'm very pleased to be joined today by therapist and founder of Internal Family Systems, Richard Schwartz, along with psychotherapist and psychologist Steffi Bednarek, to discuss how the Internal Family Systems model can help us work through crises at every level, from individual trauma all the way up to our shared more than human global predicament.

[00:01:13] Dr. Richard C. Schwartz is the creator of Internal Family Systems, or IFS, a therapeutic model that depathologizes the multi-part personality. Dick is also the founder of the IFS Institute, which offers training for professionals and is also currently a teaching associate in psychiatry at Cambridge Health Alliance.

[00:01:35] Steffi Bednarek is a climate psychologist, gestalt psychotherapist, systems thinker, and IFS therapist, as well as the founder and director of the Center for Climate Psychology. With over 25 years of experience in systemic change and trauma therapy, Steffi invites us to reimagine our place in the broader web of life and advocates for restoring soul to our collective culture.

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[00:02:01] Her work has supported national governments, the corporate sector, global financial institutions, the sustainability sector, and large NGOs. In this conversation, Dick walks us through the basics of IFS, a framework for naming and recognizing the parts of ourselves that often come into conflict with one another, which he variously categorizes as the exiles, the managers, the firefighters, and the Self, with a capital S.

[00:02:31] From there, Dick, Steffi, and I explore how the expression of these parts and our relationship to them has shifted over time and how that shift has contributed to many of the unhealthy behaviors so many of us grapple with today. Most importantly, and most interestingly to me, we apply the IFS framework to the level of the global economic superorganism, examining how these aggregate behaviors have built into the dysfunctional system we see today and identifying the parts at play within that system itself.

[00:03:04] Though perhaps slower and more introspective than some TGS episodes I find conversations like this one to be some of the most valuable for understanding myself and how I reflect the larger system that I'm a part of, creating potential space for system-level change that starts with the individual. I hope you are able to take the time to reflect, in the same way you listen and watch these conversations.

[00:03:37] With that, please, give a warm welcome to Richard Schwartz and Steffi Bednarik. Dick Schwartz, Steffi Bednarik, welcome to the program.

[00:03:49] **Steffi Bednarek:** Nice to see you, Nate, and thanks for having us.

[00:03:52] **Richard C. Schwartz:** Thanks for having me as well, Nate. I'm honored.

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[00:03:54] **Nate Hagens:** Dick, you, have spent your career developing the evidence-based internal family systems model that has changed how hundreds of thousands of people relate to their own minds and behaviors.

[00:04:11] But probably many of our listeners will be hearing the term internal family systems, IFS, for the first time. So maybe before we go any further, could you give us, an internal family systems 101?

[00:04:25] **Richard C. Schwartz:** So basic premise is we all have these what I call parts, other systems call subpersonalities, that it's the nature of the mind to be subdivided that way.

[00:04:35] It's actually healthy because they're all valuable. They all have qualities and resources to help us in our lives. But trauma and bad parenting, attachment injuries, things like that, force them out of their naturally valuable states into roles that can be destructive and freeze them in time during the trauma and inject them with what we call burdens, which are extreme beliefs and emotions that came from the trauma and then get injected into these parts and then drive the way they operate like a virus.

[00:05:13] So good parts in challenging, difficult roles, not unlike families where in dysfunctional families, kids are forced into roles that aren't who they are, but they're necessary to protect them, protect the family So that's parts. And as a systems person coming from family therapy, I was interested in how that operated as a system.

[00:05:41] So became clear there was a distinction between parts who initially you would think of as these loving inner children, but they're also the most sensitive parts of us, so they get hurt the most. So they're the parts that take in the emotional pain or take in the terror of these traumas or take in the sense of being worthlessness, of being worthless.

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[00:06:07] And once they get burdened that way and frozen in those places, we don't want anything to do with them because they can pull us back into those times and they can overwhelm us with those feelings they carry now. Even though before all that happened, they were playful and loving and open and creative.

[00:06:25] Now they have the power to make us feel terrible. So we naturally tend to lock them away inside and just move on. And our culture is a just move on culture. You know, don't... You get hurt and you forget about it. You don't look back. You just keep going and thinking that you're just moving on from the memories, but really you're walking away from your most precious qualities simply because they got hurt.

[00:06:52] So we call those exiles. And when you have a lot of exiles, you feel more delicate. The world seems more dangerous. Some other parts are forced to become protectors, and they try to protect Some of them by managing your life so that nothing similar ever happens again, or you don't let anybody close enough to hurt you like that again, or you make you look perfect so that you get no one rejects you or make you achieve at a high level to get accolades to counter the worthlessness and so on.

[00:07:25] So there's a whole set of parts we call managers, manager protectors, that other systems would think of as the ego who are kind of running your life and they got you here and they deserve a lot of credit for that. But they're very afraid of opening the door to these exiles. They want to keep them contained and protected.

[00:07:44] Spend a lot of energy doing that. And doesn't always work. Exiles do get triggered. When that happens, it's like a explosion of raw flames of emotion coming out of your gut that's gonna consume you. So there's another set of parts who are standing by and go into immediate action, impulsive action to get you

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higher than those flames or douse them with some substance or distract you till they burn themselves out.

[00:08:14] So we call those firefighters. So that's the map that's held up these 40 some years. But the big deal about IFS is that in addition to all of these parts, there's a kind of essence I stumbled into as I was trying to get people like, Nate, if I was-- I, I don't know if you have one, but if you had an inner critic--

[00:08:36] and I w-- and I was trying to help you with it by listening to it rather than fighting with it. And let's say we were doing that and it was going okay, but suddenly you, hate the critic and you're, and things are going south 'cause now it's getting defensive. And what I thought when clients would do that, similar, something similar was going on.

[00:09:00] But maybe a part who hates the critic has jumped in, just like in families. I'm trying to have two polarized family members talk to each other and suddenly a third one sides with one against the other and everything goes south. So maybe this part that hates the critic is doing the talking. So I would have you focus on it and ask it to just relax back for a few minutes and let you finish the conversation.

[00:09:26] And what I would find is If that, if, and most people can do that pretty readily, and when they do, it's like another person comes out and not only doesn't hate the critic, but has compassion for it suddenly out of the blue, and also calm relative to it and confident and curious, just purely curious about why it does it.

[00:09:49] And in that state, the critic relaxes and tells its secret history and, there's a lot more to it, but we can actually help it out of that role and help it unburden and help the parts that protects unburden. And so when I would ask clients, "What part of you is that?" 'Cause that's great. They'd say, "That's not a part."

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[00:10:10] That's, myself. that's me." So I came to call that the Self with a capital S. And the big deal about IFS is that's in everybody, can't be damaged, just beneath the surface of these parts so that when they open space, it pops out and knows how to heal and knows what to do to heal both internally and in external relationships.

[00:10:35] And so a lot of the work is designed to first access that self, and then when somebody's in that state, begin to get to know and actually help transform these parts. So, that's a CliffsNotes version, so.

[00:10:52] **Nate Hagens:** Excellent. I now have so many questions, but I want to, invite Steffi into the conversation.

[00:10:59] Steffi, my understanding is that your current work is, kind of applying internal family systems, not to the individual, but to the broader culture. but maybe you could start by sharing what drew you to IFS and maybe how are you applying it, today?

[00:11:18] **Steffi Bednarek:** Yeah. Thanks, Nate. I am both, I'm a climate psychologist and a psychotherapist.

[00:11:27] And IFS is a rather late discovery for me. So there's a lot to say, but just, maybe three short things. The general Western, that's important to say, very young profession of psychotherapy, has a very anthropocentric outlook. So we, our theories, are just paying attention to what happens in human relationships.

[00:12:00] So there's no real theories or, or also assessments that we do around how we might be shaped by place as much as our moms and dads and caregivers. How we might, how the education system may have left an imprint on me so that I can't even see the dysfunction that is within the system and how, I, start to automatically intrinsically adopt these values and, start to collude in them.

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[00:12:35] How I zoom in on the individual and then forget to zoom out again and see the individual within their context of life. I became really frustrated around this, and then in the early 2000s when I became painfully aware of climate change through watching my little daughter asleep, and all the data that I was holding, started to really sink into my heart, and I just was heartbroken and Tried to turn to professionals in my profession, and I realized how unequipped a lot of my colleagues and myself were in holding something so big and, devastating as the current predicament we're in, and how the same, Well, if you now move into IFS language, the same protectors, the same exiles, the same firefighters that we may try and change out there actually in- were enacted through us. And at the time, I was trained in IFS and, I tried to, apply to individuals, and suddenly I found that IFS itself is a wonderful lens that can, turn both ways, and it depends on which ontology it sits in, so which outlook it sits in.

[00:14:12] And it doesn't have to sit within a, this, the outlook of Western psychotherapy. It can actually be brought into a living systems theory. And whilst it's not going to be the answer to everything, it will help us see, A, how the systems we may talk about as out there are also showing in, up in us, but also allows us a certain systems literacy without having to do a five-year course in systems thinking and without having to do a four or five-year training in psychotherapy.

[00:14:56] So it's a wonderful, quite intuitive framework, and, yeah, I'm really excited at how beautiful it is- kind of lends itself to seeing a little bit more of this hyperobject that we're dealing with.

[00:15:15] **Nate Hagens:** Now I even have more questions. so real quick question for you, Dick. It seems that I hear IFS in conversations all the time.

[00:15:26] Like, how many people globally are trained in this modality?

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[00:15:31] **Richard C. Schwartz:** Well, it'd be just an estimate, but my best estimate is about 50,000.

[00:15:35] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah, so and then they're working with other people, so— Yeah ... it's, that's a lot. Am I correct in inferring that we have external family, a mother and a father and a brother and a nephew in my case, but You just think that we then have an internal family as well that populates during our childhood and everyone has their own portfolio of exiles and protectors and firefighters and some of the words you used.

[00:16:09] But is that how you look at it? We have an external family and an internal family?

[00:16:13] **Richard C. Schwartz:** Yeah, very much. And, a lot of times there are parallels among them.

[00:16:18] **Nate Hagens:** I wanna ask about not just modern Western culture, but on this show we think a lot about human behavior from an evolutionary standpoint. So from that perspective, why would the mind be built in a, Swiss Army knife sort of way that IFS allows for?

[00:16:36] W— would that have been adaptive?

[00:16:39] **Richard C. Schwartz:** Yeah, I think so, 'cause I've thought about that a lot, and it seems like if you only have one mind that has different thoughts and different emotions, you can't focus simultaneously on enough of things that we need to actually survive. So it really helps to have this collection of minds, each one with different little specialties that can, talk to each other, like a— The mod—

[00:17:09] **Nate Hagens:** modular mind hypothesis

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[00:17:11] **Richard C. Schwartz:** exactly, yeah, modular mind, that then work out problems with, each other and have dialogues and then, ideally to have a leader of all that. So it-- in evolutionary terms, it makes sense in terms of how much we have to do at the same time.

[00:17:29] **Nate Hagens:** Well, who's the leader? The self or not necessarily?

[00:17:32] **Richard C. Schwartz:** Well, not necessarily, but ideally the self becomes the leader, yeah.

[00:17:37] **Nate Hagens:** So Steffi, let me ask you this. For, a modern, healthy, productive Western human going about their lives and then learning full on about the planetary boundaries, not just climate, but the implications for coming decades on the environmental situation, using IFS language, what happens to that person? Do they have a new firefighter or exile?

[00:18:07] Or what's your-- can you explain what happens to such a person?

[00:18:11] **Steffi Bednarek:** So again, it's like, do we, zoo- zoom in on the individual, what happens in them, and then do we say that's their individual parts? Or do we also look at what are we encouraged to-- what are, the responses that are encouraged, by, by the culture that we live in?

[00:18:31] And what are the options? So who am I allowed to be? what, what kind of responses are okay? And so there are c-- I'd like to start with the culture and then move my way in rather than the other way around.

[00:18:47] **Nate Hagens:** Well, the culture says to ignore it pretty much.

[00:18:49] **Steffi Bednarek:** Exactly. Exactly. And the culture offers me an enormous range of firefighting options, as soon as I switch on- Literally.

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[00:19:02] Yeah. Exactly. And so I'm never really asked to, to stop and let it sink in. I'm, fed a certain kind of hope that has less and less actual ground in reality. I'm fed scapegoating stories that make it easier and easier to kind of blame other people and, vent my, the, the rising of fear. So this, what in IFS might be called, or it would be called exile or strong emotions.

[00:19:47] There's no space for grief, and we haven't got a real word for earth grief, for our connection, to the loss of home, the loss of, yeah, our, deep earth connection. So it, is very difficult to talk about what's actually also what would be a healthy response, because the system around us is so wounded, is so dysfunctional, is so, in a way also death bringing that, you know, like often climate psychologists get asked to work with groups who actually feel distress.

[00:20:37] And the, implicit invitation is often, "Can you make this go away? can you help people to just function in the society as it is?" So, and that's often also the wish. Like, nobody really wants to suffer. Nobody wants, discomfort and distress. But that's the appropriate response to the external conditions.

[00:21:10] And so it makes it very confusing in terms of where is the leverage point and what do we help people to do? What does it even mean to be a psychotherapist, apply a psychological lens to these times? I think there's a danger if we just focus on, the individual. There's a lot of pathologizing that goes on and a lot of categorizing.

[00:21:35] This is a good response. This is a bad response. How can we transform the bad response? And it has something similar to, how we manage the land, how we manage monocultures. Certain, emotions are wanted, others are not. this is okay, this is not okay. And so how do we use psychological roundup to, get rid of the things that we, don't like or that are discom-- like cause discomfort?

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[00:22:05] And that's where I think IFS in its, entire outlook has a very powerful lens to say there's an ecology of parts, and I can be hopeful and hopeless both at the same time, or hope-free And, these contradicting things can be there at the same time

[00:22:27] **Nate Hagens:** It can simply be said that normal, healthy, productive person, when they come across all this news, there is some suppressed grief that doesn't have an outlet in our culture, and there's probably a lot of humans that are feeling some version of that.

[00:22:44] Dick, do you have your, take on, that question?

[00:22:47] **Richard C. Schwartz:** Yeah. Well, when you have a lot of exiled parts, that you really don't wanna feel because you can't stand the-- what, what-- you can't stand what they carry, one of your managers is gonna be denial. And so you use it to try to minimize what happened in the past, but you also use it in how you see the world or how you operate in the world.

[00:23:13] You, just don't let negative information in because that negative information is gonna trigger your exiles, which then becomes a big catastrophe inside. So if we-- when I work with somebody with that part, that manager that has a lot of denial, and they get it to step back, and they get-- they actually go to some of these painful places, there's initially this terror of being overwhelmed.

[00:23:39] And so we have to, work with the parts that are so afraid of that. And ideally, as, as people are able to do that work and they can no longer fear their exiles, then They can look at things that would, in the past have triggered the hell out of them. So the denial s- kind of evaporates, and they can lead from self.

[00:24:05] And self, self has these... You know, a lot of people think of self as this wonderful passive witness state, like through mindfulness or through something

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like that. But self is also, has a C word of clarity, and sees injustice, and sees, can see these problems without denial, and then has the courage and confidence to act to change them.

[00:24:31] So a lot of... I work with a lot of social activists, and a lot of what I'm doing is helping them do their activism from self rather than from their righteous parts–

[00:24:42] which only polarize. And w– and they have great success because, yes, you're using three of the C words, which are, compa– which are courage, clarity, and confidence, but also with compassion.

[00:24:58] So you have t– people don't polarize.

[00:25:02] **Nate Hagens:** Given all the things in the world, how many humans, again, Steffi, in Western culture, 'cause I do see that's an important distinction, in this conversation, in every conversation, are having a manager of denial show up because that manager is protecting them from all of the very extremely uncomfortable identi– identity, life–altering circumstance, changing implications of if they understood and metabolized all that's going on?

[00:25:40] Do you think that's, quite prevalent?

[00:25:42] **Steffi Bednarek:** I think it becomes more and more. So what I see is that denial has been around for a very long time, and then in the last 10 years, I think that shifted to what psychologically we would call disavowal, because more and more climate information was available, so the context brought the actual data more to us.

[00:26:07] and so what we then saw... So disavowal is where two realities exist at the same time. And, so that means that most of us can have a pretty informed

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conversation about climate change and, make sense. But that at the same time, people then might engage in behavior that completely contradicts this, this information, so that people kind of can be at home, let's say CEOs of companies that, are responsible for a lot of, damage, to the ecosystem, will deeply love their children, will also very likely, love engagement in, beautiful natural surroundings.

[00:27:10] And then something happens on the way from home to work where they slip into a role where a lot of that is split off, and they enact something that they know robs their children of a safe future. And these two realities Are currently able to run side by side. And so that, that's disavowal. And what's difficult about this is that in terms of climate activism and the kind of work that maybe you and I, Nate, we're involved in, is the more we bring this information to people.

[00:27:53] So disavowal is also means it's a protective aspect, protecting the vulnerable parts of me that don't want to know. So I kind of know and I don't want to know at the same time.

[00:28:06] **Richard C. Schwartz:** Mm-hmm. That's right.

[00:28:09] **Steffi Bednarek:** and so if we don't pay attention to the... It's an actual vulnerability that is behind that, and we start to blame and shame people or ram in traumatic information down their throats, there isn't much wriggle room because the, their system, their internal system, but also our external systems are not prepared at all in supporting people in really digesting the enormity of the situation in any form of, psych- with psychological coherence and support.

[00:28:45] And so where have people got to go? And so the protectors are likely to become more extreme, and I do believe that we see that, so with more aggression, with more bypassing, with greater, scapegoating. And so there is a

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dynamic relationship that I see between climate activism information that is pushed out there and the defensive responses, that are coming up.

[00:29:18] And so what I've been wondering and also writing about is whether that kind of splitting, this, this polarization can lead to, something that is actually much deeper than denial or disavowal, which is a proper, loss of reality. So I, everything has to get more extreme. The more this reality that I can't deal with is, is coming my way, and I don't have the external resources, I either have to collapse into emotions that I can't deal with, which is deeply traumatic Or I have to become more extreme in my denial.

[00:30:03] And so we see quite irrational forms of coping, and that can be, manipulated

[00:30:11] **Nate Hagens:** So that applies what you just said to an individual. You could predict that, but then an aggregation of individuals, you can make kind of a culture like Isaac Asimov, psycho history prediction of given the events on the horizon, climate just being one of them, that is a default scenario unless things change.

[00:30:32] **Steffi Bednarek:** Yes. And I think we're seeing this already. We, we see this in, in, in the culture or an organization. I wouldn't talk about parts, but I could talk about pockets of society. and so you have pockets of society that display certain forms of firefighters that are actually really dangerous to the time we're in.

[00:30:58] **Nate Hagens:** hear. I'm so glad that I arranged the two of you to come on, together. it's just so obvious to me that at the core of the human predicament or the more than human predicament, as I say, is, the human. and we talk about emissions and economy and debt and, energy and all the things, but this is the conversation on, human development and how we're going to grow up, or at least some subset of society, hopefully.

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[00:31:36] I've had many guests on the program discussing different human development theories, some more esoteric, like integral theory and ego development theory, and there's some more mainstream, like attachment theory. Dick, where does IFS, internal family systems, fit, between the esoteric and the mainstream human development models?

[00:32:01] **Richard C. Schwartz:** Well, I think one of the strengths of IFS is that it isn't so esoteric, that it's actually very practical in the sense that, All I, need to do is have whoever I'm working with focus on whatever thought or emotion or, sensation they wanna get to know or they... is causing them trouble and find it in their body and then get curious about it, which often means moving other parts back that don't like it.

[00:32:32] And once they're in that kind of calm, curious, even compassionate state, then you direct questions to that place in your body and you wait for answers. So, and, everybody can basically do it and often are very surprised at the answers they get.

[00:32:52] **Nate Hagens:** So does someone need to find one of these trained IFS therapists, or is there something they can do in the quiet of their own home to get started to talk or work with their parts?

[00:33:03] **Richard C. Schwartz:** I'm glad you asked, 'cause for years I was afraid to bring it directly to the public because there's some delicacy to it. And as, we invited people to go to these exiled parts, sometimes they would have very big backlash reactions. So I was reluctant to, do that. But we figured out a way that it can be done safely.

[00:33:26] And so the last several years we've been, bringing offerings to the public, including a workbook, and we're now talking to people, about some kind

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of AI product. Not an AI therapist, there are a bunch of those, but, a way to help people kinda get to know different parts and, work between sessions and so on.

[00:33:51] And, and we're having-- re- soon we're going to have a, an event for the public of teaching people how to do this on their own. So yeah. So that's been one of my goals is to go beyond psychotherapy so that it's available to people more broadly.

[00:34:11] **Nate Hagens:** What about people, like me, to be honest, who have trouble connecting with or identifying their parts?

[00:34:21] or said differently, I guess, does this model work for everyone, for every human?

[00:34:26] **Richard C. Schwartz:** For people who have trouble doing that, often there, there's a part in the way. There's a part that doesn't want them to... And I don't know that's true for you, Nate, but when I'm working with somebody and I say, "Okay, focus on that part and tell me where you find it," and they say, "I, don't know.

[00:34:45] I don't know what you're talking about," usually there's a part that isn't ready, that, that doesn't quite trust me enough or is committed to, to not going into the parts that are in their body and wants to keep them in their head all the time or there's generally some reason for it. But a lot of it is they're just not-- They're worried about my judgment if they went there.

[00:35:10] There's generally some reason that comes out. If I back off and maybe do something else for a number of sessions and then bring it up later, it turned out they just didn't trust me enough that I wasn't gonna judge them. So things like that.

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[00:35:25] **Nate Hagens:** So Steffi, I wanna ask you a question, but, I, I thought of a little anecdote first.

[00:35:31] earlier this year we had, indigenous climate activist, Xiye Bastida, on the program. She lives in Mexico. And I said, "What do you love to do? What do you like to do in your free time?" And she said, "Hanging out with my climate friends, not talking about climate." And I thought that was a nice phrase at the time.

[00:35:53] but two weeks ago, I spent a week with a lot of people working on the more than human predicament in person. We didn't talk about climate or energy or the wars or polarization or any of that stuff. We just talked about life and made jokes, and it was so refreshing and healing for me to just be with people that kind of are aware of this stuff.

[00:36:21] And maybe my parts felt, more free or liberated or I don't know. But do you have any thoughts on that? And maybe you could talk about how IFS model specifically interacts with people's feelings of shame or blame in our culture that are bubbling up all the time in, in our, unfolding predicament, and, why is that helpful?

[00:36:46] **Steffi Bednarek:** I can very much relate to needing a break from it. And, I find it really interesting to think als- sometimes I go to mythology, not just necessarily to IFS, and the story of Medusa s- just came up here around if you stare at the abyss for too long, you risk turning to stone. And that sometimes we need to address something that is too big for one skin to bear.

[00:37:27] we, need community, and also we may need to start looking at it sideways in playful, ways. You know? So when I feel very overwhelmed, I go into a manager part that feels like, very busy, very sincere, very on, switched on all of the time. And in terms of IFS, that is a manager part, managing, like, the

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horrendousness of what it would be like to feel completely, like, helpless And when I also, when, I unblend from that part and access self-energy, just my capacity, to hold things becomes wider.

[00:38:29] It doesn't mean I no longer know about what's around the corner, but I can also hold beauty, and I can also hold deep, intimate connection and love for people and love for everything that we are starting to lose. And with that, there's this deep grief that comes in. And one of the exiles that I see in so many of us, and I include myself, is our wild and undomesticated capacity to feel love, to feel grief, to fall to our knees, and to howl together in, in a wild way, rather than these kind of polite tears that you wipe away in the therapist's office.

[00:39:23] And there's something in that, that when we go to self-energy, which I can find through this introspection way, but which I can also find through community and connection with others, a, a larger self-energy, something comes in, like in mythology, and I love what Martin Shaw, the mythologist said, and I hope I remember it right, where he says, "That's how we can encounter the thousands of shimmering secrets that have been there all along and waiting for our attention."

[00:40:02] So when I'm just zooming in on the atrocity, I miss everything that is waiting to be seen and included. And there's a lot of beauty in that too.

[00:40:14] **Richard C. Schwartz:** As I said earlier, I work with a number of social activists and help them with the burnout, and it does help to balance things more and have, you know, times in your life where you're just enjoying yourself.

[00:40:28] But when we go inside, many of those activists have a part that takes in the pain of the world and thinks to help people, it has to do that. It has to feel the suffering of everybody all the time, and that will burn you out. So when we find that part, we help it understand that it... In order to do the activism, it doesn't

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have to do that And it can let self have compassion, but it doesn't have to take it all in and hold it.

[00:41:00] And we'll also find many people, because of their childhoods or their histories, have an intense desire to help and have these massive caretaking parts that don't let them take care of themselves and that also burns them out. So we, try to balance things out a little better inside and do more of the, what Steffie was calling self-leadership, which when you can do all of this from self, you don't really get tired in the same way.

[00:41:35] it's like you have this, wellspring of energy that flows through you that, can keep you going.

[00:41:44] **Nate Hagens:** Here's a random question, Dick. you've done IFS therapy for a long time with a lot of people. And increasingly, there are a lot of people in our sphere that are very worried about the future and of humanity and the biosphere for climate and other reasons.

[00:42:04] have you noticed any commonality of the individual human's family history and childhood trauma that predisposes them to try to caretake for the natural world? or is that a silly question?

[00:42:20] **Richard C. Schwartz:** No, I think that's some of what I was trying to say. Okay. That, that there are things that happened that made these caretaking parts take over, and it sometimes had to do with if they didn't take care of one of their parents, the parent would get depressed and leave them or something, or their marriage would fall apart and they'd be orphaned.

[00:42:42] So they co- they become these big caretakers of their families, and then that translates into larger systems too. And if you do your activism from those places, you will burn out. So helping people heal the parts that got them

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into that role, so they're doing it from a very different place. And, sometimes they think, "Well, if I don't have this to motivate me, I just won't do it."

[00:43:13] But it turns out to not be true at all.

[00:43:15] **Steffi Bednarek:** I'd like to add to that as well. so what we were looking at the Center for Climate Psychology is around that question as well. And I also noticed that a lot of people who are neurodivergent are in the climate space. And so we had a series of looking at, neurodivergence in the meta-crisis.

[00:43:40] What role does that play? And neurodivergence not from a pathological point of view, but as a superpower because, a nervous system that is already very aware and, more prone to systemic sensing is likely to make more connections and is also likely to see really unusual leverage points. And so it's an encouragement to celebrate the people amongst us who, already display a different lens, and to treat them well at work, and to be curious about their perspective rather than funneling them back in through HR kind of initiatives into mainstream paradigm.

[00:44:32] **Nate Hagens:** It will take a village. I, I, totally agree with you. So let me take it a level higher. I think both of you, are at least moderately aware of my framing of this podcast and what I call the economic superorganism, which is this metabolic, global economy that behaves in aggregate like a single organism that's compelled to grow and consume without limits.

[00:44:57] **Richard C. Schwartz:** Yeah.

[00:44:58] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. W- Dick, imagine the superorganism came to your office and was interested in doing, internal family systems work. What parts might it find and what might work, and what would it need to operate from the self-energy, if that metaphor holds?

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[00:45:18] **Richard C. Schwartz:** Yeah, it holds. I love the question actually, 'cause I, have versions.

[00:45:23] I have, you know, miniature versions of that in my office a lot. And I would start with that striving part, the part that, that sees growth as the big goal and, doesn't think of the consequences of unrestricted go- growth either in an individual or as a planet. And as you get to know that part and what's it afraid would happen if we didn't keep doing this, and those are the questions we ask protectors, then you'll learn what drives it and, both the legacy burden it carries, but also are there other parts it protects that are very vulnerable or that it's trying to distract from?

[00:46:09] And as we learn about that, then we get permission from it to go to those other parts and actually help them. So the exiles of the United States, for example, or-- because as lo- g- again, as long as all those parts are still hurting so much, it's very hard for these other protectors to s-slow down and y- and, try to pay attention to them, actually.

[00:46:36] **Nate Hagens:** It's kind of a fascinating question because you could treat the United States, with this, but then if you go up to the global level-

[00:46:45] **Richard C. Schwartz:** Yeah ...

[00:46:45] **Nate Hagens:** a lot of the exiles are countries themselves. That's right ... and it becomes, quite fascinating, psychoanalysis of the superorganism. Steffi, practically, you have worked with governments and global financial institutions piloting the integration of models like IFS, especially, a project that you called Systems Wayfinding.

[00:47:14] Could you maybe tell us what that actually looks like in practice and what you hope, it will accomplish?

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[00:47:20] **Steffi Bednarek:** So I love the question about the superorganism coming to therapy.

[00:47:23] **Nate Hagens:** Oh, please, if you wanna weigh in on that, go for it.

[00:47:26] **Steffi Bednarek:** Okay, so I backtrack a little more then. for me, there would be two stages to that, and the first one would be in the contracting in itself, because the superorganism wouldn't come as a neutral client.

[00:47:45] it would be challenging for any therapist because the therapist is as much involved in the logic and the patterns of the superorganism as the client. So there's already an enormous amount of collusion which is likely to make us blind to what the superorganism actually presents.

[00:48:09] And the very first question for me is, am I actually sufficiently equipped to do the work. And so that immediately brings me to the other question you asked, what is my work? I think for anybody who is working in this time as a change maker, we can't just work on systems out there. The very first step is how have these systems influenced us, our outlook, the dreams we have for the future, what we get excited about, what we see as success?

[00:48:45] All of that is already tainted by this super organism or hyperobject. And so I have to ask the, my manager parts, my exiles, my firefighters, how have they adapted to living within this? And for me, that's the very first step before I call myself a change maker. I have to st- I have to see how it turns up in me.

[00:49:14] And, there's no end to that story because nobody gets to live outside of the system that shapes all of us. And so it's an endless question. And so we don't get to say, "I'm the one who, has it." We need each other, and we need to help each other to see how it shows up. And so there is no neutral therapist.

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[00:49:38] That, that's the first challenge. And I would have to ask myself, am I... I, have to bring humility to this. Am I the right person at this time to work with this particular aspect? and the second one for me is, why would the Superorganism come to therapy? So what I see is manager parts that hold an enormous amount of power don't tend to come to therapy to give up that power.

[00:50:03] They usually come to therapy because they don't like the responses in other people that hold them to account, or they don't like the unintended consequences of their behavior, and they want to get rid of that.

[00:50:15] **Nate Hagens:** Well, the Superorganism might potentially come to therapy only when it hits rock bottom.

[00:50:21] **Steffi Bednarek:** Exactly. That's right. Exactly. That's right. And, in our time, that means an enormous amount of disaster for both humans and more-than-humans. And that's the predicament we're in, 'cause from a psychotherapeutic perspective, you can't make someone willing to change. They have to be willing, and often that is when crisis is really present.

[00:50:47] **Nate Hagens:** Do you want to, give an overview of your Wayfinding initiative?

[00:50:52] **Steffi Bednarek:** Yes. Sorry, I forgot about that. So yeah. So that's the first turn. It's how does it turn, up in me? But then also, and that's what I love about IFS when we take it into, larger systems, it allows us to see the pattern in a fractal, so how does it show up in the relational field?

[00:51:15] How would it show up in an organization? And I'm not saying that it is like for like, like living systems theory, but it's a lens that allows for both. Because at the moment, a lot of systems thinking is so fragmented from any kind of inner approaches. so that I can, for instance, work with an organization and become

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really interested in how structurally, rather than individually, an organization might already set up fragmentation and polarization in its departments that is never addressed what is habitually, for instance, exiled in an organization or in a country?

[00:52:01] What are the voices that are always silenced, that are never listened to? What's the data that never really gets an airing, or the kind of knowledge systems that are always exiled or dismissed? And what would happen? How would we need to change? so IFS says everything belongs. Like, we don't want to get rid of any parts, and that also includes the, the, parts that go into potential fascism.

[00:52:39] These parts belong to the system, so how do I need to engage with them? What is it that I need to listen to? they show extreme behavior. and so what is it that, like, when... Usually when I am, encountering... We-- In systems wayfinding, there's one, little exercise that we give people to do very much at the start, which is, "Can you just in the next week go to the wrong pub?"

[00:53:13] Don't put yourself in danger, but go to the wrong pub and order the wrong drink, and encounter, and stay there for long enough to maybe listen to the wrong people having the wrong conversation." And what we then encounter are our own parts that turn up and are full of judgment or, you know, like, that create our, attachment to identity.

[00:53:43] And what do-- how do I need to attend to these parts in order to soften and be able to hear what the wrong people are really concerned about? So people who come to therapy will be more likely, especially if they choose IFS therapy, they will be more likely to already have an affinity, and it might work for them.

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[00:54:06] If you bring this, and often I don't even call it IFS, into organizations, there's already a defense, and for a good reason. I don't think we can come into an organization and just declare, "This is a safe space. Why don't you share your innermost fears?" It's not a safe space. And so instead of asking people to make themselves very vulnerable, I worked with an artist, Alan Boldon, and, so we developed some images that, I just want to show a few just to say this is another way.

[00:54:46] So worked with, for instance, wealth holders and philanthropists, and in ord- in, instead of shaming them or blaming them for not giving more than, I think, globally 2.1% of, the global financial wealth goes to climate initiatives. We brought up pots, but we showed them images. And so this is one

[00:55:21] This is another one

[00:55:30] And so we've, we've got a number of parts that actually to get somebody to say, "Actually, I want to build a wall of money around me to protect myself," is very shameful. So to-- for an individual in a group to actually get to the point of saying that, is very unlikely to happen. But when we come and we say there is no way of functioning within the Western system without having a part that learned that this is what we do to be safe, already takes out the shame of that.

[00:56:09] It kind of, it-- So I then become the voice of, acceptance and compassion and that invites these parts in. And what, was extraordinary is that, so many-- We had 100 people in the room, that so many of them started to say, "Yeah, that's me. I have that part." So we have an image of, a parent attending to a child.

[00:56:40] So very often, I'm talking about work with wealth holders, but it would be similar in other organizations. When, we're in our parent part, very often we get

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activated and want to be generous, want to kind of do something meaningful. And in that case, that part often gives way the more the negotiation moves to actual giving.

[00:57:10] the part that has gone to business school kicks back in and says, "Ooh, is this a clever kind of return on investment?" And it's a completely different part that comes forward, that is no longer connected to the parent that wanted to make a safer future for the children. And the more you move towards actual capital moving, the more, these kinds-- Th--there, there are some parts that are very invested in holding the power, holding control, or not wanting to look bad or make a, risky investment.

[00:57:50] And it's at what point, Have we forgotten? And so again, if we're in self and we can see all of these parts, it makes it less shameful to say, "I have this part, but I also know that in order to become a good ancestor for the children of the future, I need to call in parts or I need to act for more self-energy."

[00:58:16] And so it kind of just makes something visible without asking people to go into their deepest, darkest personal aspects and, helps people have a conversation.

[00:58:29] **Nate Hagens:** So the real goal is, culture needs to move towards in service of living systems in, the broader world, but we need a lot more humans working from self-energy in order to navigate towards that.

[00:58:49] So Dick, do you have any, follow-up comments to that?

[00:58:53] **Richard C. Schwartz:** I, loved listening to Steffi describe that work she's doing with benefactors and, it's, you know, to globalize, first of all, just the language by itself frees people up to say, "It's, a part of me. I have a part that's kind of greedy, and then I have another part that really wants to help people."

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[00:59:16] And, having them identify those parts and how they get along inside and what... That reduces the shame enormously of saying, "I'm a greedy person." And secondly, like Steffi, my, focus is on leaders, and we're starting a training for leaders in IFS. We also have trainings for coaches that work with leaders.

[00:59:44] And I do believe there is, you know... Economic trickle-down theory doesn't work at all, but, I believe that self can trickle down from the leadership, that self is contagious in a way, and that parts are contagious too. So if your leader is dominated by the kind of parts we've been talking about, that's gonna affect the whole culture of whatever company you're working with But if you could have a self-led leader, that pulls for the self of everybody around that person.

[01:00:18] So that's been our initiative.

[01:00:21] **Nate Hagens:** Except our current system doesn't select or reward people that would be led by self-energy.

[01:00:28] **Richard C. Schwartz:** That is true. Yeah.

[01:00:30] **Nate Hagens:** So let me ask you a specific question on that, Dick. last year we, had two psychologists on the show, to discuss people with dark triad traits, narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy, and the fact that they often rise to the top of our modern, institutions.

[01:00:50] So through the IFS lens, when you look at these type of people who are many of them running our most powerful institutions and systems, what, parts do you think are in charge?

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[01:01:02] **Richard C. Schwartz:** Well, you could describe each of those as parts. there is a manipulative part. There's a part that, is totally self-focused and driven and so on.

[01:01:16] And those are some of the people that I w- I've worked with the past. I, don't do a lot of ongoing therapy now, but, and what is missing in that description is how those are protectors that are protecting a lot of exiles And that if, and you guys are right, that those people don't show up unless they're hitting bottom or there, there's something, their marriages are falling apart or something like that.

[01:01:45] But when they do, and I can get them, or like Steffi's saying, as these, these, donors separate from and notice the parts that are driving their, the way they do it. as people can separate from those, that triad and see them as parts that are trying to protect them. And instead of hating themselves for having them, begin to get to know these parts and what they're afraid would happen if they didn't make them feel all these things, then you get more access to self.

[01:02:26] And, then we can actually go and maybe do some healing of what drives them. And it's true that those are the people that ascend in this system. It takes that kind of ruthlessness often to get to the top. but and there are now people, and I, did a recent workshop with a lot of leaders who are, and a lot of coaches who are working with a lot of leaders, who say when they go in to these systems and get that kind of separation, there's such relief to be able to talk about this and to, talk about the parts that drive them.

[01:03:07] And, yes, it's true. I've, worked with some of these CEO types that wound up having to quit because they couldn't stay in that system. The system was, driven so much by the culture that they just couldn't stay in self and s- and stay there. But I've worked with other people who were able to change the whole culture of their c- their company.

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[01:03:29] **Nate Hagens:** This is all so fascinating. I'm, working on a frankly, on public choice, and the ranking of where our information and behavior is way down the bottom of the pyramid, and worldview and, status and things like that are much higher. And this just fits right in there. Steffi, did you, wanted to add something?

[01:03:50] **Steffi Bednarek:** It's very contextual. I have seen, huge change when individuals change and when their mindset change, changes. At the same time, I also see that, in order for, especially when we work on, on, on individual leaders, they are beholden to a much larger structure So what I also see very often, in, in friends and colleagues that are coaches and O-OD consultants is, this Machiavellian attitude.

[01:04:32] If I work within a system that kind of cr-creates success if I display these attributes, and then I go to a coach that kind of has a mission to make me feel, I create enorm- an enormous amount of tension where all the change is down to me personally. So I think it creates the risk of a double bind where the individual has nowhere to turn to.

[01:05:04] because if they, become more aware of their values, their life is just gonna get a lot more difficult and, certain things are unlikely to change in this superorganism. And what I see a lot of, and I don't think we talk about that, enough, is that this coaching approach Often also, produces results where the individual, instead of being equipped to change the system from within, actually is in a position where they leave the system, and a lot of them then become coaches and train coaches to do the same kind of thing.

[01:05:52] So it becomes a sort of, self-fulfilling industry. I think it's about time we ask some questions about that, and that's where I, think we need to come together, where people who do inner change and individual change really need to come together with people who work on larger, systemic change.

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[01:06:19] And the methodologies are going to be different, and I need enough systems awareness and system sensing to know at what point do I need to intervene individually, and at what point do I need to intervene structurally. And one example of that, if I may, is Sweden, is a country that already has, enormous amount of gender equity.

[01:06:47] When, policies were introduced to take paternity, leave, hardly anybody took this up. I think it was 6%. There was an enormous amount of, attempts to change mindsets and big communication strategies that had absolutely no effect until there was a legal change that said, that if there are two parents and not, and if both parents don't take some form of, parental leave, nobody gets any money.

[01:07:25] And suddenly, 96% of, all dads that were in a, a relationship, took parental leave, and that allowed mindsets to change. So sometimes it's the inverse. I need to change the structure before I can actually, have a context in which my personal change is, possible to find roots.

[01:07:54] **Nate Hagens:** You said something, well, you said many things that were kind of deep, but, one thing landed that once people learn this and start operating from self-energy and they're in a, riding high in the superorganism, in corporate, world, they leave, because it no longer aligns with their self-energy.

[01:08:20] But the only job they can find in our, culture is doing coaching because there are no other jobs that, that align. So right there is a big gap. We need to have more jobs and vocations for, people that come to terms with all this stuff.

[01:08:38] **Steffi Bednarek:** Yes, but they're badly paid, and so it means– Yeah. ... that I also need to, work on the parts that feel actually quite, scared of less and, loss.

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[01:08:50] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. And that is gonna be a huge, coaching job for a lot of people in the not too distant future. Dick, did you wanna add anything there?

[01:09:01] **Richard C. Schwartz:** Just that is true, and like I said, a nu- a number of the people I worked with actually quit their jobs and moved much more toward service kinds of, work.

[01:09:12] And, you know, fortunately had enough money, they didn't have to worry so much about making that same level or, they'd already worked with those materialistic parts. But, that's what happens. When you become self-led, you are less focused on getting things for yourself, and you're more focused on, helping, the collective.

[01:09:35] **Nate Hagens:** I don't imagine that it's binary, being self-led or not self-led, because there are times that I feel a clarity and a compassion, and I'm, my, my demons and trauma are at bay and I'm just forging ahead, but that's probably ten or fifteen percent of my life. So it's a spectrum, right?

[01:09:57] **Richard C. Schwartz:** Totally. I'm the same.

[01:10:00] I have to say, as I've healed a lot of my exiles, my percentage has gone up considerably. But yeah, there are still times, and, my wife's not here, so I can say this, that, she can trigger me like no one else.

[01:10:18] **Nate Hagens:** Well, she'll watch the podcast, so you just said it in front of her.

[01:10:21] **Richard C. Schwartz:** Okay. But keep going. And, and I totally lose it and a protector comes in and she's saying, "Look at you now.

[01:10:32] You know, you're gonna... Tomorrow you're gonna get up and tell everybody how to do it, but look at you now." So and, but that's actually quite rare

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and, in my first marriage it was quite common. So the healing, actually does work. And even when that happens now, I catch it quickly and I say, I-- "You know, give me a second.

[01:11:00] Let me work with this." And I'll come out and say, "Okay. Yeah, I'm sorry this part took over and, I'm gonna keep working with it and see what it's protecting." So we're ab-- we're both able to do what we call a U-turn in our focus rather than the protector wants to focus on how to change you. But ideally, you're gonna go inside and find these parts and see why they got so triggered and be able to speak for them when you come back, and particularly speak for the exiles, the vulnerability that triggered them.

[01:11:34] And that gets you back on track really quickly.

[01:11:37] **Nate Hagens:** So it's we're all on a journey and we're improving and the goal is to be, more in self-energy, and in service.

[01:11:46] **Steffi Bednarek:** And may I add to that, that it's also important to create structures that allow for that. And so, it is so much easier for me to be in self-energy when I can tap into other people who hold me in this, who remind me, rather than seeing myself as, it just all needs to happen in me.

[01:12:13] In the same way it is easier to work on my trauma when, I have others that are around that support me so that I don't feel alone. And I think, Francis Weller, for instance, talked very powerfully, on, on your podcast about the need for communal structures, rites and rituals that are not about accumulation and, constant busyness and success and striving, but rites and rituals that invite us into relationship and belonging.

[01:12:49] **Nate Hagens:** It's so true, and I'll just share, maybe overly share, but Holy crap, we've been on this call for an hour and a half. I didn't even realize that. But

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what I was about to say is I feel like I've been in self-energy since this conversation started because maybe there are allies and we're all seeing the same thing, and I feel more free or, I'm-- I've been wrapped attention to what the two of you are saying.

[01:13:19] But you brought up Francis Weller. That was my first exposure to that conversation. I, had never talked to him before, and it was all very novel and fresh and strange to me, this conversation about grief, and the various aspects of our grief, including ancestral grief and grief for the natural world.

[01:13:38] And now, eighteen months later, it finally makes sense what he was saying. so this is all a, a journey and an exploration, internally and externally. so, I, Despite the, the length of, our conversation, I still have a, few more things that I wanted to ask the two of you. Steffi, you have said, in podcasts and elsewhere that our culture has lost its soul.

[01:14:09] and Dick, over the years, you've grown more open about a spiritual dimension to the internal family systems. So maybe starting with you, Dick, could you share more about how you came to that conclusion? And then Steffi, could you share more about what you mean by culture's, soul here and, what the connections are to IFS core self?

[01:14:32] **Richard C. Schwartz:** Yeah. When I first stumbled onto self in clients, again, by just getting these parts to separate, this other person would pop out. I thought, "Isn't that great that there's this psychological aspect to us?" Just like when we cut our arm maybe, our body knows immediately how to go into action to heal that.

[01:14:54] Maybe that's what this is emotionally. And I held that view for quite a while, but I was finding the same essence, the same self in people who, you know,

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didn't have, some, you know, s-some traumas but had otherwise decent lives. I was finding these... the same self in people who'd been tortured on a daily basis.

[01:15:20] And at some point, I couldn't maintain that perspective that this was psychological. And I had some students also. And I came into this work as an atheist, basically, a scientific atheist. I had some students who started saying, "Maybe this is like Buddha nature," or, "Maybe this is like Atman in Hinduism," or, "Maybe this is like, Christ consciousness," or...

[01:15:44] And I took a look and then lo and behold, each spiritual tradition had something parallel and described in a similar way. Just didn't know how to access it as quickly, but it was very similar. So I started to think maybe this is a drop of something much bigger. And so that's my position now that what I'm calling self is, the particle s- the particle state of the big wave of what many people call lots of different things.

[01:16:21] what I call the oceanic self, but other people call, Brahman or the non-dual or there's lots of names for it. It's the place you go with psychedelics. It's the place you go when you meditate a lot and that we can embody that, and that's why it can't be damaged, and that's why it shows up the same in everybody 'cause that's what it really is.

[01:16:49] **Nate Hagens:** The self can't be damaged?

[01:16:51] **Richard C. Schwartz:** Yes.

[01:16:53] **Nate Hagens:** So we have the protectors and the exiles and the firefighters and all those parts, but the true self within each of us is solid and there all the time and can't be damaged.

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[01:17:03] **Richard C. Schwartz:** Correct. That's right. And our parts don't know that, so they think they have to protect us, and it's a big relief to them when self emerges and can say, "No, I can protect you."

[01:17:16] You don't have to protect me."

[01:17:18] **Steffi Bednarek:** So this is a conversation that I am currently having with Dick and I really love it. so originally, the way I use soul is different from what, Dick has just described, because we can use soul in a sort of, almost religious way. And when Dick and I started the conversations around this, my use of soul, so Francis Weller was for a long time, ago, a mentor of mine.

[01:17:59] And, I, I studied Jung and, mythology. And so from that tradition, soul is actually something rather than the ascension is something that binds us deeply into life and gives our life meaning through participation. So it's not in me, it's also not in the world. It's in, it's this, mercurial quality that is in between relations, but that, deeply gives our life meaning, and we can't define it, but we can sense it.

[01:18:40] We know when it's there. And from that perspective, it, it-- like that quality of soul, communicates to us through the imaginal world, through dreams, through, our bodily sensations and just an intuitive knowing, that is if I try and grasp it intellectually, it's gone. But there's a-- it, can come in a longing for meaning, and that aspect of soul is not interested in happiness.

[01:19:15] that is so surface level. so sometimes that aspect of soul actually, wants us to engage and really stay with the trouble, as Donna Haraway says, or, to, encounter, difficulty in life in order for us to become large enough to become fully, well, Jung would, say individuated. And so when I first piloted Systems Wayfinding, that's the notion that I came with.

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[01:19:51] And I thought, "Well, let's try and experiment and see if soul's a part." And so I experimented with that, and I told Dick about it, and I was just so surprised because the beauty of IFS, it's so experimental and experiential. It's not just a theory. It's like you have to ask the part And so when, people access that aspect, it said to them, "I'm not apart."

[01:20:24] I'm also not self. I'm g- like, there, there is something bigger," and it is what, Dick just described. And what was just for me so mind-blowing is that w- then that part, whatever you call it, started to take people on a journey. It's like, "Let me show you." And a lot of them, and it wasn't directed by me, it was suddenly this, this, essence or presence or whatever it is took over, and it gave people an embodied experience of what it means to...

[01:21:00] Well, Thich Nhat Hanh talks about interbeing. Like, what it means to be interconnected with life. And I remember one person said, like, there's something happening in my brain. There's this tingling. I have never experienced it. It's kind of unpleasant and, pleasant at the same time, but it is just so taking me into an experience that my intellectual brain can't...

[01:21:28] Like, I need to give up something of, this holding on to control."

[01:21:35] **Nate Hagens:** Just to be clear, that was, without psychedelics?

[01:21:38] **Steffi Bednarek:** Yes. Exa- Just therapy sessions? Yes. And that's where I thought I haven't done psychedelics, but a lot of friends have, and it was like a shamanic journey or psychedelic experience, but through, like, accessing this part and allowing it to take the experience into an imaginal realm where, a lot is possible that in our physical, body w- we can't hold so much complexity.

[01:22:10] **Nate Hagens:** Well, as a rationalist and scientist who's deeply interested and curious, about non-duality and these other things, it seems to me that our

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society is suppressing some natural emergent longing for meaning and creativity and connection to the broader world, and it's just been squelched down and muzzled.

[01:22:38] And so when a therapist... I'm, just making this up, I'm hypothesizing. When a therapist opens up and allows that part to express itself when it's been squelched, there could be an amazing, response.

[01:22:52] **Richard C. Schwartz:** Well, my translation of what Steffi just shared, and I've, again, just this year become open about the spirituality of IFS and, and in addition to self being both the particle and the wave aspect of the spirituality, I've had for 30 years or so the experience of having clients, as they become more self-led, suddenly these, what we call guides, show up and often do, do or act in the way that Steffi described.

[01:23:30] When I would ask them, "What part of you are y- what part of you are..." And they say, "I'm not a part like, like these other parts. I'm something else." And, so there is now, for me, there, there is acts getting fully into self provides a kind of opening or a portal to that level of, wisdom that is just around us wanting to help all the time.

[01:24:03] Jung had one he called Philemon, but he didn't go fully spiritual with it. He said it was part of the collective unconscious. And, I don't know. I don't know from, you know, what it is exactly, but it's a phenomenon, and they're always very val-valuable and helpful, and, some of them help in the way that Steffi described, and some are just comforting and, But yeah, it's a whole phenomena that I'm actually writing a book on now.

[01:24:33] **Nate Hagens:** I often argue on this show, that you're both probably aware that human behavior is largely currently emergent from energy and the

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economy, and the great simplification, the contraction, as we come off the fossil fuel peak is inevitable and, coming, either way.

[01:24:53] And so the real question is whether that descent is brutal or humane. But many of, our viewers, come from an ecological energy systems finance, and myself even for a long time came from that background, might not initially see how frameworks like IFS can truly make an impact, on that trajectory.

[01:25:18] So I'd like to ask each of you to directly respond to that critique. How might this type of work, if it were carried all the way up to institutions and cultures beyond just individuals, but starting with individuals probably, actively and tangibly support a more peaceful, lower suffering, transition and simplification?

[01:25:41] **Steffi Bednarek:** Yeah, I think no psychological approach can stop the unfolding of, biodiversity loss that is already underway. so the question is: how do we meet-- and I think that was part of your question. how, do we meet this loss, and what, what kind of humans do we want to be as we face this, and what do we want to lean into?

[01:26:18] And I, I guess in a way that's, my answer would be very much what I've said already. it is both. I have to, work on my capacity to mature through the suffering and the loss that I'm going to encounter, and no amount of self-energy is going to, m- like, make this loss go away But it will help me to meet others with compassion, not just my own parts, but others with compassion.

[01:26:56] And I think we also see this in hospices, in hospice work, that, w- when... And I, don't say this to dramatize things in terms of we're all gonna die. We don't know what the future is going to hold. But there's enormous beauty that can happen as things, die either literally or metaphorically. And but we need

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containers that can hold this, which means, work on myself, but also on creating systems and structures and rit- rituals.

[01:27:38] And I don't just mean this in a sort of new agey kind of ritual way. rituals that, hold people as they struggle, as they fall apart, as they rage, as they grieve, as they numb, and, all of these parts. And I think IFS is a very powerful model that can contribute to, this collective container building.

[01:28:05] **Richard C. Schwartz:** Well, that was beautifully said, but I'll take a little, different tack. So we need a different paradigm for understanding and relating to the mind. And the current paradigm has got us in the place we're in, which has to do with fighting ourselves inside and locking away parts of us and, and being dominated by the protectors that result from that.

[01:28:35] Without that shift in paradigm of understanding and relating to the mind, a lot of what we're gonna try to achieve will be what Bason called or thought of as first order change. So what one of my goals, and it- it's not likely I'll achieve it in my lifetime, is for, and this might sound grandiose, but for IFS to replace the current paradigm for understanding and relating to, yourself and, that then if we could all access more self and heal so many of the parts that drive our extremes, that would have an effect throughout.

[01:29:21] And so that's what keeps me going.

[01:29:24] **Nate Hagens:** So, as you know, this podcast focuses a lot on energy, fossil energy, rebuildable energy like solar and wind, but we don't often talk about the self-energy of human beings. actually never. so what would a world made up of people and leaders who are primarily, like we said, it was a spectrum, but to a large degree, are led by self-energy look like?

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[01:29:50] **Richard C. Schwartz:** Well, Steffi alluded to this, but for me it's all parallel. So if you can relate to even parts of you that ordinarily you would hate or that have caused you a lot of damage in your life, and you can come to love them and help them transform then you can do the same to people that even resemble those parts in the outside world.

[01:30:17] And, so hence the parallel. So Steffie was talking about how, when you really become self-led, your heart opens wide, and you see beyond the protectors of your enemies, and you can see the exiles that drive them. And then you can-- you might still work to stop them, but you're doing it with a level of compassion that doesn't polarize.

[01:30:45] **Nate Hagens:** So, so my, my coach who introduced us, Dick, refers to that aspect of, me, but of broader society as our Buddha nature. So there is a little bit of a, of an overlap, right, between Buddha nature and self na- self-energy?

[01:31:02] **Richard C. Schwartz:** Very much. Totally.

[01:31:04] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah.

[01:31:05] **Richard C. Schwartz:** So yeah, you have, some percentage of humanity leading from Buddha nature, it would, make a big difference.

[01:31:14] **Steffi Bednarek:** Yeah. I love the fact that Buddha nature came in, right? Because there's also... I'm also want to honor that, there's lots of, different kinds of knowing that are practiced in lots of areas in the world that are not IFS-led, that ha- bring us into a similar kind of wise mind. So we may come from lots of different directions.

[01:31:44] but it's a state of being that is wide and open and can, bridge polarities and hold them not as a conflictual thing that can collaborate, with people that we

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don't like. And the beauty for me is what we know about social tipping points is that we don't need 100% of a culture to do that.

[01:32:09] We need 25% of a culture in order to have a social tipping point. And for me, that it would not be a society where there's no conflict, where there's no kind of difficulty. That will always be part of it. But the way we meet that is different. And if, the policymakers have 25% of people in them that can hold, For me, that, that really is the attitude of maybe what in indigenous cultures we would, ask of an elder, to not be reactive and to think seven generations ahead.

[01:32:55] we would also then create the context that encourages that so that we have, feedback loops that are actually encouraging, this and, where we cr- yeah, we create the structures that allow for and reward a stretch.

[01:33:17] **Nate Hagens:** We're coming up on two hours. this is one of the longer conversations I've had this year, and I ha- I actually have a lot more questions because I'm really curious about this.

[01:33:26] But I think, I will, just now ask each of you a couple of closing questions, that I ask all my guests, but this has been great. so taking off your IFS hat just briefly maybe, what advice do each of you have for someone listening to this episode now, aware of all the problems our culture faces?

[01:33:52] w- what personal advice do you have for them being alive at this time, at this moment?

[01:33:57] **Richard C. Schwartz:** I would say just to know that there are no bad parts of you, even though it seems like there are bad parts and that a lot of parts that have done damage in the world, and, I have worked with a lot of people who've done heinous things.

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[01:34:16] Even those parts, if you go to them and get curious, will talk about the burdens they carry and what happened, who they're protecting and so on. that's a radical, different understanding of human beings and that one way to, to start to change your both internal world but also the world around you is to begin to get to know all kinds of different parts of you from a place of curiosity and, that ultimately will have a big difference in your life.

[01:34:54] I

[01:34:55] **Steffi Bednarek:** would say to remember that we are not alone, that, this predicament that we're in, to remember that there are other life forms and other, other beings around and that, we don't have to figure this out on our own, and that wisdom can come sideways from lots of different directions, and to listen out for something that is more than human.

[01:35:30] Include that in the conversation

[01:35:33] **Nate Hagens:** If you could wave a magic wand and there was no personal recourse to your decision, what is one thing you would do to improve, the future?

[01:35:41] **Steffi Bednarek:** I'm gonna be a bit cheeky and say, for people to not ask for the one thing, but to, always allow for multiples and for, an ecological awareness to be taught to our children, right from the start.

[01:36:08] but actually if it was the one thing I... There's an artist, Tracy Waugh I think, who asked policymakers that took decisions about water to step into water as they made the decisions into the polluted rivers. So there's something about, including the places that we make decisions about in our decisions and being in these places.

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[01:36:41] **Nate Hagens:** That makes sense. Dick, any, any magic wand wishes? I guess it

[01:36:47] **Richard C. Schwartz:** would be that, That self, there was more self-energy available that, there would be more opening in the world for that.

[01:37:01] **Nate Hagens:** Thank you both, for your time here today, and for your ongoing work. Dick, do you have any closing comments, for people watching, listening who understand and agree with what you've laid out here today?

[01:37:14] **Richard C. Schwartz:** First, I, really love this conversation. I really, always love talking to Steffi. And Nate, your interest and your questions really elicited a lot of, I think, important things that, you know, I couldn't have provided by myself. And so, and I'm very grateful to Steffi for taking this place as I can't take it, and loving our collaboration and, yeah, I just really have enjoyed the whole process.

[01:37:48] I guess it's gonna get dark, and if we can all kind of stay connected and, hold on. One of the other of you alluded to this earlier that, there is a brighter future, but it's not apparent right now. And that there are lots of, light sources that don't get a lot of attention that, are collaborating right now.

[01:38:21] And IFS is one, but there's lots of them. So there's, hope.

[01:38:26] **Nate Hagens:** Steffi, I'll give you the closing word.

[01:38:28] **Steffi Bednarek:** Just, yeah, thank you. Beautiful conversation, and I loved every bit of it. And Nate, you were very present through your questions and, there's-- I kind of would also really would have loved to hear your for, you know, for you to contribute.

[01:38:51] So,

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[01:38:53] **Nate Hagens:** Well, then it would have been three and a half hours. I know. and my mom wouldn't have been happy probably. so we'll have to look forward to a round two. wonderful to talk to both of you. Gaia speed on all your work in the world, and to be continued, my friends.

[01:39:11] **Steffi Bednarek:** Thank you. Thanks for having us.

[01:39:12] Thank you, Nate.

[01:39:14] **Nate Hagens:** If you'd like to learn more about this episode, please visit thegreatsimplification.com for references and show notes. From there, you 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 Sirianni.

[01:39:36] Our production team also includes Leslie Batt-Lutz, Brady Heine, Julia Maxwell, Gabriela Sleiman, and Grace Brunfelt. Thank you for listening, and we'll see you on the next episode