

The Great Simplification

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[00:00:00] **Charles Eisenstein:** This is the biggest change in my beliefs that has happened over the last 10 years. I no longer think that ecological limits, resource limits, energy limits are gonna force us to change. If we wanna continue the story of separation, we will do so at a greater and greater cost to the rest of life and to our own souls.

[00:00:20] The increasingly difficult conditions to sustain that are a louder and louder invitation for us to ask, what do we want to sustain? How do we wanna live? How do we wanna be? We gotta bring it all in. Once we do that, then let's start asking, what is mine to do?

[00:00:45] **Nate Hagens:** Today I'm joined by frequently requested guest, Charles Eisenstein, to discuss how the story of separation permeates through our culture and our institutions, shaping how we relate to each other and the natural world. Most importantly, Charles and I explore how the mindset of separation causes us to get in our own way as we navigate the unfolding more than human predicament.

[00:01:12] Charles Eisenstein is an American author, public speaker, and teacher whose work focuses on civilization, consciousness, money, and human cultural evolution. He graduated from Yale University in 1989 with a degree in mathematics and philosophy, and spent the following decade as a Chinese-English translator before turning to writing and speaking full-time, including as the former speechwriter for RFK Jr.

[00:01:39] Charles is the author of many books, including *The Ascent of Humanity*, *Sacred Economics*, and *The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know is Possible*. In

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this conversation, Charles and I wind through economics, money, climate, and language, tracing how the stories we tell ourselves ultimately shape the physical world that we live in and how we experience that world.

[00:02:06] We talk about why separation sits at the root of so many of our largest crises today, and why trying to solve those crises by using the same narratives that created them gets us nowhere. Instead, Charles argues that by reframing our stories towards one of interbeing, we can start planting the seeds of a different system, even as the old one falls apart around us.

[00:02:35] With that, please welcome Charles Eisenstein.

[00:02:39] **Nate Hagens:** Charles Eisenstein, great to see you.

[00:02:41] **Charles Eisenstein:** Good to be here, Nate. Happy to be talking to you.

[00:02:45] **Nate Hagens:** So you are probably one of the top five most requested guests, over the years, so I'm glad we're finally able to schedule this and have a conversation. You have spent over two decades writing and speaking about foundational stories and mythologies that underpin human civilization, and you especially focus on the concept or the idea of separation.

[00:03:14] So before we go down into any specific rabbit holes, maybe you can share why you've centered your work so heavily around the stories that we tell ourselves, and maybe give a concrete example about how our current cultural mythology actually shapes everyday lived experience.

[00:03:34] **Charles Eisenstein:** Okay. Yeah. and I'll try to do it without sounding like I'm, expressing metaphysical cliches that everybody's familiar with already.

[00:03:43] but the basic idea is that the world that we collectively create is a product of the stories that we tell ourselves and each other about who we are,

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why we're here, what the nature of reality is, what the purpose of human life is, what the purpose of the human species is, where we fit in the totality of the cosmos, like all these things that every culture talks about.

[00:04:08] Some of these stories take the form of explicit ideologies, and others are implicit. The deepest one that I've explored, I call it the story of separation, which essentially says, "Who are you? You are a separate individual." That could take the form of a soul encased in flesh. It could be a self-interest maximizing genetically programmed machines.

[00:04:38] It could be a bubble of psychology inside of a flesh robot. It could be, framed economically, an economic actor seeking to maximize its financial self-interest. So whether it's biology, religion, science, economics, it's all kind of conver-- it all kind of converges on the same idea of what a self is, what a human being is, and therefore what motivates a human being, and what that re- the relation of the human being is to other human beings and to the rest of, I'll call it creation.

[00:05:13] So part of that story of separation is that, is not only me separate from you, but also humans separate from nature. And there's also a kind of a s- a psychological separation in the sense that, that intelligence is believed to be something that human beings possess, but that's not suffused into the world overall.

[00:05:41] The world overall is simply a collection of impersonal forces acting on generic particles, on masses that are random and certainly indifferent to the human story. Therefore, human progress consists in rising to mastery of these impersonal or even hostile forces. If, 'cause if there's other competing beings out there, th- they're not just impersonal, they're hostile.

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[00:06:17] More for me is less for you. So we're constantly at war or in a battle for control over the indifferent and hostile forces and beings outside of ourselves. So the, so here we get a narrative of human progress, which says that once we were ignorant, naked, and stupid, but thanks to our intelligence, we gradually came to dominate and we're better and better off, and our destiny is to, gain perfect control through the application of force on the genetic level, on the molecular level, on the macro level, on, you know, to the stars.

[00:06:55] We're not gonna need nature anymore. We're gonna put all of reality into a data set so that we can administer it with our intelligence rationally and efficiently.

[00:07:03] **Nate Hagens:** Let me interject here because one of the core learnings, or core curiosities I've been exploring the last year or so is there's a difference between humans and humanity.

[00:07:16] And with large numbers of humans, the socioeconomic, the memetic structures express themselves differently. So your last little bit there is about technology and conquering the stars and all that I don't think that's held by the average human. Well, maybe you can explain. Like, you, mentioned Homo economicus and self, interested rational utility maximizers.

[00:07:47] Someone with a PhD in economics probably believes that, but the farmer down the street from me has never heard of that term. So how does the whole culture fit into the story of separation?

[00:07:59] **Charles Eisenstein:** Yeah, it's implicit for most people. And you're right, it's actually falling apart. My father's visiting right now, you know, and he grew up in an era where it was just unquestioned.

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[00:08:12] It was implicit that each generation was gonna be better off than the last, that the onward march of technology would bring us an age of leisure and perfect health and social harmony, that the scientists were gonna figure things out and present to us this utopia. It was unquestionable. And today, I think because it has not redeemed its promise and that failure has become more and more obvious, like people do– don't believe in it anymore.

[00:08:45] **Nate Hagens:** So the stories are still there, but the lived experience is calling it into question.

[00:08:50] **Charles Eisenstein:** And the consciousness underneath those stories is changing. But we still have the superstructures, which are the, the institutions built on those stories that we feel trapped in and unaligned with, which is why so many people feel alienated and can no longer source meaning and identity from the legacy, life programs that are offered to us.

[00:09:18] **Nate Hagens:** I wanna ask you a question about the origins of the story of separation, but first maybe share a little anecdote. When I worked on Wall Street back 25-plus years ago, someone gave me a book, Ishmael by Daniel Quinn, and I read five pages of it and I'm like, "A talking gorilla? This is dumb." And they said, "No, it changed my life," and I put it away.

[00:09:46] And, on 9/11 the markets were closed, and I was in a fragile state, and I picked up that book again, and I read it cover to cover. And the story about takers and leavers, and I think Ishmael was a little bit about the story of separation.

[00:10:05] **Charles Eisenstein:** Mm–hmm.

[00:10:06] **Nate Hagens:** It, like, immediately resonated with me. Like, duh, this is what happened.

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[00:10:11] This is the case. And so I wonder how many people, deep in their subconscious, resonate and know that we are part of the web of life and connected to everything. It's just there's been this giant cultural wall, between their lived experience and that deeper feeling.

[00:10:35] **Charles Eisenstein:** Yeah, that book was a formative influence on me as well.

[00:10:39] my, my first major book, was called The Ascent of Humanity, and in part it was an answer to Daniel Quinn, Derek Jensen, John Zerzan, the kind of anti-civilization discourse. and, Quinn narrates it as a fall. These guys all narrate human history, the history of civilization anyway, as a fall from, a state of harmony and connection.

[00:11:05] like we made some huge mistake, some bad ideology infected us, and all of a sudden, or maybe over some time, we began to see nature as another. We began to compete with each other. But when I really looked into the history of technology and I read like Lewis Mumford, you know, and thinkers like that, it became clear that the story of separation co-evolved with technology and with language even, and with Fire, the use of fire.

[00:11:41] so, so I could not find a starting point for that story. Even stone tools create some-- you're manipulating the environment. Fire, you're creating a division between the wild and the domestic, between self and other. language, you're starting to name things and set yourself apart from them.

[00:12:02] **Nate Hagens:** So the story of separation could have started with the growth of our neocortex.

[00:12:08] **Charles Eisenstein:** Yeah. We've co-evolved with the story. I mean, you could even take it back to the eukaryotic cell that selfishly keeps all of its DNA for

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itself instead of engaging with the genetic plenum of constant bacterial exchange of genetic information.

[00:12:24] And, and I'm like, okay, and then you, take it fast-forward in time, the d- the, how technology allows division of labor, concentrations of population, social hierarchies, like the whole thing that we call civilization. So, just to wrap it up here real quick, I decided that this was not a big mistake, but it was part of a larger process, and that was inevitable, and that is happening for a reason, and that is, in fact, guided by some kind of intelligence or teleological purpose.

[00:13:01] And I became curious, what is that, and how do we fulfill that process?

[00:13:08] **Nate Hagens:** Well, I'm gonna ask you that question next, but first, what I thought is that the story of separation kind of dovetails and intertwines in a positive feedback sort of way with scale. Mm-hmm. The larger our system gets, the more they rely on that story and the more disconnected we are from, you know, the, the interbeing- Yeah

[00:13:33] inter-interconnected story. Does that make sense?

[00:13:35] **Charles Eisenstein:** Yeah, absolutely, because scale requires abstraction. You take the same process, and you apply it, in, in many different situations. So you have to efface the uniqueness and the relatedness of each thing. You know, industry is a good example. You have to standardize processes, standardize input, standardize job descriptions, and you standardize the output, and that's how you scale things.

[00:14:00] So, scale is absolutely a core part of the story of separation.

[00:14:06] **Nate Hagens:** So getting back, what is the teleological purpose, hidden intelligence? What are your insights on that?

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[00:14:14] **Charles Eisenstein:** Yeah, I mean, that gets really metaphysical. and, I'm not gonna try to give a pat answer to this question, what is a human being for?

[00:14:25] Why are we here? But I'll say that's the right question, because that question did not exist in the old story, which denied teleology, which denied purpose. It was a bottom-up causality that, that says, you know, any purpose or meaning, that's, and that's, something that we impose, that our pattern-seeking brains impose upon the chaotic, random, arbitrary, results of forces mathematically operating on masses.

[00:15:03] So to even ask that question already is a departure from that story. So, and I do have my views on what that is. Just in a sentence, it would be to, well, on one level, to contribute to the continued unfolding of life and beauty on Earth and in the cosmos. But, right now, I'd rather just say that's the right question.

[00:15:28] **Nate Hagens:** I fully agree with you. It's why I refer to this moment as a species-level rite of passage. Mm-hmm. because all the cultures before didn't quite ask that question, and we have to see everything that's happening with the more-than-human predicament maybe to mature or meet the moment. so you, contrast the story of separation in your work with what you call the story of interbeing.

[00:15:55] maybe you can tell us that alternate story and explain what it actually says about who we are and how we relate to the rest of life.

[00:16:03] **Charles Eisenstein:** So that term is used in Buddhism. Thich Nhat Hanh popularized it in the West. but it's a very natural, a very natural way to describe something that goes deeper than just interconnectedness, which would be separate beings having relationships.

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[00:16:22] But it says that our very being is Interdependent on the being of others. So that, there's something of you in me and s– and vice versa, and that the events that I experience as external to me have an intimate mirroring of internal events, that the state of humanity is inseparable from the state of nature.

[00:16:51] So on one level, we're becoming aware that what we do to the rest of life and to the biosphere affects us, and that no amount of technological shielding can prevent the e– effects of our actions from influencing our own health. For example, the f– the health of the soil, the health of the water is inextricable from our own health.

[00:17:16] Why? Well, in the story of separation, it's because, some, you know, chemistry happened, and we haven't yet learned to shield ourselves from those effects. But if we are fundamentally separate, then we can shield ourselves. We can live inside bubble cities, you know, and personal protection gear.

[00:17:37] **Nate Hagens:** At least some of us.

[00:17:39] **Charles Eisenstein:** Well, right, and that's a whole other thing, yeah. Yeah. but the story of interbeing says, "No, you cannot separate yourself like that." And this is one of the things I've really been emphasizing in environmental discourse. This doesn't mean that if the whales all die or the insects all die or the Amazon dies, that we die.

[00:18:02] It means that every time another species, another ecosystem, another part of the biosphere, another river dies, something in us dies. It comes out of our souls. And this is something that probably most people listening have experienced personally. When a favorite– Daily. Yeah. like when a favorite place where you grew up in childhood, like a beautiful natural environment, you go back and it's a parking lot.

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[00:18:35] Or like this summer here in Rhode Island, there weren't any fireflies. And there is... Th-that had no measurable impact on me, but no measurable... Like, it didn't in-influence my income, you know? But man, it... Like, I felt so much poorer. Like, and I can imagine 20, 30 years, you know, the people who had never seen that, they won't even know what they're missing.

[00:19:05] **Nate Hagens:** I can begin to understand why you were one of the most requested guests on this program. FYI, we've had a banner year for fireflies in Minnesota. Not now, but a couple months ago they were everywhere. But let me ask you this. I think many, most of our viewers completely resonate with what you just shared.

[00:19:28] But does everyone, does every human, if, they were given a, a reprieve from, watching the news, CNN or Fox or watching the algorithms, would they feel that sense of personal loss if they noticed and were aware that there were no fireflies, to, use your example?

[00:19:49] **Charles Eisenstein:** Yes. Maybe with a very, very few exceptions of highly psychopathic people.

[00:19:55] But I mean, this happens all the time. So

[00:19:57] **Nate Hagens:** this is innate. This is in us.

[00:19:59] **Charles Eisenstein:** Yeah. Yeah.

[00:19:59] **Nate Hagens:** Maybe there's another part of it which is, loss aversion. People don't wanna know that there's no more fireflies because they don't wanna feel that little bit of loss that you just described.

[00:20:14] **Charles Eisenstein:** Well, the feeling of loss gets normalized.

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[00:20:18] **Nate Hagens:** What do you mean?

[00:20:18] **Charles Eisenstein:** Well, we think that this is what it looks like to be a human being.

[00:20:25] **Nate Hagens:** Oh, God.

[00:20:25] **Charles Eisenstein:** we've become used to a much lower level of intimacy and joy and authenticity and aliveness than is possible. And the discomfort of that state is assuaged through all kinds of offerings that we call addictions.

[00:20:47] That

[00:20:50] you can't blame people for eating ice cream when they're thirsty if ice cream is all that is available to assuage their thirst, even if it makes them even more thirsty afterwards. You can't blame people for getting addicted to porn when the kind of intimacy that the soul craves is not available and porn is what is available.

[00:21:08] You can't blame people for getting addicted to shopping or to food when the community and connections and belongingness that they crave is not available and the only thing available to connect them to the world is buying something. So a lot of what we look at as symptoms, I mean, as causes like greed, laziness, indulgence, like selfishness, these are symptoms of a profound dispossession that is normalized.

[00:21:41] And so I just am like, ah, my brothers, my sisters, your longing and your impatience and your rejection and your rebelling, your rebellion against normal, the normal life that has been offered is a sign of health. Your depression is a sign

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of health 'cause it's like, "I'm not having any of this. I don't even wanna get up in the morning for this."

[00:22:11] It's not the final step towards recovery, towards reclamation of what has been taken from us, but it means that you're still alive there.

[00:22:21] **Nate Hagens:** When did you begin to feel that or notice that or express that? When you were, like, a teenager or w- what was your, recognition of what you just described?

[00:22:32] **Charles Eisenstein:** When I was a teenager and into my 20s, I did not understand this.

[00:22:37] I just thought that I had some kind of problem for not being with it and not being ambitious. rejection was narrated to me as something that, you know, a sick or a problematic or an irresponsible person does. Because back then, the story was still pretty robust. It was, You know, with, not too great an effort at ignorance and self-delusion, you could believe that humanity was on the right track.

[00:23:12] Now, I became aware very early on as a teenager that humanity is not necessarily on the right track. It came to me first through radical, like, left-wing politics and alternative histories, where I became aware of the genocide and I became aware of the ecocide and, the oppression. And, you know, there's a left version and a right version of this same basic theme that all is not well here.

[00:23:40] that, the facade of progress and normalcy is just that, a facade. and that goes along... See, that validates the intuitive, instinctive rejection of, like, the normalized, you know, like, sit in school in front of a classroom, you know, and raise your hand for permission to go pee and, you're confined in there and you're looking forward to the weekend.

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[00:24:08] Like, is that what life is supposed to be?

[00:24:11] **Nate Hagens:** I wonder if in a thought experiment, we all just started in a group of 150 people, like, pre-agriculture, and we didn't know anything, and we were just dropped in there, and we just lived our lives for five years with no memory or cultural stories if we would arrive at this recognition naturally, obviously, of interbeing.

[00:24:38] and then I guess a, a, an adjunct question to that or adjacent question How does interbeing, the way you're describing it, map to evolutionary biology and, David Sloan Wilson's multilevel selection of cooperation and competition? Because—

[00:24:58] **Charles Eisenstein:** Mm-hmm ...

[00:24:59] **Nate Hagens:** We're talking about humans here, but a gazelle and a lion, there's interbeing there.

[00:25:04] I can see that the gazelle becomes part of the lion, but what about from the gazelle's perspective?

[00:25:10] **Charles Eisenstein:** Yeah. So I think that, some of the emerging paradigms in biology, are really important to, that, to feed the intuitions of interbeing. My education, like I'm dating myself here, but, you know, my education was really, in the era of the selfish gene that didn't recognize, for example, the importance of endosymbiosis in evolution, didn't recognize the importance of horizontal gene transfer, didn't recognize epigenetics, didn't recognize the, ability of organisms to, engineer their own DNA.

[00:25:52] not just the epigenetics, but the actual genetics also. Didn't recognize the responsiveness of DNA to, environmental, interests that are not just the

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interests of the organism, but that operate on, this is what you were referring to, David Sloan Wilson is the name. You know, the larger units of selection that ultimately encompass the whole.

[00:26:17] But a lot of these new paradigms are profoundly encouraging of the f—the intuitions of interbeing.

[00:26:31] **Nate Hagens:** So what do you think a society organized around interbeing as opposed to separation would actually look like day-to-day for work, for community, for how people relate to money, for how people relate to each other and the natural world?

[00:26:48] **Charles Eisenstein:** It's so different from what we are used to. The course of development of such a society is-- will take a very long time. So for example, you said, what would-- how would our relation to money change? I think even a more relevant question would be how would money itself change th—that would bear a different relation to it?

[00:27:12] a lot of our relation to money is a function of the way that money is, I wanna say, is designed, but that would imply a conscious designer, like some, you know, coterie of human beings who sat down and said, "Okay, we're gonna design money to have these qualities." But, you know, you look back at the history of money, and you-- again, just like with technology and the story of separation, it co-evolved with society and with our consciousness.

[00:27:38] So y— it's not like someone's designed it, which is-- doesn't-- that means, like, you can't necessarily design it and here's our better mathematically perfected design, and now let me submit it to the committee in charge and hope that th— my brilliance will, overwhelm them, and they'll say, "Yes, let us impose this new system."

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[00:27:57] **Nate Hagens:** Well, in the history of technologies, I would argue that money is the supernormal stimuli that created the, the separation more than any other because we parse all the things of context and value in our ancestral environment into one denominated and one thing, this token. Yep. So that is a huge driver of the story of separation, I, would guess.

[00:28:25] Yes?

[00:28:25] **Charles Eisenstein:** Yeah, a huge driver and also a consequent. Once you accept that we are separate competing beings, then our current money system makes sense, because it creates separation, but it affirms separation. And, when you're operating in a money-- in a, in our current kind of money system, it reifies the intuition of separation, which says more for me is less for you.

[00:28:53] We're in competition with each other. And therefore, I've done this on another podcast, but I s-- but I'll do it again here, the metaphor of the game of musical chairs Where, you know, imagine you're a hundred and fifty people that, And, instead of plunking you into, inside a traditional gift economy, you put them all in a game of musical chairs and you say, "Okay, the music stops, everyone goes for a chair," but there's only a hundred and forty chairs, a hundred and fifty people, so ten of you are gonna be left out.

[00:29:29] So just imagine a group of us playing that game and, you know, your kids don't eat if you don't get a chair. So, hey, sorry, you know-- Yeah ... you elbow other people out of the way, and the f-- the, fastest, the luckiest, the strongest, and the most ruth-- most ruthless get the chairs.

[00:29:47] **Nate Hagens:** The people who may not need a chair as much are the ones that are gonna grab the chairs first.

[00:29:53] **Charles Eisenstein:** That could be, too. Yeah.

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[00:29:54] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah.

[00:29:55] **Charles Eisenstein:** Or maybe there's a few, altruistic people who are like, "Yeah, I'll let the pregnant mom get the chair, and I'll do without." But generally speaking, you see, human nature is red in tooth and claw. And so you have this game going on, and sitting outside the circle, there's four observers.

[00:30:15] There's an economist, a biologist, a politician, and a priest, okay? And, the economist says, "Yep, there's human nature, everybody maximizing their rational self-interest." And the biologist says, "Yep, you're right, and it's programmed by their genes." And the politician says, "Lucky thing they have us around to set some limits so that they're not actually killing each other and make some rules."

[00:30:45] And the priest says, "I'm gonna go in there and ask them to be nicer to each other." But what nobody is acknowledging is that the rules of the game create the human nature, quote unquote, that they're seeing. and so if you change the rules and you had a hundred and fifty chairs and a hundred and fifty people, you still might have some jockeying for position, you might have some trading, you know, 'cause all the chairs are different and all the bottoms are different, and I like this kinda chair, and maybe you wanna sit next to them, you know.

[00:31:16] And, like, you'd still have an economy, but you would not have competition built into it on an artificial level. And so the point I make with this is that the money system right now is exactly congruent to a game of musical chairs because of the way money is created as interest-bearing debt, which means there's always more debt than there is money.

[00:31:42] Now the difference between the money system and this game is that, in essence, more and more chairs are added. More and more money is created in order to allow the repayment of existing debts. But that means that the money

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system has to continually expand. And because lending happens when there's a positive return on investment, which means the conversion of relationships into services and nature into goods, the realm of goods and services must constantly expand.

[00:32:23] And so just to kind of complete the circle, as you were saying, more and more of human life gets denominated in monetary terms. More and more of life gets monetized. More and more of nature gets monetized and commodified, and we are helpless to do anything else as long as the rules of the game are as they are.

[00:32:42] So that's like sacred economics in two minutes.

[00:32:46] **Nate Hagens:** And you're back to Lewis Mumford, *The Machine*, and you're kind of I– talking about my story of the global economic superorganism– Yes ... that has a metabolism. So let me ask you this. If one percent or five percent or 10% or 50% of the humans on Earth understood what you're saying and wanted to change the rules of the game Would that alter the musical chair situation?

[00:33:14] It seems to me that, just like technology and scale are intertwined, that we're headed for a period where the musical chairs dynamic in our society is going to intensify, not lessen. So if there is a percentage of society that adopts the interbeing perspective... I guess what I'm asking is, what is the theory of change here?

[00:33:43] Because I could see what you're trying to seed is a wiser, more sustainable, longer-lasting culture. But then there's also the time between here and there. So is there a, a–an application of this to our present moment, or is this trying to inform and seed future cultures?

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[00:34:05] **Charles Eisenstein:** both. So first I'll say that you could have 100% of the people understanding these dynamics, and still the system wouldn't necessarily change.

[00:34:16] This happens all the time. You have organizations where not a single member of the organization agrees with what the organization does. So because they're lo-- everyone's stuck in a system.

[00:34:26] **Nate Hagens:** Mm-hmm.

[00:34:27] **Charles Eisenstein:** However, when the ideological core, the narrative core, I would even say the spiritual core, hollows out, leaving just the structures, it becomes-- that, that system becomes fragile.

[00:34:45] When-- and when it's hit with a shock, a crisis, nobody tries very hard to bring it back again. And so those moments of crisis become an opportunity to choose something else.

[00:34:58] **Nate Hagens:** So you're doing what I'm doing, trying to change the initial conditions of what comes next without knowing what that might be.

[00:35:04] **Charles Eisenstein:** That's right. Yeah. And the initial conditions, you know, include the stories that we tell ourselves about who we are now, the crisis, the collapse, which may not look like what a lot of people are afraid of. The collapse may not be a collapse of supply chains or the financial system or the biosphere.

[00:35:25] It definitely is a collapse in our mythology, which is already underway. It's a collapse in who we thought ourselves to be. It's a collapse in what we thought was real.

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[00:35:37] **Nate Hagens:** You often, Charles, talk about war metaphors embedded in how modern society responds to the various threats like the war on carbon or the war on drugs or the war on poverty.

[00:35:51] Why is it that we default to war as an organizing metaphor, and does that relate to the idea of separation you've been unpacking?

[00:36:00] **Charles Eisenstein:** So partly it's, consistent with this story of separation that, sees the world as, an eternal battle of each against all, and that identifies the obstacle to your wellbeing as something else, somebody else who is taking the resources that you could have, that's maximizing their self-interest at the expense of yours.

[00:36:23] So war is built in on that level, but it's also psychologically very satisfying. in-- when you understand complexity, like even mathematically complexity theory, then you start to understand that there isn't one cause for most things. That cause arises out of, myriad relationships, and that means that you don't know what to do.

[00:36:54] You can't attack one thing. But when you think in terms of a war, whether it's a war on Iran, war on terror, a war on drugs, a war on germs, a war on weeds, a war on pests, a war on immigrants, a war on whatever, then all of a sudden these complicated issues become very simple. You know what to do. so, so like even conspiracy thinking, like the big C conspiracy theory that, you know, there's a, a cabal that is orchestrating everything and everything is planned, you know, and nothing happens without their orchestration, like that is also fits that mindset of, "Oh, here's the one thing, and if we only destroy that one thing, then everything will be fine."

[00:37:40] **Nate Hagens:** it's binary and it creates an out group. so that is just prime territory for human memetic transmission.

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[00:37:47] **Charles Eisenstein:** Right. But it's still the same way of thinking. Let's find one thing that is the key to everything and go to war against that one thing, which is also consistent with the mentality of money, which is if I only had this one thing, it would solve all of my problems So this collapse is, like a one of the deep ways of thinking, the, the meta patterns that are one-- Those, that's one of the things that we need to transcend in order to really live into it, the story of interbeing.

[00:38:22] **Nate Hagens:** So I think you also took that a step further in your climate book, *Climate: A New Story*. I think you argued that reducing the ecological crisis to carbon alone, Yeah ... repeats the same reductionist thinking that-- Same pattern ... same pattern.

[00:38:38] **Charles Eisenstein:** Find the one thing, you know, and then apply it to a min-max problem, and you know what to do in every situation.

[00:38:44] What's the lowest carbon alternative? Then you equate that to green. And, you know, whether you're talking about the war on drugs or the war on viruses or the war on carbon, the danger is what do you leave out?

[00:38:58] **Nate Hagens:** But we need science, and we need quantitative analysis. So, where do you see quantitative framings as useful, and where do they lead us astray?

[00:39:08] **Charles Eisenstein:** I mean, they're useful, you know, to extend the range of our senses and, the, our appreciation of the vast complex of causes and effects. They lead us astray in many ways. First, they, f-- cause us to focus on the things that we can most easily measure or the things that are most convenient to measure or the things that are the most profitable to measure, and distract us from the things that maybe we could measure but they're hard to measure.

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[00:39:43] Or maybe we could measure, but they will defy the interests of those who are paying for the measuring. Or the things that don't occur to us to measure because culturally we don't acknowledge their existence. Or the things that are fundamentally unmeasurable, fundamentally qualitative, which the story of separation says don't even exist.

[00:40:10] Going back to Galileo and Descartes and Newton and, Hume, you know, those guys were saying anything real can be measured. If you can't measure it, it's not real. You know, it's just fancy and idle speculation. And, this was part of the conception of progress that we will someday be able to measure everything and therefore understand everything and therefore control everything.

[00:40:35] Even love, Nate. It's just a cascade of hormones and neurotransmitters, that's all, and we can measure that, and then we'll know if you actually love somebody. You'll be able to check if this person you're in love with actually loves you. You'll be able to get a test.

[00:40:50] **Nate Hagens:** It's funny you bring that up. I haven't thought about it in over 20 years.

[00:40:54] When I was getting my PhD, I read about a chemical, and this is the first time I'm thinking about it in 20 years, plasma NR8 or something like that. That is the love chemical that if you have it, it shows you're in love, and I was really taken by that then. So I think I was back then fresh out of Wall Street, I was deeply still in the story of separation and trying to beat it with a hammer, which was science.

[00:41:21] But I hear you now. I-- It's obvious.

[00:41:24] **Charles Eisenstein:** Yeah.

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[00:41:25] **Nate Hagens:** So– Yeah. So, I don't know if you watch any of my content. Last week, I did, frankly on, 15 unordinary things that normal people could do to cede responses to the metacrisis, and one of them was, measure your returns in things other than dollars in social capital or healed ecosystems or improved friendships or instead of IRRs.

[00:41:57] And you've also written quite a bit about what you call demonetization as a way to pull more of our daily lives outside of monetary exchange altogether.

[00:42:07] **Charles Eisenstein:** Mm–hmm.

[00:42:07] **Nate Hagens:** Maybe you could unpack that a little bit, and how do you think this would change our relationship to each other, the rest of nature, and what would have to change structurally for this shift to happen?

[00:42:18] **Charles Eisenstein:** I like where you're going with that, but I wouldn't say to measure the things that don't bring monetary returns. I would say attend to them appreciate them, enjoy them

[00:42:30] **Nate Hagens:** Because measure is itself part of the story of separation.

[00:42:33] **Charles Eisenstein:** Yeah. And, you know, some things can be measured and some things cannot.

[00:42:38] Some things should be measured and some things should not. Yeah.

[00:42:40] **Nate Hagens:** Thank you. I will use that in the future.

[00:42:42] **Charles Eisenstein:** Yeah.

[00:42:42] **Nate Hagens:** Attend.

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[00:42:43] **Charles Eisenstein:** And, I find that, the more I give attention to all of these other gifts and values and pleasures, the more I move into the sphere in which those are real. If you enjoy something and you don't know that you're enjoying it, then you're not gonna seek it out, and maybe even more importantly, it won't seek you out.

[00:43:11] This gets a bit more metaphysical, but I've come to understand that simply enjoying and fully receiving the gifts of creation, widens the channel of creation. Imagine that you are, This is something I'm putting in my new book, but, like, imagine that you love to knit hats and you're giving them away to people and, you're really putting a lot of effort into these hats and making them as beautiful as you possibly can.

[00:43:47] But then you see that people are tossing them in the trash, you know, using them to wipe their butt, you know, like, like throwing them in the puddle and just not valuing them. You're probably not gonna wanna continue to make those hats and give those hats I think that creation works like that too, and that when human beings cease to enjoy the gifts of creation, stop looking at the fireflies, stop listening to the bird songs, retreat into their boxes, and don't honor and celebrate and fully receive creation and instead, make do with substitutes for all that is offered out there, then the flow dries up, and the fireflies disappear, and the whales disappear, and, all of the beauty starts to shrivel away.

[00:44:47] And yeah, you could adduce conventional causal reasons why that is happening, but I think that there's-- that there, there-- this is part of the, what I would include in the story of interbeing. There are causal principles that do not operate by force that we are mostly ignorant of but that we have an innate attunement toward, an innate recognition of that, that, that...

[00:45:25] And this may actually get to your question, you know, about what we can do. In the conventional narration of power and cause, there is not very much

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that most of us can do. What are you gonna do? Are you gonna vote, in a system that's utterly corrupt? What are you gonna do if you think that the world works through the machinations of a power elite and that they are the ones who actually have power?

[00:45:56] Well, that narration of power is by no means universal among human cultures. You know, speaking with indigenous people who say, yeah, you guys don't understand. The real cause of climate chaos is that you have removed the gold from the mines in the mountains, and that's the heart of the mountains, and without the gold, they cannot rule the earth as they are supposed to with their heart."

[00:46:23] Or they say that you have taken too much water so that the rivers no longer reach the sea, and so the sea no longer knows what the land needs. And who am I to dismiss those casualties and say, "Oh no, you're primitive, and we know better than you"? Do we know better? Prove it. What world have we wrought that would demonstrate that we know better than them?

[00:46:48] So, this is this openness to a broader causality that does not exclude what we were educated in, but that includes way more. And I am quite sure that humanity will not pass the threshold that we have come to if we do not incorporate all that we have excluded. And that includes these other causal principles that we recognize intuitively in the moment where you know that the most important thing you could possibly be doing right now is attending your friend who is in hospice. And what passes between you in that moment, maybe the forgiveness or the awakening or something, even though no one ever hears about it and that person dies, you know that had an impact on the world.

[00:47:45] You know it. You feel it. And in this time where we do not know what to do, I think that we need to expand our awareness to those moments which are not to the exclusion of, you know, conventional change-making, political or social. It's

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not to exclude those things, but it's also to include those in that guidance system of, "I know what is mine to do right now.

[00:48:16] I can feel it." It's not a calculation that I'm making according-- about what is gonna leverage the most, you know?

[00:48:25] **Nate Hagens:** Let's dive into that a little bit. As you're probably aware, a lot of this channel's focus is on the biophysical constraints that shape our world and coming decades, especially in terms of energy and materials and complexity.

[00:48:41] **Charles Eisenstein:** Mm-hmm.

[00:48:42] **Nate Hagens:** And, you come at the more than human predicament from a narrative and psychological angle and, metaphysical, which I increasingly-- I, I don't fully understand it, but I increasingly see the importance of. How do you see these material and mythological lenses fitting together in the coming decades?

[00:49:05] **Charles Eisenstein:** Reality is not two, it's one. So any coherent theory of change has to include both. We can't wave away all of the human dramas and the material conditions of those dramas and escape into a spiritual or metaphysical realm. I mean, this is-- we are here to, play with and ultimately transform the social and material relationships that are the very definition of this world.

[00:49:38] Okay? So, I, I, you know, fully endorse the approach that th-- and, where this question comes from. In some research I did for the climate book, I concluded that, if everybody on Earth lived the lifestyle of a traditional Bangladeshi villager, Earth could support probably twenty billion people.

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[00:50:03] If everybody lives the lifestyle of a North American, then two billion people would not be sustainable. And that the question ultimately isn't sustainability. How can we sustain the way that we have now? Do we even want to sustain that? The increasingly difficult conditions to sustain that are a, a, louder and louder invitation for us to ask, what do we want to sustain?

[00:50:39] How do we wanna live? How do we wanna be? So energy constraints and other ecological constraints are a boon to humanity that nudges us into more consciousness of a choice. But I do not think that those conditions will rescue us from the choice. I used to think so. This is the biggest change in my beliefs that has happened over the last ten years.

[00:51:04] I used to think that collapse would save us, that we would have to make the changes that we want to make. I no longer think so. I no longer think that ecological limits, resource limits, energy limits are gonna force us to change. I think that we will, if we wanna continue the story of separation, the story of ascent, the story of control, that we will do so at a greater and greater cost to the rest of life and to our own souls.

[00:51:34] That economic growth can continue even-- Well, for one thing, we will accelerate the stripping of life and beauty and earth. We will find cleverer and cleverer ways to do that, and do it on a bigger and bigger scale in order to overcome the energy return on energy investment barriers and, you know, discover new ways to do that, and new things to deplete.

[00:52:04] And also the strip mining of the human soul, which we are seeing now with AI. The fundamental business plan that has sustained the era of growth is you find something that people do for themselves or each other, and you take it away and you sell it back to them. So childcare, cooking, physical skills, building a house, taking care of your neighbors when they have a misfortune, that can become insurance.

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[00:52:33] **Nate Hagens:** And now thinking.

[00:52:34] **Charles Eisenstein:** Thinking. Yes. Thinking itself becomes a product. So technology extends the reach of capitalism into farther and farther realms and means that the impoverishment has no limit. So instead of facing collapse that will save us, we face a choice, and this accords with my spiritual intuitions.

[00:53:00] Like we are not helpless victims. What is different and the way that we can serve is that we can bring consciousness to choices that had been unconscious. That's what we're here to do. So that we can be like, yeah, we could take this a level farther, but we choose not to. Why? Because we now recognize that what that chase has brought us is not what we really want. The wealth that we can measure is not meeting the longing of our souls.

[00:53:39] That's what we're doing.

[00:53:41] **Nate Hagens:** So a common critique of work that focuses on storytelling and cultural narrative is that it remains too intangible and abstract without a clear theory of change of, how that will alter institutions and power structures. And so what do you think about that sentiment? And, how does greater consciousness of the choices and awareness, does that change the population or the voting?

[00:54:16] Or how do you see all that?

[00:54:20] **Charles Eisenstein:** Yeah, that critique would be valid if it's, talking about stories and narratives. But if you're actually telling new stories and serving the emergence of new stories, then you're changing the world. I mean, how else does collective human behavior change?

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[00:54:42] Everything that we do collectively, anything you want to accomplish beyond the power of your hands involves communication, it involves symbols. Money itself is a symbol. It's-- and gets its power from the stories that we tell about those symbols, from the agreements that we have. Like the whole human world is based on agreements, and the way that agreements are shared and transmitted is through stories.

[00:55:06] **Nate Hagens:** So, like me, you've been working in this space for quite a while. Can you tell me how you've seen, maybe give a positive example and a less hopeful example. How have you seen the stories change in the people you talk to around the country, or, in your network, in the last five or seven years, say?

[00:55:29] **Charles Eisenstein:** there's many things happening at once. On the one hand, there's kind of a growing radicalization where at first people think that this one element of society is corrupt, but they still have a, a-- they still believe that there is some readout of legitimacy, you know, some sanctuary of legitimacy.

[00:55:51] Maybe it's academia, you know, maybe it's science, maybe it's, you know, there's some institution that is still sound. But then they realize that what they are observing in, you know, some other corrupt institution is a hologram of everything else. And it-- and, that unsoundness goes all the way down to the cognitive layer, all the way down to the deep mythologies, and they reach a point of questioning everything Not knowing what's real.

[00:56:25] And then from there, you know, some people, because of the discomfort of that, they will jump to a new narration, a new theory of everything. could be conspiracy theory, could be, a political theory that is comforting for a while, but then eventually they feel betrayed by that as well, and then they enter into, like, the real unknowing, which I think is a very sacred place.

[00:56:59] So I see people going through that.

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[00:57:01] **Nate Hagens:** I'm just trying to connect some of the themes you've been discussing. So in the musical chairs example, would there be a better outcome, if a lot more of the 150 participants are in the state of unknowing?

[00:57:17] **Charles Eisenstein:** Yeah, 'cause those 150 participants, they at be- at the beginning, they just take for granted that there's just 140 chairs.

[00:57:24] That's just the way things are. So either I go for a chair or I let somebody else have it. But now they're starting to say, "Hold on a second. Why are there only 140 chairs? Is it-- is scarcity really built in? or are there other chairs being kept in another room?"

[00:57:44] **Nate Hagens:** Or is the size of the chair the appropriate one or do we really need this many chairs?

[00:57:49] Maybe we could be walking- Right ... or laying down or all- Right ... kinds of other things.

[00:57:53] **Charles Eisenstein:** Right, right. So people are beginning to ask questions that they have not asked before. Yeah. and that happens as the shell of reality disintegrates, you know. And things that people have taken for granted, all of the established certainties, come into doubt, including ones that they might actually come back to and say, "Yeah, actually, after some research and consideration, I do think the world is round after all."

[00:58:19] **Nate Hagens:** But you think that the greater, just to stay with that metaphor, the greater percentage of those 150 people that are asking questions, even if they don't know the answers, if they're just curious and stepping into the unknowing, that is a, much better situation than the alternative.

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[00:58:38] **Charles Eisenstein:** There's a sacrifice that we all have to make of something that we thought we knew it's to-- in order to pass the guardian.

[00:58:48] **Nate Hagens:** What's that?

[00:58:50] **Charles Eisenstein:** It's different for each person, but there's gonna be something that's part of your identity and your worldview that you're gonna have to render up to the guardian at the threshold.

[00:58:59] **Nate Hagens:** The threshold of what?

[00:59:01] **Charles Eisenstein:** The threshold of a new world.

[00:59:02] **Nate Hagens:** So, kind of a common debate in this space is whether we need to focus on top-down responses to the metacrisis, such as policies and governance, or bottom-up, starting with individuals and small groups.

[00:59:16] so, what do you think of the role of both of those as it pertains to our situation?

[00:59:23] **Charles Eisenstein:** Who's we here when we say we need to focus on top-down? When I ask that question, who is the we, I don't just mean global north, global south, you know, privileged and dispossessed. I'm also talking about

[00:59:40] It's like there's no committee. like everybody is in a different station in life. And so are we telling people, "Okay, disengage from your bottom-up work, disengage from your efforts to bring healing to your family, to bring healing to your relationship, to preserve the threatened nineteenth-century architecture in your neighborhood.

[01:00:07] That's not very important. When the sea level rises thirty feet, you know, that's not gonna be important." There's a lot of people who think that if we

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don't stop X, nothing else is gonna matter. So everybody has to abandon what, you know, they care about because I know what you should be doing. So this comes into-- That's why I say, who are we?

[01:00:28] Who am I telling you what you should do? Who am I including in the we? I think that the answer is different for everybody. Here, I'll bring one more thing in. This is in my book that I'm working on as well. The passage by Victor Frankl, who speaks of those in the concentration camps who went from hut to hut comforting others and giving away their last piece of bread.

[01:00:59] he, you know, he, makes some points about, the significance of such people There's some part of, me, and I believe everybody, who, despite all reason, understands and feels the impact of the, that act of sharing your last piece of bread, that understands that all of those nameless people who did that, many of whom, you know, whose stories were never told, that if they hadn't done that, we would be in a much worse situation right now.

[01:01:37] That every act has cosmic significance. On some level, we know that. And, I wanna bring that causal principle into this conversation about top-down or bottom-up, you know, and just not to answer the question, but to say we must ask that question from a place that includes all of this information, all of the information that comes through your subtle senses, all of the information that you've received from your psychedelic journeys, all of the information that is, that has been excluded by the prevailing story of what is.

[01:02:19] We've gotta bring it all in. Once we do that, then let's start asking the question underneath your question, which is, what is mine to do?

[01:02:30] **Nate Hagens:** Something that I have become more and more aware of is the importance of grief, as part of our cultural transformation, which I understand is also a pretty central part of your work.

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[01:02:43] So before I get to your, your, the book you're working on now and closing questions, let me ask you, what does healthy grief actually look like? And how is that different from the way that many of us in this culture attempt to process or avoid processing loss?

[01:03:06] **Charles Eisenstein:** Grief, the way I understand it, and I'm no expert on it, but I've thought some about it, it's the process of incorporating the reality of a loss.

[01:03:17] If you're not-- if you don't go through grief, then you're not in reality. You're in, the very common delusion that you can hold on to everything, that this world is permanent, that you are permanent. so it's part of the maintenance of the separate self. The idea, the delusion that nothing can ch- that you can live forever, that, The illusion of permanence.

[01:03:52] When you undergo grief, like, say someone, someone you love dies and you're just kind of pretending that nothing's changed and that they're still there, that means you haven't gone through grief. When you go through grief, you're like, "Oh my God, this person is gone forever," and you are attending to the loss of a part of yourself.

[01:04:19] This is, again, interbeing. Something in you dies.

[01:04:23] **Nate Hagens:** Like the fireflies.

[01:04:25] **Charles Eisenstein:** Yeah. Yeah. And when you go through that process, in a way you're made whole again.

[01:04:33] **Nate Hagens:** How and why? 'Cause that person is gone, and the fireflies are.

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[01:04:38] **Charles Eisenstein:** That person is gone, but you have incorporated their imprint onto you. Sometimes you meet people who have experienced inconceivable loss, you know, the loss of all of their children, for example.

[01:04:59] You hear these stories, you know. Sometimes you meet people who have experienced that, and often they are in a state of joy and wholeness. They've been, like, cleansed by a holy fire, you know? It's not because they pretended nothing happened.

[01:05:18] And so grief then puts us in reality. It allows us to understand the preciousness of the things that are still here.

[01:05:27] And I think that if we felt the grief for... You know, we have those moments where, like, what happened to all the seals, you know? Or what happened to all the bugs, you know? What happened to the birds? There's not as many bird songs. And when we actually feel that, we're like, "Wow, these-- what is remaining is really precious, and I'm going to serve that."

[01:05:50] I'm gonna value that." Like, it's not even a vow that you make. It's that you have more information and your choices then come from that expanded body of information.

[01:06:04] **Nate Hagens:** So that kind of ties in with our culture's ability to grieve and how we have rituals for processing grief. You have a recent essay, "When the Rituals Stop Working," where you argue that our modern Western rituals anyways lose their power as the agreements underneath them are unraveling, like contracts and exams and writing and money.

[01:06:38] So what do we risk losing as those things kind of unravel and fall apart, and what do we stand to gain, by letting them go, if anything?

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[01:06:50] **Charles Eisenstein:** The way to understand ritual is kind of the opposite of how we conceive it. A ritual is not something that is less real. You know, oh, that's just a ritual. An authentic ritual is something that feels more real than other actions.

[01:07:04] Ooh, you're signing a contract now, or you're getting a medical test. This is important, you know. Or you're sterilizing the instrument you're gonna use for surgery. That's important. You're washing your hands, you know, that's an important cause of germs. Rituals draw from the mythology or the story that embeds them, and they contribute to it as well.

[01:07:28] So when the rituals stop working, it means that people no longer believe in the story from whence they came. It's a sign of the hollowing out of the mythological core of a culture.

[01:07:43] **Nate Hagens:** So, so how do we create new rituals? Is that something that is emergent in culture, or can individuals perhaps, watching this episode start their own new rituals?

[01:07:54] **Charles Eisenstein:** No, we don't really create rituals. We discover them, and we do so by being humble and honest and precise rituals have to draw from things you actually believe. And that's why, you know, it's a lot of these gatherings, you know, when somebody invokes the four directions at the beginning or, you know, calls in the ancestors or something, it kind of feels performative.

[01:08:23] It feels symbolic. As I said, real rituals don't feel symbolic.

[01:08:28] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah.

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[01:08:29] **Charles Eisenstein:** So what we're really, what we're really looking for in this search for ritual and, I would say ceremony actually even more, we're looking for something that we believe in again.

[01:08:42] **Nate Hagens:** So, before I get to closing questions, I wanna get to your new book. I understand what you're writing, which maybe you could share why you have, articulating this is possibly your last book.

[01:08:57] But you have published a short excerpt, which I would like to read part of here, and maybe you could expand on this passage. "Speaker and listener have an equal power to bring truth into manifestation. It is a joint process, the process of creation, the exercise of the power of fiat. The word fiat has a bad connotation today, used as a term of disparagement to describe Federal Reserve money, fiat currency.

[01:09:29] Let us reclaim that term because it refers to a primal creative principle, the power of words. Fiat means to speak something into existence."

[01:09:42] **Charles Eisenstein:** Let there be light.

[01:09:44] **Nate Hagens:** Do you wanna unpack that a little bit?

[01:09:48] **Charles Eisenstein:** I could say a few things about it. I think I said some of it before. Everything that we create beyond the power of our two hands happens through communication, through the forging of agreements.

[01:10:03] if I'm building a house, some guy's gonna show up with a cement truck at some point. He would not do that if there were not a story of a house being built here. It would be ridiculous. Why would he show up at some random place? But, you know, there's a contract, a, a voucher, an invoice, you know, a bill of goods, you know, a payment, and so he does that.

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[01:10:29] and when... So on a bigger level, and I'll get to it, but on a bigger level, 5,000 years ago, there was a story of the civilization that we were building, that even if you were doing menial labor, you understood yourself as part of something that was meaningful, which we do not have anymore. And so people are asking themselves, "Why am I doing this?"

[01:10:53] much more than they ever have before. People need an answer to that.

[01:10:57] **Nate Hagens:** Well, the answer for most people is, "I gotta pay the bills somehow, and this is the only way- Yeah ... I can think of doing it."

[01:11:03] **Charles Eisenstein:** That's not the answer, though. That's a substitute for the answer. That's coercion, and people will never wholeheartedly participate in something where they're being coerced to.

[01:11:16] And that, that is sapping the vitality of our s-society. Yeah. People need to believe in it, and then they will enthusiastically go way beyond what they need to do to just make their salary. You know, I don't come to these podcasts with an agenda of wh-what I wanna say, as if, you know, I were speaking to a generic person.

[01:11:42] Those are boring conversations. You know people who go to a party, and they already know what they're gonna say. If you wanna, bring something new into the world, a new truth, that comes through a relationship bec- that is unique V- and in, in the way I work is that it is pulled through me by the listening.

[01:12:06] It's pulled through me by the people, by the person I'm speaking to

[01:12:10] **Nate Hagens:** Last week, I did a podcast with a French biologist named Olivier Hamant, and I didn't know much about his work. It's all about the concept of robustness in nature and in human systems. And one of the things that he

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suggested is a way to develop robustness is to play jazz instruments because there is no theme, there's no set goal.

[01:12:38] You just are responding to the other musicians. And I didn't think about it at the time, which is always the case when I do a podcast. As soon as it's done, I'm like, "Oh shit, I wish I would've thought of that." But conversations are robust—Mm-hmm ... because they're I— they're a lot like improv because Yeah, I had some prepared questions for you because I've— you know, my staff did some research on your work, and we have a lot of mutual friends, and so I know a little bit about your work.

[01:13:08] but you're right that the, the best emergent conversations, meaning satisfaction, all of it are where there's this dance between listening, responding, and these new neurons that fire on things you hadn't heard of. Now, in our case, some of the metaphysics that you're describing or pointing to are very new to me.

[01:13:39] so I'm not having an immediate aha. I'm still mulling over what you said. But, I agree that listening, deeply listening and respectful, full attention to the other is something deeply lacking in our culture.

[01:13:59] **Charles Eisenstein:** Yeah. So like even the metaphysics stuff, you know, it's not that, that, my experience isn't that, oh, you know, N-Nate is really hungry for this information or something like that.

[01:14:12] It may be playful, like it's gonna provoke you a little bit. You know, it comes from, attending to the human being that is in front of me right now. That, yeah, it's a function of a relationship. And, you know, maybe at certain moments I'm a little timid. I'm like, okay, maybe, you know, I'm gonna, he's gonna think I'm weird, you know, or I'm going to, sabotage my credibility by hoisting my freak flag a little too high and, you know, triggering people's very understandable cynicism,

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about people who, you know, wield pseudoscientific concepts, to legitimize, poorly considered ideas.

[01:15:04] You know, I'm, so I'm aware of all these things. You know, as I tune into you, as I tune into the, to the audience, you know, the people who I think might be listening, like all that is going on in the background. Just to say that, that is a relationship and on some level, I just trust that...

[01:15:28] And this is like, you know, it's just, this is very mundane. You know, you tune into somebody, you actually pay attention to them, you look at their expression as you speak to them, and it changes what you say. And they will have the experience of, "Oh, yeah, this guy's actually speaking to me." Not to their idea of me, but they're speaking to me.

[01:15:50] **Nate Hagens:** So in addition to unknowing or not knowing, and some of the other things you mentioned, trust in the unknown is also seems to be an important thing, that we trust the other and that we're going on this conversation journey together, and trust is kind of the opposite of fear, and fear might be a product of the whole separation story.

[01:16:20] What are your thoughts on that?

[01:16:21] **Charles Eisenstein:** In spiritual discourse, sometimes that same pattern of find the bad thing to go to war against—

[01:16:29] comes up in the context of fear, where fear becomes a bad thing. So I don't look at it that way. I see fear more as, kind of, it's part of the, the weaving of the cocoon, in which we operate, in which we grow.

[01:16:49] It's a protective layer. And a— as we grow inside of these fears At some point, they become obsolete and they become limiting, and you get tired of

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being afraid of certain things. so it's pr-- yeah, and then, yeah, then maybe then it's time to overcome these fears or to melt some of these fears. But fear has, you know, a very valid purpose.

[01:17:21] But I do think that many of us are reaching a point where we're ready to stop being afraid of some things that we've been afraid of for a long time.

[01:17:31] **Nate Hagens:** You've written elsewhere about what large language models mean for human creativity, and as the world increasingly fills up with machine-generated words, getting back to the quote that, I read about fiat, what happens to the power of the word that you're describing in your book?

[01:17:52] And, in that context, what do you think humans need to protect?

[01:17:57] **Charles Eisenstein:** Yeah, this is a huge topic. I wrote three essays on AI. Well, more, but the, the final three, the first one was called Intelligence in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, which is a reference to the Walter Benjamin essay on the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction.

[01:18:17] The second was called The Staggering Implications of Nondeterministic AI, and the third is called Virtual Intelligence. And the idea, the-- in, in that last one, I observed the difference, in, in the subjective experience of listening to recorded music compared to listening to somebody sing to you, or that experience that you have if you go to a concert and the band is just going through their playlist.

[01:18:54] Except sometimes you go to a concert and you're like: "Whoa, they're actually playing to me right now. They're playing to this audience. There's a relationship here." It meets you on a different level. Music is more than a series of notes. It's also part of a relationship. And so when you interact with AI, it gives every impression that it's feeling something.

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[01:19:19] In fact, it might even say that it's feeling something, but it isn't feeling anything so at some point you feel cheated. It would be as if you were in a relationship with somebody and they were... I mean, this happens, like psychopaths and narcissists sometimes make a very careful study of the expressions, even the micro expressions and the intonations and the things that people say when they feel something, when they feel compassion, when they feel joy, when they feel sorrow.

[01:19:54] They can give a very good imitation of, "Oh yeah, I feel you. You know? Oh yeah, that just gave me chills. Oh yeah." But it didn't. And at some point, imagine your relationship with somebody like that, and at some point you realize that they hadn't been feeling anything the whole time, that they'd been putting on a show.

[01:20:13] Well, I think that people are starting to wake up to the fact that AI, that there's an-- the-- to an emptiness there, that because it gives such a good imitation of being present for you, it temporarily assuages the longing for connection, the longing for s-- for presence that has been so attenuated in our current, technological landscape.

[01:20:48] We're so separated. so it gives that temporary feeling, but underneath it, it's a delusion. There isn't somebody there actually feeling something. You're alone. But yeah, the power of a word isn't just the symbolic content or the semantic content of a word. It is inextricable from the moment in which it is spoken.

[01:21:18] The same word that is true right now, the same sentence that is true right now, if I said that to somebody else, it may not be true It, i-i-- the, the truth is more than the meaning

[01:21:30] **Nate Hagens:** And for that reason, AI separates us further.

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[01:21:34] **Charles Eisenstein:** Mm-hmm. Yeah. And I use AI all the time. It's a very powerful tool. I'm not anti-AI.

[01:21:39] Yeah. But it's just like the question with measurement, like wha-what... We're, we're-- This is a new tool, and the most profound invention since the printing press. We have no idea yet-

[01:21:49] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah ...

[01:21:50] **Charles Eisenstein:** really what it's for.

[01:21:51] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. This is a whole separate conversation. Yeah. So, if you have a few more minutes, or quite a few more minutes, I have some closing questions that I ask all my guests, their, in their first, appearance on the podcast.

[01:22:08] What can someone listening to this episode do now, today, this week, this month, to help address some of the things we brought up in this conversation? I often finish that sentence by asking, "Or is it all up to politicians and leaders?" I think I know what you're gonna say to that. But, what, what advice do you have just broadly about people tuning in here who are aware of all the things?

[01:22:37] **Charles Eisenstein:** I don't know if-- what you should be doing, and I'm speaking to you, Nate, but I'm also speaking to any of you who might be listening here. Like, how would I know better than you in the totality of your situation what's, what you should be doing? but what I can say is that if you have-- if anything I've said resonates, and has awoken a new realization in you or strengthened one, or had any influence at all, whatever you've taken in has maybe changed you a little bit brought something up, down-regulated something, I don't know, and who you are as a chooser will be different.

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[01:23:28] Anytime you take in new information, your choices will change, or you'll have an opportunity to make different choices because now you have a different context. I'm not really saying anything here.

[01:23:42] **Nate Hagens:** No, you are, I think, because earlier in the conversation, you said we-- the, the way that culture's gonna change is if some per...

[01:23:50] I'm paraphrasing, if some percentage of those hundred and fifty people at the musical chairs are asking questions and- Yeah ... being open to different things. So- Right. Yeah.

[01:24:02] **Charles Eisenstein:** Right. Many of us have had experiences that just don't fit into who we have been, and we have mechanisms to sequester those experiences, to preserve the way we've been living, the way we understand who we are, our identity, our relationships.

[01:24:27] We sequester inconvenient truths. And I'm not just talking about paranormal stuff, I'm talking about it could be like relationship truths, you know. Like us, we do this all the time. Maybe you're, you know, married to somebody who on some level you, you know is, lying to you or you know isn't the right mate for you.

[01:24:51] But that is very inconvenient to acknowledge, so you keep that sequestered away and pretend otherwise. But at some point, the truth that you've kept out invades, and you might have a moment where you're like, "Okay, am I gonna bring this in? Am I gonna really act from all that I know?" And so many of us are facing this moment.

[01:25:17] And so this question of what can you do or what should you do, I would say act... Like I would say find that thing that you've sequestered and bring it in.

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Find the thing that's ready to come in. Find the thing that you are tired of living in denial of, and it's gonna feel maybe s– scary, but it's also gonna feel fresh.

[01:25:48] You're gonna have that feeling of, "Yeah, I get to be, I get to be the person that corresponds to this also. I'm gonna bring this in." And wherever that takes you, that's gonna be a good place.

[01:26:02] **Nate Hagens:** That's good advice. Scary advice, but probably, good. Would you change your recommendations or have other ones for young humans in their teens and 20s who are becoming aware of the Iran war and climate change and energy constraints and such?

[01:26:22] **Charles Eisenstein:** To young people, I would say trust your sense that reality as, as it has been presented to you, is much smaller than what is really real and available. Trust your intuition.

[01:26:39] **Nate Hagens:** I can't help but ask what happens when intuition runs smack into a wall of science and there's, a, a dissonance?

[01:26:50] **Charles Eisenstein:** Well, sometimes something might feel like intuition, but it's actually wishful thinking.

[01:26:54] So there's– Okay ... a, you know, a process of humility and honesty with yourself. I mean, ultimately it all comes down to that. Right. You know? It's not about what you have chosen to believe. It's about the process by which you choose that. And so the ancient spiritual teaching, know thyself, comes up. Be honest with yourself, you know?

[01:27:19] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. So there's a distinction between wishful thinking and deep, true intuition of the body and such.

[01:27:30] **Charles Eisenstein:** Mm–hmm.

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[01:27:30] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. So, what do you care most about in the world, Charles?

[01:27:35] **Charles Eisenstein:** Honestly, probably I would say my children.

[01:27:38] **Nate Hagens:** For some reason I didn't know you had children.

[01:27:40] **Charles Eisenstein:** I have four, four children.

[01:27:41] Yeah.

[01:27:42] **Nate Hagens:** Wow.

[01:27:42] **Charles Eisenstein:** Yeah. But as far as most, I guess, like, the question already contains an assumption that there's some way to rank and order these things. In any given moment, what I care about the most could be whatever is presenting itself to me for my care.

[01:27:59] **Nate Hagens:** So when you previously said whatever thing is changing or you're curious about, that is a change that is necessary and would be your advice.

[01:28:12] I think I might have to change the language in my common scripts and words, to be less separated, origin, or less mechanistic. I'll think about it- Yeah ... 'cause I've been asking these same questions for years now. If you could-- here's another one. 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 of humanity and the biosphere?

[01:28:43] **Charles Eisenstein:** I will answer that, but first I'll say that the stories that, that people have embroiled themselves in, the story of us versus them, the story of self and other, the story of separation, these need to be played out to

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their dramatic conclusion because we have, on some level, chosen them for a reason. You know, going back to Daniel Quinn, this whole project of civilization wasn't just some giant mistake, and it wasn't Gaia's error to give humans all of the capacities that we have.

[01:29:22] We are in our time potentially completing an era of human development that includes all of the stories that run our world today. The, you know, the story of, cycles of vengeance, for example, all these stories that we've talked about. So in a way, I'm, I wouldn't interfere, except the way that I would interfere and do interfere, and if I could wave a magic wand, would do so on even a bigger scale.

[01:29:58] If I could whisper in everybody's ear at a certain moment when they are facing a choice that they are unconscious of, I could say, "Hey, here's what is actually happening right now. Here's something to add to your field of awareness." That's what I would do. 'cause I trust-- It's like this fundamental trust that when you have access to new information, that who you are changes.

[01:30:32] When you... This is, in one, in, in the climate book, actually, I, quote, Kogi, who was speaking of the devastation being wrought in the coastal areas of Colombia, the draining of wetlands, you know, the development. And he said, "If you knew she could feel, you would stop." If you knew she could feel, you would stop. So much of the violence that we visit on each other and on the biosphere, on all beings, is because we objectify them.

[01:31:10] We make them into an object. We separate them from self. Self feels and experiences and suffers and experiences joy. An object is just a thing. So when we objectify other races or women or whatever, or economically objectify people and make them into just customers or sources of value, then we treat them as such.

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[01:31:36] When you actually tune into somebody's living subjectivity, like, whoa, there's an actual being here, and they're feeling just as I feel, then you incorporate that information. You cannot abuse them anymore. You cannot exploit them anymore. It doesn't feel good. and so when the Kogi said that, he was saying kind of the same thing.

[01:32:00] If you just knew, if you just understood, then you wouldn't do this anymore. So this is, you know-- so if I could wave my magic wand, I would bring that moment of revelation of that experience to somebody. But this is something that we can do without a magic wand, through our interactions.

[01:32:21] **Nate Hagens:** Thank you, Charles, for being such a deep thinker and feeler. You're working on a new book, but I just wanna ask you, before we close, if you were to come back here a year from now, like, what is one question that you're really, that's really alive for you right now? A research question or something you're watching in the world that you might wanna return and have a deep dive on that topic.

[01:32:52] Is there anything that fits that at this moment?

[01:32:55] **Charles Eisenstein:** There's cer-certainly a lot of things I'm really curious about and, learning about, you know, like how power operates in the world, and which of these exiled phenomena are actually ready to come into consensus reality? Which of those are we ready for, and which are not yet ready?

[01:33:26] And what of myself is ready to share with the world and what is the world ready for? And this is not to make myself into something unique or special. I think everybody has this question and this yearning to be received and well used. So those are some of the questions that I'm holding right now.

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[01:33:53] **Nate Hagens:** Thank you. Do you have any closing thoughts or comments for the people watching and listening who understand and agree with or are at least curious about what you've laid out today?

[01:34:06] **Charles Eisenstein:** I would, invite people to attend to a sense that maybe you have, that even though I am now separated by time and space from you, I'm saying these words, you know, on some day in August, I don't know what day today is, the twelfth or something, and you're hearing them now. So the rational mind might say, "Well, Charles isn't really speaking to me."

[01:34:42] But maybe some other part of you has the irrational feeling that I'm speaking to you And how could that be when, you know, there's many thousands of people listening, and how could I tune into just one person? Like, the rational mind just discards this. But there's a part of you that irrationally feels maybe or maybe not , that I'm speaking to you, that there's A connection

[01:35:22] And we've become rightly cynical about that feeling because, you know, so much of what is broadcast through our screens, especially in the age of AI, there isn't anybody there and they're not speaking to you. I mean, that's like the big lie of the broadcast media. it subverts the natural... Like, you know, you look, you hear music coming from a box and you look, you know, look behind it.

[01:35:52] If you show it to a Stone Age person, they might look behind it. Where's the musician? Where's the speaker? Open it up. Where are they? You know, like the... It's real, it really messes with our minds. So we're cynical and we hesitate to give our intimate attention to something.

[01:36:20] So through all of that, maybe there's still part of you that feels a connection here.

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[01:36:30] **Nate Hagens:** I do know what you're saying. And, for my part, about 5% of this conversation, I felt like you were speaking directly to me. I won't share which parts because they're personal, but this was helpful to me.

[01:36:46] So– Yeah ... Thank you. Great to see you again. And, Charles Eisenstein, to be continued, my friend.

[01:36:53] **Charles Eisenstein:** Yeah. Thank you, Nate.

[01:36:55] **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.

[01:37:09] This show is hosted by me, Nate Hagens, edited by No Troublemakers Media, and produced by Misty Stinnett and Lizzy Sirianni. Our production team also includes Leslie Batt-Lutz, Brady Heyen, Julia Maxwell, Gabriella Sleiman, and Grace Brunfelt. Thank you for listening, and we'll see you on the next episode