The Psychological Drivers of the Metacrisis
A conversation between Iain McGilchrist, John Vervaeke and Daniel Schmachtenberger, recorded at Merton College, Oxford, in September 2023.

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Schmachtenberger:
So we're here today to discuss, I believe the title of this will be called something like, the Psychological Drivers of the Metacrisis, and what possible responses might look like. So I'll start briefly with, what do we mean by metacrisis, and then ask you to share some of the short version of the models that you have shared in great depth in your writing and your work, and ask you to also share opening frames so that people who aren't already familiar with your work can come along. Though everybody should, if they're interested in this, go deeper. There's a lot of resources to go deeper.

I'm also not assuming since we're—we all just know each other a tiny bit enough to have a sense of shared interest, but not enough that we've already done this. This is extemporaneous, which is part of what makes it very interesting to me.

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So I'm not assuming that either of you share the exact same assessment of the metacrisis. That's not implicit in you being here. But I know from our conversations you both share a sense that the state of the world has problems and impending risks that are serious, that are not automatically resolving themselves, that are novel in history.

So we can just say the challenging state of the world. What in the nature of human mind, in the nature of human conditioning, experience—we might even find that the term" psychology" or "cognitive drivers" are insufficient, which is fine—has brought us here? And what might a different relationship to human mind, psychology, cognition look like that might allow a more viable, better future?

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So just briefly on the metacrisis frame: before World War II, there was no risk that we could very quickly destroy the entire habitability of human civilization. That was brought into being with very powerful technology: nuclear weapons, and for the first time ever we had the ability to make a series of bad decisions and radically change the possibility space of the world.

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Before the Industrial Revolution, we didn't really have the capability of destroying the biosphere at scale. That's not as fast. That takes a few hundred years, but we're at the place where the planetary boundaries in terms of species extinction, in terms of chemical pollution, in terms of many planetary boundaries are being crossed. The Stockholm Resilience Centre published its update to the planetary boundaries framework just a few days ago that showed of the nine major boundaries they've identified, we've radically crossed six already, which means—who knows? If we were to change the direction already, what would happen?

And that was the result of the Industrial Revolution and the technology that it made possible, moving us from half a billion people before the Industrial Revolution to eight billion people, and increasing the resource consumption per capita by about a hundred X in the

industrialized world. So sixteen times the population, one hundred times the resource consumption per population. Obviously without advanced tech, we couldn't do that.

So there's something about the crises that we're facing—and then obviously AI and synthetic biology and drones and cyber weapons and the radically complicated six-continent supply chain—that is all a very novel human technological development that wasn't true in any previous age. Without human technology, there is no global existential risk that is human induced. There might be a meteor or something, but not anthropogenic catastrophic risk.

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So we're in a unique position in time. The polycrisis is a frame that a lot of people have heard that says, rather than just focus on climate change or just coral or just species extinction or just nuclear, we have to focus on all these issues, and we have to recognize that they can inter-effect each other, that one of these issues getting worse can cascade into other ones, and that sometimes the solution to one can make other ones worse.

The answer in World War II to how do we not have nuclear war was mutually assured destruction and the Bretton Woods global financial system and a whole bunch of, like, the whole post-war order—which did mean we didn't have nuclear war between superpowers, but it was also part of what led to the six-continent supply chain and exponential growth connected to a linear materials economy that have pushed us to the planetary boundaries. And so we can see solutions to some problems can end up leading to other ones.

The metacrisis frame—the slight distinction from that terminology from polycrisis—is that we're not just looking at the mini-crises and how they can cascade, but that there are underlying dynamics that give rise to them.

Obviously, humans are animals. We're part of nature. We're also pretty obviously unique. When you fly into London or into New York or whatever and you look at the world, you see the Anthropocene in a way that's—you know, the next most environment-modifying creatures or things like beavers. This is obviously a radically different scale of environment modification. And so there's something about human technology that arises from something about the human mind, both our capacity to create it and then also how we utilize it.

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So some people look at the origin of the metacrisis starting with stone tools. Some look at it starting with the agricultural revolution, the plough or the Industrial Revolution or various places that I think they're all interesting. But if we simply say, we have a bunch of risks to civilization's ability to continue, to continue well, that are real, worth considering, and different than they were historically, it's also worth stating that most early civilizations don't still exist. There is no more Egyptian or Ottoman or Byzantine or Mayan empire. And the collapse of those civilizations has been academically studied, but they weren't global civilizations.

So there is some precedent that civilizations have a life cycle. We have the first six-continent global civilization, meaning the tech that is recording this can't be made in any country in the world. The internet that is broadcasting this to people requires this global civilization to produce.

So, metacrisis. I think everyone is aware of—there's a lot of risks that we face, and we can look at the economic drivers in terms of perverse incentives and externalized costs. We can look at the game theoretic rivalrous drivers in terms of arms races and tragedy of the commons. We can look at the theory of technology, the way that technology itself ends up shaping the mind. We can obviously look at things deep in the nature of human psychology, our value systems, our cognition. It's pretty clear when we look around that none of the other animals or plants are causing possible self-induced extinction of planetary systems, right? There's no planetary boundaries as a result of the activity of deer or algae or oak trees.

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So there's something unique about humans. Is this innate to human nature, and there's no way of escaping it? Is this something that human nature can do, but is not the only thing it can do, that can be conditioned, that could be conditioned differently? This is what we're here to explore today.

Iain obviously, your book, *The Master and His Emissary*, kind of answers this question in a way, which is—though it's coming from a different angle—getting the master and his emissary wrong could be said to be the cause of all the crises that we face, the situation we're in. For those who don't already have that framework, do you want to share your introductory thoughts on the human condition that has brought us here?

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McGilchrist:
Yes, I agree with you wholeheartedly that we need to look for underlying causes of the whole pattern of events that are not just unfortunate things that happen to happen, you know. We were doing very well, and then suddenly people said the climate was changing and the seas were polluted.

And so there's a whole range of events that can be traced back to the inevitable consequence of a certain way of looking at the world. And that way of looking at the world is, in my view, associated with and driven by a model of the world that is present to the left hemisphere in a way that is not the case with the right hemisphere.

In brief, the right hemisphere seems to be more in touch with presence, with what actually experience comes to us and what we inhabit, whereas the left hemisphere is providing a representation, no longer the presence, but a map, a program, a theory, a diagram, but something abstracted, categorical, removed from and not having the constancy of the characteristics of the world that it is intending to map.

Now, I mean, I should say that to anybody who doesn't know my work, you've probably heard that everything to do with hemispheres is wrong, and that it's outmoded and science is got past it. This is not true. If you don't know my work, then forget almost everything you think you know about hemisphere differences. They're not the ones that you were told. But there are—although we've got the differences largely wrong, not entirely wrong, but mainly wrong—that doesn't mean to say that there are no differences and it wouldn't be important to find out what these differences are.

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And that's something I've said for about thirty years. And in short, the difference comes down to ultimately a mode of attention, which is an evolutionary development that goes back pretty much as far as we can trace it, we think back to trilobites and possibly even beyond. So this is something in which there needs to be two ways of attending to the world that are both very important but appear to be mutually incompatible.

One is that with which we grasp things. We need to get things in order to survive. We need to get food. We need to handle twigs to build a nest or sticks to build a shelter. Whatever it is, we need to be able to latch onto something precisely, target it, and get it. And that's so important that in a way, one whole half of one's brain is largely geared to this particular end—that of power.

But if you pay only that attention to the world, then you will be very vulnerable, because you won't see the predator, you won't see your conspecifics. You won't see everything else that's going on of which you need to be aware. And so effectively, this is a difference in which one hemisphere plays a very narrowly targeted, precise attention to detail in order to grab it, and another kind of attention which is broad, open, sustained and vigilant and on the lookout for everything else, putting it very simply.

Those two kinds of attention change what we find. No neurologist in the world would dispute that the two hemispheres attend differently. It's very clear they do. And no philosopher will dispute the fact that attention changes what it is you see. So at the end of this, very obviously, if we attend in two different ways, we see two different worlds. I'm going to grossly simplify here, but effectively in one—that is, the left hemisphere—the world is made up of little bits that attract attention and there are things that we're already targeted on, because we know we want them. They are isolated and decontextualized; they belong to categories; they're abstracted and effectively lifeless.

Whereas in the right hemisphere it sees that everything is ultimately connected. It's connected obviously to the context of things that are immediately around it or are particularly powerful, but it's ultimately connected to everything beyond that, that the world is never fixed in the way the left hemisphere needs to fix things or to grab them. It's not built up out of slices or pieces. that it is in fact a whole seamless flow, a very important word. And in this right hemisphere, implicit meaning is understood, because that's contextualized. And part of the context of that is emotion, the body, other people, the world at large.

So you've got a kind of mechanistic, reductionist world subtended by the left hemisphere—which is just a representation or a useful diagram— and you've got a living, complex world on the other hand, which has characteristics which are very much harder to pin down, that involve all the richness and meaning in life.

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Now what I believe—and in *The Master and His Emissary*, my earlier book, I traced in the second part a sort of path through the history of the West from the ancient Greeks through the modern time, in which there were rises and fallings of civilization, and in which what happened was that in each civilization, the two ways of seeing the world were used fruitfully together.

And this is not a difference just between science and the arts. Science needs both kinds of attention. The arts need both kinds of attention. And this is how they flourish to begin with, and they're highly creative, but over a length of time they overreached themselves. They became too big. They became stereotyped. They needed global administration that could be rolled out to parts of an empire.

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And so we entered into very much like that of the left hemisphere. And very soon the civilization—either the Greek or the Roman—collapsed after this movement appeared. I mean, a complex story, but that's it in outline.

And I think that we're in another, a third wave of this, if you like, in the West, which began in the Renaissance with an incredible flourishing, an almost unequaled anywhere in the world at any time of everything, of interest in the sciences, in the heavens, and in the arts, in sculpture, in music, and in poetry. This is an incredibly rich time.

And then from about the end of the seventeenth century, very roughly, with the scientific revolution, we began to believe that we could understand everything in terms of mechanisms. And this was a useful way to think, and indeed, let me be the first to say that we have benefited from it in many ways. We have developments that very few of us would wish to be without as a result of it. But unfortunately it led to a philosophical error. And it's not just, as it were, a philosophical error in an abstract way. It's one that runs deep to the nature of how we experience the world. That is: we believe that the world is made up of parts, and that we find reality by going down and down and down until we've got bits that are almost identical to one another, whereas in fact almost the opposite is true, that everything happens out of the coming together into complex wholes.

Now, when I say coming together, I'm suggesting that we do actually temporarily start from—temporarily—from parts, but we don't. And in our minds in our left hemispheres, we start from parts, but in reality, things are whole, and what we call parts are wholes of another level, and they can't be understood only by the parts. This is a theory which is sometimes called a gestalt theory, because the Germans have this word gestalt which we don't have an exact equivalent of, which means a whole which cannot be accounted for by the sum of the pieces, the parts.

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And we've lost that insight, and I think that what has happened is that a combination of factors, and it's not exhaustive, but the rise of capitalism, the development of empires, both geographical empires and commercial empires, thinking in terms of global generalizations, have led us away from the the reality which is always unique, implicit, wrapped up with value, not just being sort of facts on their own, which is not to say, by the way, that I don't have any truck myself with the idea that we will just make it all up to suit ourselves. No, that's not the case. But nonetheless, reality is something we experience as a relationship between us observing and whatever existence is observed. And this goes both ways. We are affected by it, and we affect what we see. We literally change what there is to see.

Now that vision is quite different from the one we have,that, if only we can master more and more, using a left-hemisphere kind of mechanism, we will achieve power, and power will make us happy. But the roots of happiness are very other to that. I'm sure we'll come on for that. But effectively we think we've accounted for everything where we think in terms of matter. But much more important are values, the sense of purpose. And as far as I'm concerned, the sense of the sacred.

So that's really where we're at, and I think recovering some of what we've lost is critical to making any progress. We can't just stick sticking plasters on the cancer. We need to eradicate the cause and change the way in which we think about ourselves, the world, and how we relate to it.

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Schmachtenberger:
Before we move to John's opening comments, for those who aren't familiar, would you explain why you use the term master and emissary?

McGilchrist:
Okay. This is a kind of a fable in which there is a wise spiritual master who looks after a small community so well that it flourishes and grows. After a while, he realizes he can't look vafter all the business of the community himself, not just because there's now too much of it, which is part of it, but also because if he's to maintain his overall vision and to see the whole, he mustn’t get distracted by detailed, bureaucratic concerns.

So he appoints his brightest and best to be his emissary and go about it and do the administrative stuff, a high level assistant. And unfortunately, that assistant is hubristic. Knowing much less than the master, he thinks he knows it all, and he thinks, in fact, of course, he is the real master. And because of his lack of knowledge of what it is he doesn't know, he, the master, and the civilization fall into ruins.

And that obviously is an allegory which could be applied, I believe can be directly applied, to the idea of relationship between these hemispheres because one of them actually sees much more, is wiser. And you know, I’m not just using figures of speech. We know—and in the book I demonstrate how we know—that the right hemisphere is not just more emotionally and socially intelligent, which many people might assume is the case, but also more cognitively intelligent, so that. where we have some evidence about what has happened to somebody’s IQ—we have measurements before and after, say, a stroke—where there has been a significant drop in IQ, the insult is almost always in the right hemisphere. So it's very important that the right hemisphere should remain in the position of the master. And as long as the hemisphere follows the direction of the master that sees more, it's very helpful and useful. It's a good servant, but a very poor master.

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Schmachtenberger:
So the question of why in the global civilization, the emissary became dominant relative to the master is something I want to get back to, but thank you very much. That was a great opening, and something I should have shared in the opening is, I have tremendous respect for both Iain and John's work. Both have done these kind of very deep histories of Western

philosophy and very meaningful worldviews that address the nature of mind, the meaning crisis.

And yeah, I'm very honored to be in the conversation. That's why I wanted to get both of your perspectives on the underlying drivers of the metacrisis that are inside of human mind, experience, and cognition.

So, John, similarly, I would love to hear your opening thoughts. You've done a very deep presentation of what you call the meaning crisis.

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Vervaeke:
Yeah. And what I'd like to do as well, as I'm doing my presentation, I'd like to show some deep lines of convergence with Iain. Iain and I have spoken before. We've often realized that there's a lot of convergence, and one of the things I'm hoping to do is in this with you, is for us to unpack that and more, because we had more limited conversations in the past.

McGilchrist:
Yes.

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Vervaeke:
So I'm going to start—I will get back to the history in a minute—I want to start with the present. We're in the UK. In 2019, a national survey, a very comprehensive survey, eighty percent of people found that their lives are meaningless. Interesting. Forty-three percent think that's because of financial reasons. And that goes against a lot of the data that we have, that once your finances get you out of poverty, they do not contribute very much to meaning in life.

Thirty-four percent seem to be getting a little bit closer, at least in an intuitive way, when they attribute their lack of meaning to anxiety. And let's just be very careful about this. Anxiety isn't the same thing as fear. Fear, you have a definite object, something the left hemisphere would very much, "Oh. There's the definitive thing." I could point my attention to it and focus on it hard.

Anxiety tends to be more atmospheric. It is generally associated with the right hemisphere. And so what you've got with anxiety is you've got a nebulous sense of disconnection, and this brings with it a sense of concern, arousal, stress. And of course, horror is exactly the aesthetic of when you feel that you're losing a grip on reality. So anxiety is on the same arc as horror. Most of our horror movies are not actually horror movies. They're just startle movies where somebody, something jumps out at you and scares you. But genuine horror movies, they give you a sense of what I'm talking about. No, anxiety is low-grade horror in that sense.

So people are drifting along. And then what we can ask is, well, does that have significant consequences? And we know from the extensive literature on meaning in life—not meaning *of* life, which I'll make a distinction in a few minutes—but meaning in life or related psychological literature, especially the work of Kelly Allen, the sense of belonging, if you

don't have meaning in life, if you don't have a sense of belonging, you're in serious trouble. You're in serious trouble psychologically, physiologically, socially, probably predictably your overall health, probably your socioeconomic status. It's predictive of lots of stuff going bad. Of course, it's ultimately predictive of anxiety and depression, which, by the way, are flip sides of the same overall disorientation, disconnection problem. [00:24:17:05] It's predictive, of course, of suicide. Right. Although Tatjana Schnell has found evidence that people don't have to go through clinical depression, contrary to what we think. They can just experience meaninglessness and go right to suicide without going through clinical depression. So just on its own, it's predictive too.

So eighty percent of the population has this state that we have pretty comprehensive evidence is very deleterious to their health. And then you have a lot of sort of cultural sense that this is happening. So the book I did with Christopher Mastropietro and Filip Miscevic on zombies, why did zombies become so prevalent? And the idea is, zombies are a myth-grab that has arisen to sort of express—not necessarily articulate or explain, but express—the meaning crisis. Well, think about them, right? That they lead, by definition, meaningless lives. They've lost intelligibility, they can't speak, they move in collectivity, but they form no communities. They drift aimlessly. Unlike other monsters, they don't have any supernatural connection. They're just us decayed, right, and perpetually decayed. They're a perversion of the Christian myth of resurrection, because they do not come back to the fuller life. They come back to the lesser life. And then they got linked to another Christian myth, the apocalypse, which was supposed to be the renewal of the world, but instead it's the ongoing, endless decadence of the world. So the zombie mythology is a cultural expression of this.

And you can also see all kinds of symptoms. Of course, we have the mental health issues. Deaths of despair in the United States, in the UK are becoming serious, serious problems. Related phenomena: the UK has set up this Orwellian thing called the Ministry of Loneliness, which is like—because the number of close friends we've been having has gone down. And Eberstadt has shown in her book *How the West Really Lost God* is, this also has what you might call philosophical, even spiritual consequences, because there's a direct correlation between how much people live atomically and alone, and how secular the society has become, and how—or how sort of shallow people's ontology is. I'm not sure about her causal picture, but the correlation is just undeniable.

So this is having huge effects. You get it in the virtual exodus. People want to live in the virtual world rather than the real world. They express this as an explicit thing. And I think we can get a bit of insight into what's going on, what's missing in the meaning crisis, if we—what are they finding there that they're not finding here?

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But let me just finish a couple more symptoms. We've got the weird political paradox that everybody feels disillusioned and disenfranchised, but the political sphere has been now reappropriated and filled with religious fervor and symbolic religious behavior. And we've given over identity in the meaning of life to our political ideologies, even though we've lost faith in all of the institutions, this weird thing.

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You have positive symptoms, though. You have the mindfulness revolution. People are seeking fundamental transformation in attention, awareness. You have the rise of ancient wisdom philosophies. There are more Stoics now alive than were ever alive in the Roman Empire, right? And of course you have the ongoing thing, basically from Schopenhauer on, of the increasing investigations into Asiatic philosophies, in which philosophy and spirituality, knowledge and wisdom were not separated.

And so that whole symptomology—let's go back to—to the video game. What are they getting in a video game that they're obviously lacking in the real world? Well, what they have is they have a narrative structure. There's a narrative structure there that tells them what the story is, and what part they play in it, and orients them towards a purpose. So purpose.

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They have a nomological structure. What do I mean by that? They have a sense of —that there's a set of rules—laws and rules—that make sense of that world, so they understand how that world works. This is intelligibility or coherence. Second value: purpose, coherence.

Third, what else is going on in there? Well, they have a normative structure. They know how to self-transcend. They can level up. There's a way in which self-transcendence is available to them. And fourth, they get into the flow state, they get into a state where they feel dynamically coupled and connected to their environment.

So what do we have? These are the four factors for meaning in life. These are the things that you have when you have meaning in life. And contrary to what our culture says, purpose is one of them. But purpose is not the synonym for all of them, nor is it the most important of the dimensions. You need to have purpose, but it's not the same as meaning in life. Nor is it, right, sufficient for meaning in life.

The next, coherence. The world can't be absurd to people, right?

Third, you need significance. What that means is you need something that gives you a normative staircase, something that gives you a way by which you can get in touch with the really real. We've got from the psychedelic renaissance and the work in mystical experience—and I'm involved in that—that people seek out for its own sake, this relationship with the really real, the more real. And once they get it, they are willing to change their whole lives so that they are in deeper contact with that really real. And Yaden has shown their lives actually by many objective measures get better. So that matters.

The third one, the flow state. The flow state is a very powerful—and Csikszentmihalyi has done a lot of work on that, we could perhaps talk about that—the flow state is a very powerful version of the fourth factor, which is mattering. People need to feel that they are connected to something that has a reality and a value beyond their own individual existence. So you define this, you ask somebody, What do you want to exist even if you don't, and how much of a difference do you make to it now?

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You could grab all of these things together and they all fold into this connectedness in sensemaking. We're connected to the world, we're ordered to the world. The world makes

fundamental sense to us. We are fitted to the world. We belong in the world of belonging—sense of belonging, sense of meaning in life. My proposal is that that can ultimately be understood as reflecting sort of the core of human cognition.

I talk about the core four. I think we've split them up for analytic reasons, right? Which is attention, consciousness, working memory, and fluid general intelligence—but I think they're all just four different dimensions of an underlying core thing, and there's good functional evidence, behavioral evidence and anatomical evidence, for that claim. I won't review all of that, but I'll just take it that that could be agreed without much controversy.

What I think that those, that general ability, that general intelligence reflects, is it reflects two meta-problems that you have to solve whenever you're solving any problem you're trying to solve in the world. And I understand there's two kinds of problems. There's problems that are solved by having something, controlling it, and there are problems that are solved by becoming something, Fromm's distinction, which maps on a lot closer to the left and right in many ways.

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And we'll get back to that. But what I think these two major problems are, are—and think about your intuition. We tend to attribute intelligence to a creature the more we can see reliable evidence that it can anticipate its world, because, of course, an ounce of prevention, right. The more you can anticipate the world, the more powerful your causal intervention. If I can avoid the tiger, that's way less costly than fighting the tiger, just to put—right? And so the thing is, as you push out sort of the light cone of your anticipation of the world, hat you get is you get an explosion of the amount of information, all the possible alternative pathways to get into your goal. This just explodes in possibility.

So even to take a very limited case, here's my initial state. I'm starting a game of chess. I'm trying to get to the end. All the number of alternative pathways outnumbers the number of atomic particles in the universe. And this is one of the core problems, going back to Newell and Simon that is at the heart of the AGI project. Right. And so this is what you can't do. You can't check all that—like, think about all the things I could pay attention to. It's overwhelming. Think about all the things I could remember. Think about all the different combinations of sequences, of sounds and movements and gestures. It's overwhelming. And yet what we're all doing is, we're zeroing in on it right now.

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And what that means is, it's not that you check everything. You can't. That would take the rest of life, so somehow—and this is really important—you ignore most of what's relevant—Sorry, you ignore most of what's *irrelevant*. You ignore it, and you zero in on what's relevant.

Now that, that's not cold calculation. And this is, this is a matter of care. We're different from AGI, still—for how long is something we could perhaps—we care about the information we're processing; computers don't. We care about whether or not it's true; computers don't, right? So it's not just that relevance is not just a calculation. It's a matter of caring. It's a matter of commitment. Because whenever I'm doing this, I'm taking a chance. I have to commit to this because when I'm paying attention to Iain, I'm not paying attention to what's behind me.

There's a cost. There's always a cost. I'm always—So there's an existential risk that whenever I'm doing—so there's caring, committed connectedness. And notice relevance is a connecting relation. It's like biological fittedness, right? Relevance isn't *in* the object; it isn't *in* the subject. Relevance is that that would bind the subjective and the objective together. I call it "transjective," right? And that—so the name for all of that I use is this *religio*—the sense of binding that carries with it a sense of profound meaning. And I put it to you that when people have access to profound meaning in all of these dimensions, they get a sense of the sacred, an inexhaustible fount of intelligibility that is not just an intellectual affair, but this connected living affair.

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But here's the problem: The very processes that make you intelligently adaptive make you perpetually prone to self-deception. This is my reinterpretation of the first knowable truth, right? Because the very process that gets me to be adaptive by focusing in and binding myself—and that I take, I mean this seriously, this is normative for me—I'm bound. This is what I should do. I should be paying attention to Iain. It means I'm ignoring so much. And very often what we ignore can turn out to be the relevant information that we actually need to solve whatever problems we're facing.

So we are perpetually prone to self-deception. And I want to talk just a little bit about, this is at multiple levels, but what that means is—and this is a trade-off relationship—whenever you try and solve one way in which you're being deceived, you open yourself up to an alternative way with which you can be, right? So I should pay attention to—no, no, no. And then I'll lose the—I'm always in a trade-off between, what should I foreground, what should I background? Right?

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And so it's this very complex process. It's very complex; it's very dynamic; it's co-created by the world and me, and also me and other people: very complex, very dynamic, very adaptive, very prone to self-deceptive, self-destructive behavior, both individually and collectively. So cultures across the world have had to deal with this really tricky problem: How do we ameliorate this self-deception without undermining the adaptive connectedness? Because we can't just shut it off, and we have all these trade-offs. We can't just pursue simple panaceas that will—"Just do this!" So we have to get this complex—I call it an ecology of practices: practices that intervene in our cognition, our attention, our awareness in multiple places. You know, checks and balances, very—like, think about the eightfold path of Buddhism. It's this complex set of practices and they're represented by a spoked wheel because they all interconnect and they're all self-organizing.

And when you do that, you need to set that within a community that homes you, because you need people who have been practicing it. Because this is not a matter just a theory; this is a matter of transformation. And they need to be able to guide you along the way. And then that community has to be set in a worldview that legitimates it—a worldview that legitimates it.

So another way of understanding the meaning crisis, is that unlike most cultures, we don't know where to go to cultivate wisdom. We don't know where to go to ameliorate that self-deceptive, self-destructive behavior, foolishness. We don't know where to go to enhance

the connectedness, the *religio*, so it gets us into deep connection. And we used to have a worldview that gave us both of that: this is how you connect deeper and this is how you overcome your fallenness—I'll use the metaphor—and that was the sacred, the sacred canopy. The religious frameworks were the places that gave us worldviews, traditions and ecologies of practices for addressing this.

[00:38:41:09]
And because of the Protestant Reformation, the scientific revolution—actually, I would even start it in medieval Nominalism—

McGilchrist:
Yes, I agree.

Vervaeke:
Thank you, and a lot of things. And then this has just been put on methamphetamine, basically, since the advent of some of the hyper-technologies. We are in a position where we don't have a sacred canopy. We don't have a—I asked my students, Where do you go for information? They have their phones. Where do you go for science? They're sort of hesitant, postmodern-concerned, "Oh yes, I go to science for knowledge," right? That's originally what the word *scientia* actually just meant was knowledge. Then I ask them where they go for wisdom, and they don't have an answer. And they know that without wisdom, meaning in life is tremendously at risk.

McGilchrist:
There are so many things in that that I would love to respond to, but I don't, I mean, perhaps, Daniel, you would like to talk.

[00:39:42:21]
Schmachtenberger:
Yeah, I mean, I think we get to play with relevance-realization in real time. I would like to go into zombies and video games and all kinds of things, but feeling into the highest useful—the questions on my mind—and I'd like to hear what's on yours—so, thank you. And both having shared kind of opening frames, the top question for both of you is etiology.

So how did we get here? How did we get to ubiquitous meaninglessness and no where to go for wisdom? How did we get to the master and the emissary backwards, culturally? And what is the relationship between this interior psychological phenomena and the objective environmental catastrophes, nuclear risk, AI risk, economic issues that we have in the world?

So how did we get here, and how does the interior and the exterior relate? What are the kind of causal dynamics, both directions? I would love to hear.

McGilchrist:
Perhaps you won't mind if I don't immediately address those questions, but you can get.

Schmachtenberger:
You've got somewhere else?

[00:40:48:07]
McGilchrist:
Some more burning things that came up, and we can come to those as you've announced, and then we will come to them, I'm sure. And one was a reflection on what you were saying at the end, John, about: A, we can only attend to so much. We can only remember so much and we all need to balance the benefits and risks of—everything we do carries, as Heidegger said, you know—every revelation of truth is the hiding of something. And I think that is really important.

And what this brings to mind for me is a couple of things. One is that filtering is creative, that if you like, filtering of light is how we get colored patterns, we get films and so forth. "Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass/Stains the white radiance of Eternity," Shelley. And so, less is often more, and part of shaping an intelligence is knowing what to get rid of, because if you try to take too much in, it wouldn't benefit.

The other thing about it is, that it is not just a trade-off in the sense, "Well, we need a bit of this and we need a bit of that." That is kind of true, but everything contains within it—if viewed in my mind anyway, viewed as a whole—it has a relationship with its opposite. And it only exists because of their being an opposite. So it's like the two poles of a bar magnet. You can't have the north or the south, because they coexist and co-create.

And so what one is trying to do is rather like in the magnets or in a in a taut string of a musical instrument, with the taut string of a bow, is to hold two things together that both need to be held, not just go flabbily to a point in the middle, because then the string goes slack, and you've got no power for the arrow to fly or the note to take off from the lute.

So I think that's something important that we ought to bear in mind, is this relationship within a thing and its opposite. It actually also, if I may say, as I was listening to your talk last night or the night before to the Consilience Conference.

Vervaeke:
Yes.

McGilchrist:
And one of the things I think, there was this idea that—and well, what have you made a lot of interesting points. but one of them was to do with—I've forgotten it. [Laughter] What was it?

Schmachtenberger:
The transjective relating the subjective and objective.

McGilchrist:
Yeah, there's a bit of that.

[00:43:34:07]
Vervaeke:
Well, there might have been something, maybe, because let me try. Maybe this is wrong. One of the things I was trying to emphasize, and one of the things that a recovery of

Neoplatonism—especially given Filler's work on it—can give us is a re-emphasis on the polarity rather than the poles. And I was talking about this. I try to use the Greek word *tonos* rather than tension—

McGilchrist:
Yes, I do too.

Vervaeke:
—because the English word “tension” is almost purely negative now for us.

McGilchrist:
Yeah. That’s right.

Vervaeke:
Tonos like Heraclitus, the tautness of the bow.

McGilchrist:
The tautness of the string.

Vervaeke:
Right, yeah, yeah.

[00:44:02:15]
McGilchrist:
And without the tautness, there is no energy.

Vervaeke:
That's right.

McGilchrist:
And whatever it is comes out of the tautness is orthogonal to the tautness, so the arrow flies off at right angles, the notes come out in a way. So it's a very important aspect of creativity. I just wanted to reflect on that.

I wanted to comment very briefly on what you said about anxiety in the hemispheres. I don't think anxiety and depression, in my experience are just parts of the same thing. I think they're actually—they can coexist, but they're not the same thing at all, and they don't need to coexist. Anxiety, I think, is not lateralized, so I think there is anxiety created by the left and by the right hemisphere, and each of them holds it.

Depression is a complex one, and I don't want to go into it in any detail, but some depressions seem to me to be due to an unbalanced overactivity, or unopposed activity of the right frontal cortex, and that can be unopposed either by the left frontal cortex or by the right posterior cortex. So it's slightly complicated. Just want to put that on record because people may go away and say, “Well, I thought he said,” you know, that's not what, anywhere *I* said, but—

Vervaeke:

I was just trying to, yeah, I was trying to indicate that the phenomenology tends to be much more atmospheric, in both of those, depression and anxiety. Rather than narrow-focused, it's wide-focused and ambiguous rather than, yeah.

[00:45:33:10]
McGilchrist:
Yeah, that’s right. To that extent, yes, but actually in terms of where they originate hemisphere-wise, I think it's hard to be more specific in the way that you seem to be saying.

And then there's just a couple of other things that I want to pick up, because we don't have to exhaust them—we can’t exhaust them now—but we would want to sort of perhaps come to them. One is about purpose and its nature and the other is about values and meaning.

So I agree with you that meaning and purpose are not the same thing. But it's very important to make a distinction that would be familiar to all three of us, but may not be in the minds of some people watching or listening. And that is the difference between what I call extrinsic purpose and intrinsic purpose.

An example of extrinsic purpose is a photocopier. Its purpose is, it was created to copy a sheet of paper, make another image. But the other thing is that the purpose doesn't lie outside itself; it’s in itself. They are in themselves purposeful. Actually, I believe that prayer is of this kind, it’s in itself valuable, not because it produces a result. But also very obviously things like music and dance are not pointless, but they're not validated by a purpose that comes out. “We have better health for it.” No, they have value in themselves.

And the last thing I just wanted to raise so that going forward we can come back to and reference these things, is that very often people—I mean, you said that we need meaning and we need to be directed. And I believe that values are things that draw us from in front of us and push us from behind, and purpose also beckons to us from in front and draws us forward. And of course, all our models are push-from-behind because they're mechanical. But very importantly, these things exist, as it were, at the same time as our striving towards them and actually cause us to strive towards them, not by pushing us, but by calling to us, evoking a response, and that we ought to be careful not to think that because of a frailty of the human spirit, we we must find meaning in a basically meaningless cosmos; we must paint values on the walls of our cell.

I know you're not saying this, right? I'm not. But I just thought it would be worth clarifying.

Vervaeke:
Yes.

McGilchrist:
We don't have to sort of cheer ourselves up by painting pretty pictures on the walls of a hermetically sealed cell. I reject that completely, and I imagine you do, too. Indeed, we are contacting something which is real. And I actually think that those values and purpose are essential to the cosmos. They’re not just things we made up.

Vervaeke:

So I don't want to exclude Daniel from the conversation, but I feel called to respond. But I want to make a place for you.

Schmachtenberger:
I have some questions I'll follow up with, but please go ahead.

[00:48:26:02]
Vervaeke:
So yeah, I mean, that distinction that you made—and this is just to provide convergence—like, it's well established in the lit. Amabile talked about intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and then the intrinsic motivation is much more predictive of creativity and insight than extrinsic. But you actually need a bit—optimal creativity is to have a mixture of the two, because you need the extrinsic when you're painting the Sistine Chapel, you're painting the blue of the sky and you just got to keep going, right? So you need—and it also gives you corrective feedback, because if you're just intrinsic, you don't have external judges and things like that. But I—yes, I think that's important.

And I think that brings out an important difference. I think the things that we think are intrinsically motivating are precisely the ones that get us into that state of connectedness: *religio*—optimal intrinsic motivation being realized as the flow state. You do the flow state to be in the flow state; you don't do it for any other reason, right? And in that sense of it, one met that sense of super salience. That's the beginning of the taste of the sacred as well. And so I think the sacred is, how does reality disclose itself to us where we're in that mode of, not work, but serious play that we're doing for its own sake, because all we're doing—like, playing music or going to a play— we're playing with relevance-realization, in this serious sense. We're playing with it, and we're playing with salience and we're saying, "If I play with this, what kind of world is available to me?"

And I agree. I think, especially given the work of L.A. Paul and Agnes Callard in *Aspiration*, that we need to bring back the aspirational dimension, that we are bound, right? And we have to bind ourselves to the future in the right way. And what's come out of this—and this, it allows me to make another point, and I know we have different language about this, but I think we converge, and it's interesting. Part of what's come out of—the way to do this is to quickly describe an experiment.

Okay, so you go in to a bunch of academics, and you say—you give them all the evidence, all the arguments that they should start saving for retirement right now. You take any challenges, any questions. You come back in six months, none of them are saving.

And then that's to do with what's called hyperbolic discounting and the way our evolutionary machinery makes distant, things in the distance much less salient to us than current. That's why you procrastinate. It's why you eat the chocolate cake when you're trying to lose weight, right? And it's very adaptive, because if you don't get that, you're just overwhelmed by possibilities, right?

But now you come back to them, and you say, "Okay, what I want you to do is I want you to practice this every day." Notice it's a practice, not just a belief. "I want you to practice every day. I want you to practice, like, imagining." And we should talk about two kinds of

imagination at some point. “But I want to imagine your future self as a family, a beloved family member that you've always cared for. And you need to continue caring for them and you have a lot of compassion, a love for them. And I want you to do that every day.” And you come back in six months and you find two things: now they're saving, and the ones that do the practice more regularly and more vividly and imagine it save more.

You see what this is showing: that the imaginal augmentation of the aspiration to do something actually is a constitutive part of being rational. Descartes reduced *logos*, sensemaking, rationality, to computation, and we lost the fact—No, no, no. If I’m actually—and this is Agnes Callard's argument. If I'm trying to become more rational, that's an aspirational project. That's me trying to become somebody other than whom I am. I have to bind myself to my future self. This is *religio* again, I have to get *religio* with my future, and that's not something that I can do just inferentially. I have to do this using imagination. I have to use this with connect—So I agree with you profoundly that even the attempts to be more rational require an aspirate. So aspiration, rationality have to be rebound together.

McGilchrist:
Yeah.

Vervaeke:
One thing I'd want to push back on, but just because I know you've got—I'm hesitant around the word “value,” because the notion of value comes up basically in the Enlightenment and it's part of the is-ought distinction made and things like that.

Okay. Do you want to challenge that? Because you don't have—you don't have this notion sort of predating the idea that value is—right?

McGilchrist:
I think we're talking about terminology.

Vervaeke:
Okay.

[00:53:12:15]
McGilchrist:
It would be hard to say that Plato had no allegiance to the values of beauty, goodness, and truth.

Vervaeke:
I don't call those values.

McGilchrist:
Well, we can call them what you like, John, but, you know, let's not—

Vervaeke:
No, no, no. What I mean is—

McGilchrist

[...] use different words. But you know what I mean by values.

[00:53:26:04]
Vervaeke:
Well, I do, and I don't. And this is—but I want to do what you did with one of my terms. I think most people don't hear, see. Plato doesn't think we value them. Plato thinks we love the transcendentals, right? And value is a statement of—right?—of choice and preference. This is how Locke introduces it and makes—and you can actually see him change from “We are called by the world” to “We choose.”

And he introduces the notion there. And why I want to say that is because I want to make the argument again—and this is part of the over—that love is not a purely subjective matter either. Love is not a feeling. Love is not an emotion, right? When I love somebody, that can make me happy, it can make me, say—I miss my partner right now because I love her so deeply. It can make me angry, frustrated, joy. Love isn't an emotion. It's a way of binding myself to another person. And I think when most people hear the word “value,” because of its Enlightenment history, they hear choice and preference and what they want. And I don't think, if we think we can choose the true and the good and the beautiful—

McGilchrist:
Okay, so clarification with choice-making.

Vervaeke:
Yes. Yes. We don't understand that—we don't choose them. We are called by them, and we are called by them to us to aspire. Now, I understand you're not using the word that way, but I think most people, when they hear “value” are using it, they'll—

[00:54:48:24]
McGilchrist:
Okay. Well, thanks for clarifying that. That's not what I was meaning. And there's an important relationship between love and value. Both Pascal and Scheler said that you can't actually value something until you love it. And most people would think you don't love it until you know how to value it. But it's an interesting alternative way of thinking. Anyway.

Vervaeke:
But I would say that, what I want to bring in that people don't usually hear when they hear “value” is, like, Murdoch's point, like in the sovereignty of the good, right? Love is the painful recognition that something other than yourself is real. There's a connectedness to realness that's important if you're actually loving something. You want it—yes.

McGilchrist.
Absolutely. Well, you know, perhaps you should go to love already. But it's a huge topic. I mean, and I don't want to do lose whatever it was Daniel was going to say.

Vervaeke:
Yeah. Yes, yeah, yeah, yeah. But I think this was valuable because I think we took a lot of sort of the common language of modernity and even of postmodernity with subjectivity, objectivity, all this stuff, and we've sort of—

McGilchrist:
Yes.

Vervaeke:
—put pressure on it and shown that with the presupposition that this is just the natural way thought unfolds, it needs to be challenged.

McGilchrist:
Absolutely. No, no. And above all, on this subjective-objective divide, which is not to say the terms have no meaning.

Vervaeke:
Of course not.

McGilchrist:
It's just that I, like you, believe that everything comes into being as a relation. It's never just that or just in here.

Vervaeke:
Yes.

McGilchrist:
But it is the coming together of—an encounter, in fact which is the root cause of our experience and of our love and our valuing actually.

Vervaeke:
Yes, yes.

[00:56:31:16]
Schmachtenberger:
So there's something challenging in what we're trying to do here, which is, as we've seen, what we take words to mean, which words we use, what ontologies, what references, what epistemologies—we haven't had time to all sync these. And as we've probably all experienced—I certainly have—when I want to do generative work with someone that has a different background, that's where we have to start and realize some of our disagreements are because the word means something different, and that takes a long time.

And so I'm noticing that you mentioned intrinsic and extrinsic purpose. You said purpose and meaning are not identical, but you didn't make the distinction. John responded, talking about intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which is not the exact same as purpose. And then there was a conversation around values. There was a conversation around love, around beauty. So these are all related, but not exactly synonymous topics.

They all obviously indicate something that we value, but we're wanting to speak to value being intrinsic to reality, not just something we make up, which, as you say, we're not just painting values on a meaningless universe. There's something about the ontologies that give us a meaningless universe that are part of the problem, that we want to come to, that I think

is core to the meaning crisis, core to the place we find ourselves in, and why you have to say something like, Hey, it's not that the reality is a meaningless universe, so we have to paint meaning on, but that reality has something like intrinsic purpose to it.

So I'm just acknowledging all the really fascinating topics that I'm not going to ask questions about or say anything about, because in the short amount of time we have of feeling into what has the highest meaningfulness, beauty, worthiness of love, purpose without making further distinctions on which of those it is.

You said something about the intrinsic versus extrinsic purpose that I wanted to click on a little bit, because extrinsic purpose being an instrumental or utilitarian concept, the purpose of X is defined by its utility to Y, and we're assuming Y has value.

[00:58:48:02]
So when someone takes that definition of purpose, they take purpose first, rather than meaning or value or beauty or love. They take purpose as the thing that we're looking for, which is itself a very interesting question. They take the relative utilitarian, extrinsic definition, then they ask, "What's the purpose of it all?" It's obviously a meaningless question, because there's nothing outside of "it all" to say it is relevant with respect to.

And so it's easy to say, Oh, there's no purpose to anything. We come up with nihilism as opposed to just recognize, it was a category or you were using too small a concept. And you're talking about intrinsic purpose or intrinsic beauty or intrinsic something—intrinsic something that is worth something. And you're saying that it also has a pulling quality, or a telos, right, that all that is has something like purpose that is not defined with respect to anything else, maybe hard to define at all, which the Tao would say sounds very much like the Tao. It has a nature, right? So, "Does the direction of reality or the universe reveal something about its nature that is worth aligning ourselves with?" I think is very interesting.

I want to ask—I want to propose what I think is the generator of the metacrisis in your framework and hear your response and then hear you build on it. But I want to just hear first, the thing—the definition of purpose as extrinsic that the philosophy of science can orient to. So you have a Big Bang where the laws are why they are because, who knows? And the constants are what they are. And at some point consciousness pops out, and it's very easy to get nihilism in that model. One could say that model is left-hemispheric dominance, epistemically, and that the left hemispheric dominance can't understand purpose or meaning. Is that how you would say it?

McGilchrist:
When you talk about, or I talk about values, I'm thinking of a hierarchy drawn up by Max Scheler, the German early twentieth-century philosopher, in which he had a hierarchy of values, at the base of which was utility, and this is the lowest level of his values.

And then there came things like, he called them values of life, Lebenswerte, but these were values of fidelity, magnanimity, generosity, bravery, and so forth, a lot of which seemed to have gone out of fashion. And then above that came beauty, goodness, and truth, the spiritual or *geistige* of Arthur, and then the top of the apex of the pyramid was the sacred.

[01:01:49:12]
And I think that structure has been incredibly helpful to me in seeing what we're getting wrong, because the value—the only really driving value of the left hemisphere is utility. It's evolved in order to serve utility for us. And of course we need it because it's very useful. But we mustn't think that this answers our questions, or at least this sort of level of value is going to give us the fulfillment that is promised to us by our culture, which is all about acquisition and greed and competition: typical values of the left hemisphere.

So when we come to talk about purpose and its relationship with meaning, what I would say is, first of all, to make the distinction, which really, we've made, but it's the distinction between Carse's finite games and infinite games. Finite games have a purpose and when you've achieved it, the game is over. Infinite games are things that have their value in being performed at all, and therefore eternally have that value. We've got locked into the type of belief that everything is a finite good, which it very clearly can't be, and the things that give us meaning, I think, are for very obvious reasons not specifiable as extrinsic goals: we should try and do this and make that, and so on.

There's a level at which we have to guide ourselves and think, "Well, we need to make a conscious effort to shift our values." But in the end, these things are not going to be of that kind. They're going to be openness to an attractive force. And those attractive forces are many, but they can boil down in some ways to three incredibly important things that give meaning to life, each of which has been more or less trashed by our current civilization.

[01:03:59:09]
And the first is our relationship with society, our being bound to one another in the sense of *religio*, you and the the business of sharing one's life with people who share your values, whom you can trust, whom you can confide in, whom you can eat with, play with, and generally share a culture, which may be based on a religion, but has common rituals that we all understand.

That is one thing and it is extremely difficult to find any such coherence in modern society for a host of reasons, which most people would be able to fill in for themselves. But we don't have that kind of cohesion anymore. And we are increasingly isolated, apparently by technology, and we live lonely lives. The UCLA Loneliness Index has shot up in recent years, and I think we've mentioned loneliness already. And it's one of the key things that people say when you ask them about their lives. They say they're lonely.

No. Meaning can't come from any purpose in being with others and belonging in the social world and contributing to it in some sort of obvious extrinsic way. You can't specify ahead of time what that value will be. You only know it in the experiencing of it. This isn't the problem. It's the swimming problem. You can't have a manual that tells you how to swim. You sit on the bank of the river reading, no idea how to swim. You have to get in the water.

The second is a relationship with the natural world in all its complexity and beauty. So for most people, until very recently, it was almost impossible for their lives not to be enmeshed with the surrounding natural world. Only in the last, perhaps one hundred fifty years or so have we become isolated from nature. And this is like a really important divorce, a very, very important one. The divorce from one another is very important. The divorce from nature, the

sense of it as an “environment,” which is a technical term for something that surrounds you, but not what you are born out of, which is what nature really means, and what you return to.

[01:06:21:03]
And the third is the relationship to a realm of something beyond this. Again, we've mentioned this, I believe, but it is the transcendent realm or the realm of the spiritual or the sacred. And this to a lot of people now, they've been trained to think that this is a rather negligible issue, that it really is a kind of vestige of something that hangs over from a primitive time when people weren't properly educated and they invented superstitions to try and explain life.

And I mean, that is such a terrible, terrible diminution and tragedy of what it is—a travesty of what I’m talking about—and it *is* a tragedy. And so those three things are what I believe fundamentally are most important for bringing meaning to our lives. I can't specify, obviously, what the meaning is. You know, what is the meaning of life? A question you cannot answer, although I believe it's 43. [Laughter]

But that's what I would say about that. And it relates to the hemispheres in this way: that the left hemisphere is designed only for acquisition and pleasure: getting stuff, having fun. It's more dopaminergically driven than the right hemisphere, it's more associated with addiction than the right hemisphere, and it's certainly more associated with getting a kick out of power and acquisition, whereas the right hemisphere is more able to open itself to the sacred and to these other higher values that I specified where we kept them now.

So I think there is a very important thing there: that we're guided by something that literally doesn't see what it is that's pulling us—or should be pulling us—forward. That sense of direction or purpose in life and the values that call us forward.

Schmachtenberger:
So I want to say something about this that I feel like is me restating how the hemispheric model ends up getting imbalanced, almost obligately gets unbalanced in a way that leads to the world situation we have, and see if you agree with that. And then very much I'm curious to hear related thoughts.

So, you mentioned that the primary left hemisphere values utility and you also mentioned the word power, which is a very important word, because then civilizations have a relationship with each other that we can use social Darwinism to describe where there's a selection process defined in war and defined in population growth and things like that, where if a civilization has a relation—has our relationship to each other, our relationship to nature, and our relationship to the sacred, all maximizing utility, right?

[01:09:09:22]
So we think of human resources, we think of natural resources, and we think of religions as kind of narrative weapons to be able to coordinate. Then the culture that has those utilitarian, power-oriented views in all those areas will win at war. It will basically see nature as a commodity, extract more from nature to grow its population, to increase its resource consumption per capita, to grow its technological base, to utilize humans, to use the, you know, Norbert Wiener’s the human use of human beings in the development of cybernetic

systems that are then seen as inarguably in competition with each other. So “they're going to, so we have to” kind of mentality.

And then there's either no sacred, there's just that which a good is that which doesn't lose, which is kind of—I think it's very interesting that game theory was developed by von Neumann at the same time we developed the bomb, at the same time we developed AI, and it was game theory and economics as kind of the height of the reductionist’s experiment, saying based on a kind of is-ought distinction, which you’ll negate, which I'm very interested in, that says, since philosophy of science is going to say what is and can't say what ought, then our best basis for ought is that which doesn't lose in an assumed competitive dynamic.

So game theory is the only thing guiding. And I would argue that if your only ought is game theory, and you have the ability for recursive technologies that turn into exponential technologies that are in an exploitative relationship with the environment—which even the term “environment” or “natural resources,” a crazy term—and in arms races with each other, that that civilization is self-terminating.

[01:10:55:21]
But it's also hard to—it's easy to see how it won, right? How it emerged that way, because any civilization that oriented itself that way a little bit more was going to grow its population more, was going to advance its tech, was going to win wars, and then other ones kind of had to do similarly. So what the values or the sense of sacred or the connection to nature or each other that the Native Americans had before colonizers went there didn't matter that much if their weaponry and technology and whatever was not going to compete.

So the left hemisphere might be less intelligent in some very important ways, because wisdom—I've never actually heard anyone give a good definition of wisdom that doesn't involve restraint. It always ends up involving restraint and binding in some ways. And—but the utility emphasis of the left hemisphere is very good at game theory, and then it creates almost an obligate trajectory. And then nobody wants climate change, but nobody can stop it. Nobody wants species extinction, nobody wants desertification, but nobody can stop it. The overall topological features defining our world, nobody wants, but the game theoretic relationship between “we can't price carbon properly because if the Chinese do it, they’ll economically beat us, therefore we have to externalize the cost.” That game theoretic relationship creates a topology that is actually driving us in a self-terminating direction, and nobody’s steering because there is no sacred.

[01:12:26:06]
There is no—we're very good at solving problems and not very good at defining, “Is this the right problem to solve?” Right? “Is this the right goal to achieve?” That's actually why I was drawn to your work is because that—I wasn't thinking of it in terms of hemispheres, but I was certainly thinking of it in terms of capacities and predispositions of mind, that the nature of mind that oriented to parts was very good at *technê* and was very oriented to power, and the power-technê thing together was going to win over the other ones and then create this kind of obligate trajectory. I would love to hear you respond to that.

McGilchrist

There's very little in what you said that I would disagree with at all. We're in a bind which is to nobody's benefit, really. Game theory explains why we get these things wrong, and we need to find a way out of this which involves restraint.

Actually I loved what you said about that. And in fact, it's a lack of restraint that means that we're not wise. It's very unwise. And there are two levels to that. There's restraint in general and self-restraint. And the idea of self-restraint used to be intrinsic to the rise of most civilizations. They were founded on a generation or several generations that were prepared to make sacrifices on a personal level in order to achieve something greater.

That has moved out of the picture because the value now is about our personal gain. But sometimes, if we can restrain ourselves from just pursuing personal gain, we could produce an outcome which would be far more beneficial for all. Of course, this is very famously a difficult thing to achieve, because some people defect from the program. We're in a situation where we need everyone ultimately to come round to a certain way of thinking if we're to survive.

[01:14:29:04]
Now how can we do that? Can we do it at all? I don't know, but I believe that if enough people are committed enough and model their lives on the shift in relations with society, with nature and with the divine, if they can reorientate their values and stop seeking fulfillment in a very simplistic and direct way which doesn't actually achieve its goal, and worse, is destructive, then we could produce an outcome that would be satisfactory.

I don't know if we can achieve that. I don't know—I mean, it sounds like we'd have to achieve—we'd have to convince everybody. Really, if you can convince probably about 3 percent of the world's influential people, then we might be on to something.

Schmachtenberger:
Okay, so I want to come back to how the—why the world's influential people might be the psychologically least likely to be able to be convinced, based on what it took to become influential. I'll come back to that in a moment. Because you started—you said maybe we only have to influence 3 percent, but a moment before you said, if we're practicing self-restraint and anyone defects, and they don't restrain—so they do the more short-term power thing—then they win, and then they create a world that orients to that thing. So defection: sociopathic, narcissistic defection is pretty key to this thing.

[1:15:57:19]
McGilchrist:
It is.

Schmachtenberger:
I'm really curious to hear your thoughts, reflections on any of this, but also specifically, how do we—what are the criteria that—what is the evolutionary niche for the sociopathic, narcissistic property to be selected for? And how would we close that niche to—because promoting wisdom where it will always lose game-theoretically is not that interesting.

So there's something about the relationship of wisdom and power, and I would even say wisdom has to bind—it's a master-emissary thing. And I know this is very uncomfortable, as it should be, but if the master doesn't bind the emissary, then everything's broken, and so that which is power-seeking has to actually be bound, which requires power by something that is not power-seeking in the same way.

[01:16:48:22]
McGilchrist:
Yes.

Schmachtenberger:
Which is why Taoism says, the one who wants to lead, everybody should run away from. The one who doesn't want to lead and everyone pushes into leadership, maybe you can listen to. So curious to hear your thoughts on wisdom binding power, closing the evolutionary niche on power-seeking, those types of things.

Vervaeke:
So much. Yeah. So the—I mean, I think the—I agree with—first of all, what you did was brilliant and I really appreciate it. I'm liking it and am in very significant agreement with it. John Keats made a distinction between goals and ideals and the word "purpose" equivocates between them. A goal is an end state that everything else is in the service to, and it's the utilitarian, where an ideal is not. An ideal is something that is part of the grammar by which you interpret and make sense of yourself in your life.

And I agree. And we even did that with the sacred. We took sort of transcendent-immanent, and then we made this world—this is the Nietzschean critique—it only had a utilitarian value for that world. And then when we stopped believing in the upper world, this world seems to have no value. That whole framework, I think, has to be rejected, which is not a rejection of the sacred. I just want to make that very, very clear.

And so why I'm sort of on that is because I think that this is part of the answer. You can break game theoretic circumstances in which, right, you get people to remember certain things. So you can get some very core ones. Like, you go in a situation: "Will you take twenty dollars?" "Well, sure, sure." A situation: "Will you take twenty dollars, but here's two people that are going to give that person forty." So there's sixty and they get forty, and you get twenty. "Will you take it?" And if you don't take it, nobody gets it. "No, I won't take it!" So people—there's a symbolic thing that they're oriented towards, and it's something like they want to belong to a world that is a just world, and that is more important to them than their own individual, immediate gain.

01:18:56:14
That's the first thing.

So there's a symbolic aspect to it. Robert Nozick made a good point about this, that we didn't put that into a lot of—for good reasons—we didn't put it into a lot of the game theoretic modeling, because it messes up all that modeling in a lot of ways. And then that connects to—we don't actually super-value— this is the sociopath, right—we will significantly

undermine subjective well-being if we have a reasonable belief that we will get enhanced meaning in life.

This is part of our evolutionary heritage as mammals. We're also primates. We're also socio-cultural. And the prototypical instance we do this is, have a kid. When you have a kid, all of the measures of subjective well-being go down. Your health goes down, your sleeping goes down, your finances go down, your social connections go down, the amount of sleep you're getting is going down. You're sick all the time. Your partner doesn't like you anymore, and you're in a constant stress situation. And you ask people, “Well, why do—” like, you couldn't pay most people. “Well, why are you doing this?” “Because it's making my life more meaningful.” Because they're connected to something, again, that has a reality beyond themselves, and—right? I’ll use your term: a value beyond themselves.

[01:20:21:14]
Schmachtenberger:
He used another term, interestingly, which was “sacrifice.”

Vervaeke:
Yes.

Schmachtenberger:
Which has related etymology to “sacred,” of course. And something you can't say that you know something is sacred if you aren't willing to sacrifice for it. So please continue, I just want to add that.

Vervaeke:
And this is another thing to remember: that the arrow of relevance for us does not point to just, how are things relevant to me?

Yes, we do have to feel connected to ourselves, because if we don't, we’re dissociated, our agency is undermined. But as Iain said, we have to feel fundamentally—not, how are you relevant to me, but, how am I relevant to you? How am I relevant to us, and how are we relevant to the world? And yes, how are we and the world relevant to something that grounds that world, that Plato would call the good, right?

And so, I think that if we can get people to remember, this is what I would want to say. I don't I don't even like the word “remember.” I want people to be able to fall in love with all of these dimensions of being again, because—and this was Spinoza's big insight, right? The way you overcome a powerful motivation is with another powerful motivation. If we can get people to fall in love again with being—within, between, and beyond—we can break the game-theoretic.

This is what Christianity did in the Roman Empire. Christianity went out and it didn't—unlike Stoicism, it tried. I'm not saying you shouldn't try and get the government, but—and it had some success too. But Christianity went and said, “There's a new way for you to love yourself. You are not the nonperson the Roman Empire says you are. Here is a new way. Agape is a way in which you can love yourself. And it's not a hedonistic, egocentric power. Here's how we can love each other, and here's how we can love God.”

And it captured the world, and it captured a world that was one of the epitomes of a world driven by power, competition, the lust for glory.

So we have historical examples of, if you give people, if you can get them out of meaning-starvation, so they're not in a scarcity mental—when you'e in a scarcity mentality, you drop into left-hemispheric—I think Iain's right about this—short term, utilitarian, right? "What do I need?" Right, because this is emergency mode. But if you can get people out of a scarcity mentality and get them to fall in love with being again, connectedness to themselves and other, then you can call—this is something that gets them to remember that they actually do value—trying to use your language, right—connectedness more than success.

[01:23:17:08]
Schmachtenberger:
I really like the "must fall in love with." I want to play with the scarcity thing for a minute, because the people that are pursuing power the most are not in any actual economic scarcity, though they're in a perceived relative scarcity, relative to the next guy competing with them.

Vervaeke:
Sure.

Schmachtenberger:
And there are plenty of people who under scarcity share more.

Vervaeke:
Yes.

Schmachtenberger:
I've always found fascinating that when there's a disaster, that either the best or the worst of people can come out.

McGilchrist:
Yes.

Schmachtenberger:
And so scarcity can go either way, and abundance can go either way. So there is something about what is sacred that is actually deeper than, that even under scarcity can have someone sacrifice, and that even under abundance can still have someone totally self-centered.

[01:24:03:15]
Vervaeke:
Yes, but I did want—when I was using scarcity there, I was talking about meaning-scarcity.

Schmachtenberger:
Yes.

Vervaeke:
Not economic.

Schmachtenberger:
That's a good distinction.

Vervaeke:
And one of the things that happens, for example, as people go up they—this is an experiment—as people go up a corporate structure—and corporate structures tend to favor people who have sociopathic tendencies—what you also see is a measurable decrease in the ability of them to take the perspective of other individuals. The ability to take the perspective of other individuals is strongly predictive of how many deep connections you can form in your life.

So they are actually suffering a very profound kind of scarcity as they go up. They're a bit—if you'll allow me to coin a phrase—their suffering's a connectedness-scarcity in a profound way. And what I've been fascinated with is the number—and I'm sure this has happened to both of you—the number of people who are in these positions, in positions of power, who have reached out to me and said, "I feel disconnected."

[01:25:04:12]
And there's that element of almost of horror and absurdity. "I feel disconnected, and I want to be. And I don't want—" And the people I've talked to in Silicon Valley: "I don't want my kids to go through this. I don't want my kids to go through." And this is what I mean.

There is alternative motivations too. And I think they have also an evolutionary provenance to the game theoretic motivations. And I don't think the game-theoretic motivations are metaphysically necessary. I think there are other ones that have an equal power to motivate. And because we have historical evidence, we have current evidence that we can tap into those. But I think there's two poles to this: for us to fall in love with being again, that's the agent pole. But the world as an arena in which we can act, but it has to be sacred to us. Sacred is how the world is to us when we are falling in love with it.

Schmachtenberger:
Okay. I want to go into sacred. I want to say something about what you said. You said that as people move up in positions, as we look at places where power is concentrated and we move up the power hierarchy, it is—there are exceptions to this, but it is generally the case that the people who are at the top of the power hierarchies are people who are both attracted to and good at power games.

[01:26:18:03]
Vervaeke:
Yes.

Schmachtenberger:
And there are certain other things that are attendant and deficient that tends to go along with that. And power, whether it's economic, social, or political, follows a power-law distribution.

Vervaeke:
Yes.

Schmachtenberger:
So one of the things that I find very interesting is that, I think there's a mistake that a lot of sociology makes where we look at certain human traits like rationality or empathy or whatever on a Gaussian distribution—

[01:26:42:01]
Vervaeke:
Yes.

Schmachtenberger:
—and then say, humanity is a result of this, where realistically the actual power influencing things says that a tiny percentage of people that are three standard deviations psychologically different than almost everyone have most of the determining power, and then they create conditioning environments that everyone else is conditioned by. I think that's really important. You know, hyper-agency.

I have found that, like, we had a term “psychopathy” and then “sociopathy” and now it's ASD in the DSM, antisocial personality disorder—that there are types of people there that have higher and lower ability to take others’ perspectives. And so there are people who have sociopathy or whatever you want to call it, that have lower ability to take other people's perspectives, but they're ones that have higher cognitive empathy but lower embodied empathy.

[01:27:31:15]
Vervaeke:
Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Schmachtenberger:
And the higher cognitive empathy means “I know how to play you. I know how to say what you want to hear and virtue-signal.”

Vervaeke:
Yes, Yes. Good, good point.

McGilchrist:
And it's a very important point from a hemisphere point of view, because that cognitive empathy is more based on the left frontal cortex.

Schmachtenberger:
It's the simulation of real empathy.

McGilchrist:
Yes, exactly.

[01:27:50:09]

Schmachtenberger:
Yeah.

McGilchrist:
And the real empathy, or the emotive empathy, is more based in the right hemisphere. But also, we know that sociopaths have deficiencies in the right ventromedial frontal cortex, which is an area that's terribly important for forming any kind of emotional relationship with anybody else. And whether this is a thing that they're born with or not is not finally concluded. But I think it pretty clearly is something that they are born with. It could be a result of a certain kind of deficient parenting.

What we're coming back to there is that, again, there is this contrast between a connected world, the relational world in which the values come out of the relations, and another kind, which is a linear world of target-getting, goal-getting in which we think that what is valuable will come out of completing that goal. And it doesn't.

[01:28:46:17]
Schmachtenberger:
Yeah.

Vervaeke:
So I want to pick up on what you said there.

Schmachtenberger:
Go ahead

Vervaeke:
Because I think that distinction is very important that you made, and here there's an ambiguity in taking a perspective. You can take a perspective in that calculative way.

Schmachtenberger:
Yes.

Vervaeke:
That's different from taking *up* a perspective in which you care, and you try to see the world from that perspective.

[01:29:15:08]
Schmachtenberger:
This is the danger in teaching people to perspective-take, like, the way rhetoric can do it.

Vervaeke:
Yes.

Schmachtenberger:
Because you can create a very good lawyerly person. Like, what I found is that people who are best at perspective-seeking are either empaths or sociopaths.

Vervaeke:
Yes.

Schmachtenberger:
Right? They're good at perspective-seeking because they really feel what other people feel and they're seeking to, or because they actually don't have any binding to anything real. They can take whatever perspective happens to have utility without caring about a relationship.

Vervaeke:
That's right. Right, right. Yes.

Schmachtenberger:
And so that's the thing one has to really watch out for is the simulation of empathy. And it brings up something. So you were talking about Christianity binding game theory.

Vervaeke:
Yeah.

Schmachtenberger:
I'm not a Christian scholar, so I'm just going to from the outside say, the fact that under—in the name of Jesus Christ, who said “let he who has no sins cast the first stone,” we were able to do the Inquisitions is a really interesting act of mental gymnastics.

[01:30:05:09]
Vervaeke:
Yes. Yes.

Schmachtenberger:
And so, I see that wherever there is a relationship to the sacred that is authentic, and it starts to develop the ability to really move people, there's power in that. Then those who are seeking power, seek to capture it.

McGilchrist:
Yes.

Schmachtenberger:
And corrupt it.

McGilchrist:
Yes.

Schmachtenberger:
And so then all the religions become these mixed bags of an authentic, beautiful thing and the way power ends up capturing them. And if they don't orient to power, then they usually lose in a holy war, their population doesn't become very big, or something like that.

I would love to hear—so, because there's, how do we have a proliferation of the sacred for which someone will make real sacrifices, and for which whole populations will, that doesn't lose to other populations that don't do that, and that doesn't get captured by power and perverted and distorted?

Vervaeke:
Right. Okay. So first of all, agreed. But I want to say, well, the notion of restraint. Christianity was successful in pretty much keeping it as part of the cultural cognitive grammar that people other than the male citizens were actually persons. It was successful at turning infanticide into an accepted practice, into something we find horrific.

So, yes, I'm not saying that, you know, the power structures came in, but there were, there was also enough—I mean, we didn't—we are running on the fumes of the Christian sacred canopy. And it's been what has been still keeping some restraints on this otherwise Molochian machine that's running. And I want to—what I'm trying to say is—I want to give us a sense of hope about this—that it's not, the sacred emerges, and then it gets consumed. The sacred emerges, there is the pull to push back, there's the reframing, there's the power consumption.

[01:32:12:06]
But some of the underlying cultural cognitive grammar has been fundamentally changed. We haven't gone back to the Bronze Age. We're still post-Axial. We haven't gone back to the pre-Christian age. We're—right? That's not what happened. And so, I'm saying—I'm not denying that, right? I'm not denying that there's the threat. But what I'm saying is, that if we could be more clear about what gets preserved across the—I don't know what to call it—the re-entrenchment of the power dynamics, and could we more better this time focus our attentions there, focus our cultural and even our political commitments. We could perhaps do it better this time.

Schmachtenberger:
I mean, I think we must. This is exactly, it brings up the question I wanted to ask you is, in the parable that you told of the master and emissary, I might argue that the responsibility for the failure of that civilization or tribe, whatever you want to call it, was the master's, not the emissary's, because the master obviously misassessed.

McGilchrist:
The master would probably have agreed with you.

[01:33:19:15]
Vervaeke:
Yes.

Schmachtenberger:
And so rather than say, the master was wise and the emissary wasn't, and so he did a Dunning-Kruger thing and messed it all up.,the master was missing a certain kind of wisdom in his assessment of the actual realistic capabilities of the emissary. There was some stuff in his noticing the whole that he wasn't noticing that was really critical for him to ultimately still hold responsibility.

[01:33:42:17]
So there's an uptick in the master capability that could have kept that relationship right, so there's something about needing to be power-literate, to be able to keep power from corrupting a relationship with the sacred.

McGilchrist:
I mean, rather than say that the master was deficient in some way, one would say that there was an important relationship here which required a certain degree of vulnerability. So the master couldn't remain invulnerable, because he realized that he needed to not concern himself with certain things if things were to survive. So there isn't a squeaky clean answer to this. He had, in a way, to trust.

In some ways it's very like the story of God and Satan, that Satan was Lucifer, the light-bringer, the brightest to the angels, God's right hand. And because of his power-hungriness and his envy of God, everything fell to ruin. But the end of that story isn't—because Christianity, again, I'm becoming more and more convinced during our conversation, if nothing else comes out of it—of how very, very important the sort of overarching effect of a religion such as Christianity is for the survival of a civilization. I mean, I've always felt that, but I see it more and more in what we're talking about.

But what you've adverted to earlier was the necessary sort of supervision. And that is a difficult balancing act, as it is for the master and the emissary. And there's another fable which I tell at the beginning of part three of *The Matter with Things*, which is an Onondaga legend. They're an Iroquois people.

[01:35:34:00]
And they have the story of how, because creation was waning, there were these two brothers who were sent to sort of regenerate the power of the universe. And these brothers are not equal. And like the master and the emissary, one of them is wise and he is called the one that holds the earth with both hands. The other is called, hard as ice, the flint. And his value is that he's got a tool that his father gave him, which is speech, and the other is an arrow with which he can shoot. And this is an extraordinary—just starting there—division between, as it were, the right hemisphere and the left hemisphere. But the story gets better and better as it goes on. I can't tell the whole thing, but those that are interested, there's a recording on YouTube of me reading the introduction of this chapter in which we tell the story.

[01:36:29:09]
But effectively, what the good brother realizes is, the bad brother tries to imitate the good brother because he's envious of him. He sees the good brother creating all kinds of wonderful things, and birds and beasts and flowers. And he tries to create and he produces only thorns and flies and bats. And there's a sort of sense that he is dangerous left to himself, but he must also not come too close to the good brother, because the good brother needs to preserve a degree of his independence, without which he is no longer himself. So they can't fuze, but one needs to be subservient to the other. The one needs to have power over the other. But that is not something that can ever be secured a hundred percent.

Schmachtenberger:
Right.

McGilchrist:
So you can never have the situation where the one that is wise has that power, because one of the terms on which wisdom exists is that it sees beyond power.

Now I know that you've made a very good point, that there needs to be a certain degree of sort of watchfulness and power-awareness. I agree about that. Quite how this is managed in a way that doesn't actually vitiate the whole business of wisdom—because in most cultures, wisdom is associated with, well, in Chinese, with Wu Wei, within action, in the master does nothing but nothing is left undone, these remarkable and beautiful sayings of the Taoist literature. So we have to somehow find a way of making that work. And I don't know what your ideas about how that could be made to work are.

Schmachtenberger:
A close friend and colleague of mine that you both know, Zak Stein, talks about the distinction between power differentials in an educational setting versus in most traditional power settings.

[01:38:21:08]
Specifically, he's talking about educative authority versus propaganda in terms of information asymmetries. And that the key distinction—and this gets fuzzy—but the key distinction is that someone who has information asymmetry relative to someone else who could use that asymmetry to maintain the asymmetry and grow it—which is the impulse of power traditionally—in the educative example, the educator recognizes that they have an information asymmetry but they are in a kind of fiduciary relationship, where their goal is to actually bring the student up to symmetry with them and even beyond. So their goal is not to maintain their power asymmetry. They use the power asymmetry to close it. And, whereas in most power dynamics, if someone has an economic asymmetry, they use that increased economic power, political power, to both maintain it and grow it.

[01:39:12:14]
And so we'd say, the first one is an ethically legitimate utilization of the reality of the power differential. The second one is not a legitimate one. But what that also means is, let's say that the educator who's trying to bring this person up to competence recognizes that there's someone else who's trying to exploit them. The educator now has some ethical responsibility in their fiduciary responsibility to the student to also do something over here, to do something in that relationship. And that is where I think it's very interesting is, if those who are pursuing the true, the good, and the beautiful, those who are pursuing a deep relationship with the sacred and wisdom don't do anything and don't develop any levers of technological or economic or other types of power—“lotus-eating” so to speak—then they're leaving the direction of the world to those who maximally seek power-orientation for the illegitimate use.

[01:40:15:07]
And so then you have to say, is it really wise to say, “I cede power. I cede power of the world to the sociopaths,” including in the risk of imminent extinction and the destruction of the

sacred and—and not just a future destruction, but the 10 to 20 animals that go extinct every day from human action, that if there are two orders of magnitude more mammals in factory farms than in the wild today. Like, there's some ethical obligation of those who give a shit about that, to have that “give a shit” do something, to be actual, as you say, “actual” meaning that it acts.

[01:40:48:07]
So are our values actual? If they're actual, do they have a causal effect? Yeah. Are they obligated to?

McGilchrist:
Well, let me just respond to that. I'm not suggesting that we just sit back and roll over and let everything go to hell in a handcart. That's very far from what I'm saying. But what I'm saying is that even if we were to find ways of reducing certain kinds of harm, unless they were accompanied by a growth in wisdom, that really wouldn't achieve what we need to achieve.

Schmachtenberger:
Yes.

McGilchrist:
We would leave the psychopaths in charge, actually.

[01:41:30:06]
So it is a difficult one. I mean, your analogy is not meant to be perfect, but for example, with the teacher bringing the pupil up to his standard and maybe beyond—which I like that idea, and I think it's a real one—but if the student is in fact basically psychopathic, then has he done good by doing that?

I mean, once you start looking at the outcomes of actions rather than the motivations behind actions, you get into—famously—into trouble.

Vervaeke:
There's three things I want to respond to. One is, I'm hearing—we've been talking a lot about the master versus the emissary, but it seems to me that we're in a weird problematic here, and I know this isn't an accurate representation of your thought, but I want to pose it. But I wanted to also state all three things, because they belong together.

One is, yeah, but that also requires that the left hemisphere has some reverence for the right hemisphere, but reverence is properly a property of the right hemisphere. And so you've got this weird catch-22 thing going on. And then I think part of how we have done this—and this is why bringing up the educator is important—is we've done this by saying, “Oh, but there's another variable in here,” which is there's not only individual cognition; there's the collective intelligence of distributed cognition.

[01:42:56:14]
There's something that comes out in a “we” like what's here, right, that is doesn't belong to you or to you or to me, right? But it takes on a life of its own. And of course, this is the whole tradition of the ecclesia and the tradition of the geist to the tradition of the *logos* and, right?

And the Socratic dialogue, we follow the *logos* wherever it goes. And what that does is that—this is Plato's pivot problem, right? Because with the example you're talking about is exactly the problem that Plato was wrestling with with Socrates and Alcibiades.

Here you have the most attractive—not physically— but the most attractive, right, representation of wisdom. And here you have this, you know, glorious figure who's attracted to Socrates, but is ultimately properly, you know, a psychopath. Alcibiades is willing to screw anybody over for his own personal—and betray everybody. And Plato really is vexed about how, why doesn't he turn? What makes somebody pivot towards that? And then Plato wrestles with this and he has sort of two answers.

[01:44:04:20]
One is, there's a sort of seduction—and I hate to use that term in our charged atmosphere—but there's a seduction, which is, you basically get sort of the left hemisphere really involved with the kind of stuff it likes to do: running arguments and discussions. But as it's doing that, you use that as a way of getting it to pay attention to the non-propositional, right, in very, very powerful ways. And this is why Plato writes dialogues, because the drama and the character development are as important as the argument. We did a great disservice when we just took the arguments and stuck them over, just, “Aw, you know, alright.” But if you do that, that's part of the answer. And then in that, what part of the seduction is—and it's not—like, if you try to make somebody follow the sacred, it's not sacred, right? But the seduction is like, again, how we fall in love, right, is if you put people into these circumstances where they can catch the fire of the *logos*, then they will often feel called to reorient themselves. They will do the Plato's pivot. It’s not an algorithm, because if it was an algorithm, it wouldn't be the thing we need.

[01:45:23:01]
We can't make it an algorithm. If we were looking for something algorithmic, we're fundamentally misapprehending the ontology that has to be at its basis. But I've seen this when we do these dialogical practices. People say—and this is regardless of where they come from, religious or secular—they say, “This is a kind of intimacy I've always been looking for, but I didn't realize.” It sounds like Platonic anamnesis, right? And then if they go longer, right, they start to move beyond the intimacy between. They say, “Oh, there's the ‘we’ space, or the geist, or the *logos*,” and they start to feel intimate with it. And then they're called to that. And then some people are called beyond that. They're called to: “Through all of that, I get a sense of intimacy with being itself” and they get the possibility of falling in love again.

But I can't argue them into that. I can put them into a place where there's argumentation going on, where there's conceptual reflection going on, but distinct—we have to structure it with a lot of finesse, so it takes on a life of its own and can draw us in so we can get people to do the Platonic pivot. That's how I would address what you're saying.

McGilchrist:
Logic has this compulsory kind of nature, if you like, that it’s trying to compel a position.

Vervaeke:
Yes.

McGilchrist:
And what you rightly are pointing out is that the things that really matter, like wisdom and love, can't be compelled in this way.

[01:46:44:09]
Vervaeke:
No.

McGilchrist:
And if they are, then they're no longer wisdom or love. There is always a vulnerability involved here. That's terribly important in my view. And it's not necessarily anybody's fault if that vulnerability leads, as it usually does eventually, to some kind of a downfall, but without actually taking the risk, we can't have the great things that we have had.

So it has its own value and purpose, even if we can't actually always guarantee what kind of an outcome there's going to be.

Vervaeke:
Okay. But I want to pick up on the seduction. I agree with what you're saying, but what I want to say is, can we get—I'm trying to use your language because I want to play with it still. Can we get the left hemisphere involved with speech and logic? And it likes to play this "This is what happened." But it gets drawn into something that is beyond itself.

McGilchrist:
It does, and that takes me back to a point you made early on: that how can it ever be that the left—the right hemisphere and the left hemisphere have that right relationship?

[01:47:42:20]
Vervaeke:
Yes.

McGilchrist
Because the left hemisphere has this intrinsic loss of reverence or whatever.

Vervaeke:
Yes.

McGilchrist:
But I don't think that's necessarily the case, because I think the problem comes when we give too much power to the emissary in that myth.

So to begin with in civilizations, the left hemisphere and right hemisphere work very well together. The left hemisphere is given exactly that kind of a job that it's good that, and—if you like to put it this way, I'm being ridiculously anthropomorphic—but it is happy to be in that role.

[01:48:16:04]
Vervaeke:
Yes.

McGilchrist:
And to contribute. But the problem comes when we start to lose—I'm going to come back to this thing about the value difference between the right and left. I think it's absolutely essential to the situation we're in. It's our complete loss of orientation towards the right values, and what happens then is that the values of the left hemisphere are encouraged, and the left hemisphere starts to see only its own point of view. And it thinks itself in a Dunning-Kruger-like way to be more intelligent than it is.

Vervaeke:
Okay. And I agree with this wholeheartedly, but I want to say something that overlaps with Daniel, what he said, because one of the things that the Enlightenment, why it takes off, I would argue, is it gets a way of really clarifying the difference between authority and power. And this is one of the—you know, so you've got Kant, right, and then I want to correct it with Hegel, but Kant is basically saying, Authority is when I recognize you as being able to say something that I will fundamentally be persuaded of as true. So I recognize that you are—you know, this is the Kantian model, his language is dangerous, but just let me to use it for now—I recognize you as a rational being, and therefore I should acknowledge that what you say, I should take it seriously and allow it to possibly persuade me. And then when I do something because you have persuaded me, I do it because I have recognized you, and you have recognized me.

[01:49:50:14]
And then Hegel said, Oh, but this reciprocal recognition, which is what you get in the student and the teacher that you don't get in the—because the master-slave and, this is Hegel, you don't have reciprocal recognition in that, right? But in this—

McGilchrist:
And importantly, that is not the relation between hemispheres. I talk about that.

Vervaeke:
Exactly, exactly.

[01:50:10:20]
And this is—exactly. So one of the things why the Enlightenment takes off is because it brought this tremendous liberating clarification of "Wait, wait, wait. We want all the governance, even my self-governance, to be based on authority, which is based on a reciprocal recognition." And Hegel says, not only moment to moment, but all of the people before you and all the people that are going to come after you, the biggest possible distributed cognition machine you have. You want to be, like, listening to them and you want to be trying to get the future to listen to you, and you get this tremendous model of authority. And I think that was tremendously liberating.

Now, and then what I see happening is that some of the things that came along with that is how the right hemisphere started to cede power or not realize that power's getting ceded.

Because once you give, right, this priority to this, right, then you start to give—it's very easy to get into the idea: Oh, but all that the reasoning is, all that the rationality is, it's not a way of being, it's just a way of calculating. Hobbes proposes this, right?

So, the Enlightenment gives us something that is tremendously of value. And I don't think you want to go back and give that back again. We don't go back to master-slave.

McGilchrist:
No, no.

Vervaeke:
Right? And so we have to get to that point where: no, no, no. Reason isn't about calculation, it's about being with each other in a way that we are reciprocally responsible to each other, so we are governed by authority rather than by power. That's how I'm trying to answer you: that that is possible for us.

It was two things in the Enlightenment that got inappropriately bound together. I think the very legitimate understanding of the difference between authority and power, and then the illegitimate reduction of rationality, not as a way of being with each other, but as a way of calculating each other's behavior.

McGilchrist:
Which is, in my terms, the handing over of reason to mere rationality: rationality being schematic logic as a way of understanding things, whereas reason is a way of balancing rationality with the intuitions that come from a life lived, from experience. And that is what is reason. It was always thought to be the main purpose of an education. And for two thousand years in the West, to produce a reasonable person.

[01:52:50:20]
Vervaeke:
Yes.

McGilchrist:
And that's what one would expect of a wise judge or a good politician. But we don't have that.

Vervaeke:
Right. So my language for that—and I don't think it's in any way different—I talk about the ancient notion of *logos*. And with Descartes you get it reduced to logic, and then we reduce reason to just logical calculation of propositions, and we lose all the other. We lose the perspectival and the participatory notions.

[01:53:17:19]
McGilchrist:
Yeah.

Schmachtenberger:

So you said something at the beginning I want to come back to, which is, how can the left brain have reverence for the right if it doesn't have reverence as a capability?

Vervaeke:
Yeah.

Schmachtenberger:
And I think—this was something I said to Iain when he and I had a brief visit yesterday, is what Gödel did with the incompleteness theorem was use math to show the upper boundaries of math, and—

Vervaeke:
Sure, but that's the Socratic project. That's what Socrates does. Almost all of the dialogues end in aporia for that reason.

Schmachtenberger:
And it's what the jñāna yog path in the Vedic tradition—

Vervaeke:
Exactly, or koans in Zen.

Schmachtenberger:
It's what Tarski did with formal logic, using formal logic to show the upper bounds, and I think it's exactly what Iain is doing in describing the master-emissary relationship in a way the left brain can understand. Because, you know, I was saying earlier, wouldn't the master be the more responsible party? I think they're both responsible, right? And so there is a reverence the left hemisphere has to have for the right. There is a recognition of the developmental maturity, capacity, and relationship with the environment the right needs to have, right?

And we're, of course, using left and right hemisphere within the individual to also represent forces in the world, distribution of people and like that. And I think the very best thing that the parts-based—one of the best things the parts-based mind can do is recognize its own upper boundaries being insufficient to what is actually worth caring about, in which case it has its own kind of transcendence, right? It has its own recognition of something beyond itself worth listening to.

Vervaeke:
So again, evolutionary provenance for this, right? I think one way I would say of Iain's historiography, right, is like the—what should be properly opponent processing—and I'll explain what I mean by that—has become adversarial processing. And this is also the problem at the level of our distributed cognition.

[01:55:13:16]
If you look throughout our biology, you have opponent-processing going on. Opponent-processing is when you have two systems that have complementary biases, and then you lock them together so that each is the best corrector of the other. So, noncontroversial example is the autonomic nervous system. You have the sympathetic system biased in one way. It views everything as a threat or an opportunity. The

parasympathetic is, everything is—and they're like this. And so your level of arousal is constantly evolving, and there's doesn't have to be any king or emperor over this because it is a self-correcting system.

Your attentional system, the task focus, the default: you're constantly moving between focusing your attention and varying it: opponent processing, opponent processing between foregrounding and backgrounding.

[01:55:59:03]
And I can go on and on. Why does nature keep coming to this? Because it is how you solve the No Free Lunch Theorem. Every heuristic has a complementary bias. This is a mathematical theorem and a proof. But—and this is one of the things I put in my original 2012 paper—but if you put two complementary heuristics together, they can toggle between each other, and you don't fall prey to the No Free Lunch. You can escape the trap that you have to constantly fall into the bias from your heuristic.

Nature figured this out, and I think I would put it to you, if we understand it the way I've explained it to you, that the proper relationship between the hemispheres could be opponent-processing rather than adversarial processing, if each hemisphere could come to see the other hemisphere as a valuable source of self-correction. Because, as you say, they solve different sets of problems: well-defined problems, left hemisphere; very ill-defined, gestalt-ish problems in the right hemisphere.

[01:57:01:14]
But this is also something not at the individual level. Democracy has to—democracy requires this commitment, which is not game-theoretic, but it has evolutionary provenance. You are the best possible entity for me overcoming my self-deceptive bias, because you have alternative biases, and I am the best for you. And if we both commit to the Geist, the *logos* between us, we can get the best self-correcting system, which is what democracy's supposed to be. But not just for individual cognition, it's supposed to be for distributed cognition. But again, I'm trying to offer you for—the theme you have and I keep wanting to answer is, there's evolutionary provenance for the alternatives that are being discussed here that can be tapped into.

Schmachtenberger:
Yes, I want to propose something in relationship to this, and hear both your thoughts.

One very simple way I would sometimes describe the generator of the metacrisis is that humans have radically, beyond evolutionary capability via technology development, and still using relatively close to evolutionary motivations, that you can't apply apex predator theory to sapiens and have a biosphere that doesn't self-destruct, because a polar bear can't make nukes, and an orca can't kill all the fish in the ocean. But we can do both. And so we're obviously not an apex predator. We obviously are something well beyond that, because the evolutionary process having most of the adaptive capacity in the other animals be corporeal, and very slow-evolving, and slow-evolving through processes that create co-selection, creates a symmetry of power. Whereas the orca gets faster so do the tuna and they get away, and as the polar bears gets faster, the walruses get bigger and all that kind of thing.

[01:58:55:17]
And with the complexification of all our cognitive processes that could start to do *technê*, and I would say—I'm just going to call it *technê* in general, both physical technologies and language, capitalism, et cetera—that our adaptive capacity and our predative capacity increased rapidly faster than any of the rest of the environment, increased its resilience or relative capacity.

McGilchrist:
Absolutely.

[01:59:23:12]
Schmachtenberger:
And so I would put the origin of the metacrisis not with evolutionary processes, but with the beginning of stone tools. Right? And it's—stone tools are a pretty slow evolutionary curve. And so then with the agricultural revolution, we got a big bump. And then the Industrial, we get a big bump.

Vervaeke:
I think we get a big bump in the Upper Paleolithic transition. And that's my response to you, which is, we get a big bump in the Upper Paleolithic transition, in which we seem to get the advent of the appreciation of the sacred that goes along. It is sown into some of our biggest cognitive advancements.

So you have the technology, like you said, is like this, right? And then we get this bump, and we get projectile weapons, we get calendars, but we also get music. We also get representational art. We've seen—if—

Schmachtenberger:
Here's my argument. Actually, you're making it.

Vervaeke:
Okay.

Schmachtenberger:
Humans have been a very mixed bag. And from an ethical perspective of, the only creature that really scientifically optimized torture, the most subjective suffering possible, but also the only one that will sacrifice itself for other species, and that can make the vow of the Bodhisattva, right? Our abstraction allowed us to search a very wide search base, so the most kind of beautiful, numinous stuff in the most kind of horrific stuff.

[02:00:45:22]
What I'm arguing is that that mixed bag that we have been, with exponential tech near planetary boundaries self-terminates, and that we don't get to keep being that mixed bag. And this now comes up to the vulnerability of, if the relationship to the sacred is forced or compulsory, it's not actually a relationship to the sacred. If you remove choice, it's not ethics anymore; it's mechanism.

And so there's a vulnerability in the recognition of actual choice and in the honoring of choice. But we have to do that fundamentally differently than we've ever done. Because if you say, how well have we stewarded our power historically, if you ask the other species that we inhabited the planet with, or the lower classes within civilizations, or whatever, that mixed bag stewarded it pretty poorly in many places, but we couldn't split atoms and we couldn't change genomes and we couldn't make, AI.

So the question comes—and so let's take AI for a moment, because splitting atoms takes G-8 nation state-level capacity to do. It actually doesn't. The G8 has made sure nobody else gets to use it through the IAEA and making sure that if anyone even tries to, we'll bomb them preemptively, because we don't want the power to get distributed, and yet we're distributing the power of synthetic bio and AI rapidly that is every bit as destructive to not just other state actors, but anybody, in a way that is unmonitorable.

[02:02:12:04]
So when you have decentralized catastrophe weapons and things that can create the catastrophe even by the intentionally good use but with mistaken externalities from doing too much narrow problem solving and not enough—is this a good goal, is this the right problem orientation?—and if anybody does the AI weapon, everybody *has* to do the AI weapon or they lose by default, those types of dynamics. I would argue that—our abstraction capacity, exploring that whole search space, the power sides of it end up—and you know, Robert Wright's *Nonzero*, of course you have a selection for increased coordination within an in-group that can do sometimes coordination with an out-group that we call trade, but sometimes zero-sum or negative-sum competition with an out-group.

So there's a shelling game where I'll coordinate with you when it's in my benefit while reserving the right to defect on you when that's in our benefit. And if anybody does that, then everybody's in that kind of game theory. And if someone says, Well, we'll just sacrifice ourselves comprehensively, great, then there's just no more of those people. Those people are gone, and the people who made it through were the people who won the game theory thing.

[02:03:19:21]
So what I'm saying is that both through conflict theory—people who want to do messed up stuff with this much technological power—and through mistake theory—people who are just "I don't want to cause climate change, but I want to do stuff that requires energy"—multiplied by the Kantian imperative of there's eight billion people all wanting to do the same thing. We go extinct in all those scenarios, or we at least radically lose civilization—any definition of civilizational progress anybody could want to argue. I would already say when you talk about the Enlightenment that if you ask, how was the Enlightenment and how was generally the narrative of civilizational progress to the Native Americans or to any of the indigenous species that were, you know, indigenous peoples that were extincted, or any of the other species or whatever—the progress narrative is a very challenging narrative, and I'm not going to throw out all of the baby with the bathwater, but we have to hold the complexity of it.

Vervaeke:
Sure.

Schmachtenberger:
But the question that I'm really curious about is, given the amount of technological power that we have and that we're rapidly getting, and given how much that power has already eroded the biosphere to the point of tipping points, and given how distributed all the people are and there is no one king of the world—I'm not saying we would want it—who can make choices, can we imagine a humanity that has the wisdom to steward that power reasonably well?

[02:04:40:16]
Vervaeke:
Well, here's my challenge, back to you. Because you've made this argument before, and I find it compelling, but I also find it frustrating because the argument is set up that it basically says, we have no examples from the past we can rely on, and then asks us to imagine the future, where, how can we possibly imagine a future without relying on the past examples? It's a request to do—and I know you're not trying to do that. Do you see what I'm saying?

Schmachtenberger:
I would argue that we have examples from the past, temporarily, that were able to use restraint via wisdom, via relationship to the sacred, adequate to have their own population in some relative sustainability with its environment and some reasonable quality of life-producing.

I have Indigenous scholar friends who've said that the early Indigenous wisdom traditions—we're talking 40,000 years ago—actually emerged in relationship with human extinction of megafauna, and that they had already messed stuff up and were like, Whoa, we're too powerful to be this dumb. We have to be a lot wiser. Men are not the web of life. We're a strand within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves—that the first wisdom traditions were already their response to the anthropogenic crisis. And so then they might have had a while of relatively good binding of that level of tech. Then someone else got a higher level of tech, didn't have the same binding, and then those people got wiped out or had to join things.

[02:06:05:08]
So I'm not saying we have no precedent of people doing a wisdom-binding-power thing. I'm saying we have no adequate precedent to the current situation because obviously we have a totally different power dynamic. And so—but it's okay to say that new stuff is required, right? Like, so this is an innovative question. It's an "innovating in the domain of wisdom" question that of course draws on, but is not limited to what we have done.

Vervaeke:
So to my ear, this just sounds like an exaptive proposal. Can we take stuff that's been working one way and repurpose it in some—like the way the tongue has been repurposed for speech. Am I understanding you correctly? Because sometimes I've heard—

Schmachtenberger:
It has to be exaptive.

Vervaeke:

Right. Okay. So it is—

[02:06:49:23]
Schmachtenberger:
I don't think we were evolutionarily selected to wisely steward A.I..

McGilchrist:
No.

Schmachtenberger:
I don't think anyone would argue that. We were evolutionarily selected to have hemispheres to do this stuff and that created—in the same way I don't think we were evolutionarily selected to cause the Anthropocene and all of the problems and cause climate change.

Vervaeke:
Right.

Schmachtenberger:
So I think the problems and the solutions are both exaptive to the evolutionary capacities.

[02:07:09:15]
Vervaeke:
Yeah. Right. Okay, excellent.

Now that's a good reframing because the other question is, how much hope can we place in the sapiential, the wise-oriented exaptations compared to, let's call them the power-dynamic exaptations, the technological power-dynamic exaptations? And it's difficult to know where we—I'm not trying to be difficult. I'm just trying to say, for me it's like, where would we stand to ask that question? What would be the place in which you see us being able to—where are we standing such that we can look at these two and say, I can make a sort of—I don't want to want to say objective, but a relatively neutral evaluation of these two and say, here's how we can place hope here. Because you're not just asking people to place hope. I hear you saying, can you give me good reason to place hope? Is that fair?

Schmachtenberger:
I think—so you know, my process coming to this with regard to global catastrophic risk obviously involved recognizing none of the other species were causing global catastrophic risk, and people with stone tools couldn't cause global catastrophic risk, and with bronze tools couldn't.

02:08:21:10
So it was a relationship to human mind, our mind's ability to create vast economic, industrial communication, educational governments, technological systems, the way those systems in turn reinforce patterns of mind, that lead us to a novel situation of self-induced, global catastrophic risk that is increasingly imminent, and then saying, what do all these different risks have in common in terms of the patterns of human experience and behavior individually and collectively—in particular collectively—that give rise to them? Because if we can identify those generative dynamics, then we can say, a future that is not described by these

catastrophes has to deal with these generative dynamics. And so we talk about the third attractor of, like, neither a future defined by increasing catastrophe nor a control response to that that gives dystopias—what's left?

[02:09:13:19]
And so really it's a, what are the necessary criteria of a civilization that could steward the amount of technological power we have well?

Vervaeke:
So then this is great. This is helpful. I think Iain and I have been trying to point out what some of those underlying generative dynamics are—

Schmachtenberger:
Exactly.

Vervaeke:
—and then propose—and, Iain, I don't mean to put words in your mouth, so if I say something inappropriate, please intervene—but I would propose, you know, these ideas of wisdom, correct intracerebral, intrapsychic relation, correct distributed cognition, replacing adversarial with opponent, bringing back love of virtue, love of the transcendentals, pointing out that those aren't just airy fairy, they have an evolutionary provenance, so we can depend on deep motivations to empower them. But I sense that you're still sensing an inadequacy in this.

[02:10:06:08]
Schmachtenberger:
Well, I think at an individual level these are good thoughts.

Vervaeke:
Right.

Schmachtenberger:
At the, how do you have those define the way AI is developed and rolled out, and the way synthetic biology is developed and rolled out, and the way that NATO and Russia engage over Ukraine is different. So, one is saying, what would more wise—like, is there a basis—these are philosophic questions: is there a basis in reality for intrinsic purpose or meaningfulness or sacred? Are there different capacities, maybe hemispheric orientations within humans to understand that better? I.e., are there ways of developing wisdom that could steward power better? That's like the philosophic and then developmental at the individual level. But then it's the—you pointed out the word defection earlier, right, which is the defection from the wisdom that is directing the power that can end up leading to these kind of slippery things. And you can never totally close that. But in the time of stone tools or bronze tools, the worst thing you could do was way less bad than the worst thing it can do now. So I'm asking for better thoughts on, what would it take to develop wisdom at the scale necessary to actually have a continuing human presence on the planet that doesn't destroy itself or totally suck?

[02:11:36:04]

Vervaeke:
Well, I've offered an answer to that I thought.

Schmachtenberger:
Okay

Vervaeke:
But my proposal is, we need to basically co-opt and exapt the machinery of religion, because religions have been able to do—they've shown that they are proper distributed cognition, collective intelligence machines that can fundamentally reorient at a civilizational level. They have a—they can do that, for good or for ill, right?

[02:12:05:05]
And that what we need is something like that. And I'm not proposing that I'm going to start a religion, because that's a ridiculous proposal. But that—so I'm saying, we have done this in the past, and of course, nobody makes a religion. There's an algorithm. There's a way in which—and I'm sort of Heideggerian about this—the sacred has to somehow break through the way the complicated has failed in the face of the complexity of reality and speaks in a new way. And something is called to that. And then we have something like—but it can't be like the Axial religions. It has to be as different to the Axial religions as the Axial religions were to the Bronze Age religions. This is the proposal I'm making.

Schmachtenberger:
Okay, great. So this relates to what Iain said a few moments ago when he said, If I'm getting anything out of this conversation, it's how powerful something like Christianity must be.

So, you were speaking to this hierarchy of values and the utility values at the bottom, which obviously is not how the world is oriented currently, and some sense of the sacred at the top. We mentioned wisdom being something that has a concept of restraint, bound so that utility is not always maximized, that power is not always maximized, in service of something that is other than utility.

McGilchrist:
Absolutely.

[02:13:33:16]
Schmachtenberger:
You're proposing that religion has served this function before, and that something like that is probably needed. Obviously, we know the history of why church and state have been separated. We know all of the critiques of religion that are worthwhile.

What do we imagine the relationship to some sense of sacred that is developable, that creates something like wisdom, that creates something like restraint and power-binding, that creates something like increased felt meaningfulness, increased sense of coordination that is other than game theory, what might that look like? Because it probably won't be just religion as its own domain. It'll probably be how it relates to the educational system and to media and even how it's encoded in economics. What are some of your thoughts on what

the criteria of such a religion might need to be, and what it might look like, and what the transition from here to there or its development might look like?

[02:14:52:09]
Vervaeke:
So I really want to be really clear that I am not proposing the founding of a religion or anything ridiculous like this, because relevance is not subjective. It has to. It has to be co-created by reality, and thus *religio* has to be co-created by reality. There's a sense in which reality has to disclose something to us. So I just want to reiterate that contextualization.

Now, within that, what I have been trying to do are two related projects. One is to try and look for what can be exapted from the past—and I want to use that language very carefully—and see some of the central things that come out of that. One is—sorry, these are both very long arguments, so I'll just be very, but I'll be very compressed. One is, you take a look at what becomes pretty much the spiritual backbone of the West—and Arthur Versluis argued this very well, which is something like Neoplatonism. Neoplatonism has this tremendous capacity to enter into reciprocal reconstruction with Judaism, with Christianity, with Islam, with science.

[02:16:10:00]
It does this at the beginning of the scientific—so it has this tremendous thing. And I think [James] Filler in his wonderful book in his series of essays has made a very clear case, a very good case, that what Neoplatonism is trying to get us to do is give up a substance-based ontology, and I mean substance not just in the Cartesian sense, but the Aristotelian sense, like, that we think of the world—the most real things are physio—you know, spatial, temporal, physical things to which properties bind, and that relations emerge out of these things; and that what Neoplatonism is and is trying to say is, No, reality is ultimately about intelligibility.

Or we can use something analogous from our modern thinking—we have to play with it though—information—and this is inherently relational: intelligibility, information, right?—are inherently relational, and so reality is fundamentally primarily relational, but it takes a lot of transformation in individuals for it to get them into seeing the Ground of Being as that the relations have ontological—don't think about this temporally, because that's a mistake—but they have ontological priority over the *relata*: the things that are bound in to the relations.

[02:17:35:00]
And that way you can ground intelligibility and information as fundamental—well, I don't—see, any word I use is going to be inappropriate, but fundamental features of reality; even that word is inappropriate—then what you see—and it's this sort of grand unifying field theory of Western spirituality—then you see Zen gathering together elements of Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Shintoism, and also coming to, you know, a very convergent kind of: no, no underneath it, right, is it, right? It's actually the interconnectedness and the interconnectedness and time—relationality is the deepest ground.

And you have a philosopher in the West, like Heidegger, trying to open us back up to that. And then you have the Kyoto school in Japan trying to bridge between this, and then what

that brings up is the possibility of what I call the philosophical Silk Road. The Silk Road belonged to no one, and it allowed people to commerce, not only a commerce of things, but a commerce of ideas. But they needed a lingua franca, and it was sort of Neoplatonism from the West and Zen from the East. And there also seems to be interactions with Vedanta and other things.

[02:18:54:06]
And what it gives you is it gives you—nobody owns this, just like nobody owns English—but it gives people a grammar, a deep grammar by which they can enter into these large-scale re-creations of fundamental understanding of human Being in the world. And so I think that's a real possibility for us.

By the way, there's a long history of trying to bridge between—there's, like, forty years of history in the West of what's called Zen Christianity, where people would not be considered—this is something that people are—now, I'm not saying that the religion of the future is Zen Neoplatonism. I'm not saying that. What I'm saying is these two could be brought into—because they have important differences—they could be brought into a profound opponent-processing that could be that from which the exaptation can occur.

[02:19:58:24]
That's that side of the project. The other side of the project is, can we build ecologies of practices, can we build networks of communities like what happens in the early Christian church? And can we get them integrated with our best understanding of meaning-making, of *religio*? Can we build these communities? Can we build these ecologies of practices? Can we network them together? And I'm invested and involved in creating that, and trying to get, can we get this and this going together? And the hope is, out of that can emerge the possible exaptation, and it has to be as different from the Axial religions as the Axial religions were from the Bronze Age religions. That's the proposal. It's a project even.

[02:20:58:13]
Now, notice what I'm not saying. I'm not saying I'm going to make this. What I'm going to say is, can I get the very best of what drew everything together, draw it together, put it into a living community, living ecologies of practices so that there's a possibility that the sacred could speak to us again? That's what I'm proposing.

McGilchrist:
I think the sacred is beginning to speak to us again. That's my observation.

Vervaeke:
Yes.

McGilchrist:
And I notice one of the nice things for me is that a lot of young people are very interested in my ideas, and they're extremely dissatisfied with the thin gruel of, if you can call it, a philosophy by which our civilization now lives or fails to thrive.

[02:21:30:09]

And so I think there's a thirst for it, and I think it can't be compelled in any way. I don't believe you can invent religions at will at any rate. I think they grow organically, or are founded by communities in a way that, we don't need to think about reinventing religions. There are religious traditions, wisdom traditions, spirituality traditions that are very robust. I've become less enthusiastic about a kind of spiritual sense that is sort of made up, to do with, you know, I don't want to sound patronizing, but there's some kind of almost pseudo religious cults that are growing up that I think could be quite worrying, actually, because a religion carries with it a lot of power. That's why we—it is one of the few ways in which we can exert power, not *we* can exert, but power can be exerted through us for good.

[02:22:36:06]
I'm not saying it couldn't be for bad as well. That is part of what I'm saying. But if we're to think of the things that we really need, like this closely or more closely bound society in which we learn to trust one another and share values, that's extraordinarily important. And I can't remember his name, but I think a third-century Chinese emperor said, For a civilization, there are three things that are important: guns, food, and trust. If you have to give up one, give up guns. If you have to give up another, give up food. But if you give up trust, you cannot survive. And that is what we are losing very, very fast. There's a sort of way in which people now think, which is that if I can get away with it, I should.

[02:23:26:11]
So in other words, we're relying on external pressures, external constraints, external restraints on us, and if they aren't there, well, we can just do anything, which is not—obviously it's not any kind of morality, but it's also very dangerous, because at some point, faced with that kind of philosophy, it will be impossible to constrain and restrain everybody who wishes to do wicked things.

[02:23:55:12]
So I think that's—I want to just say a few things, and it may take a few minutes, but—so I think it will provide many things. It will provide a kind of structure, philosophical framework, a sense of a tradition through which we can re-experience something very beautiful—beautiful, good, and true, in my view, which is what the greatest art of our civilization has produced. And I'm not here excluding other civilizations. As anyone who reads my work will know, I derive a lot from Chinese, Japanese, Indian and other kinds of cultures. So there's that.

And I think also there is something highly motivating, which is, I think it's very important that we get away from the idea that we are simply passive here in this world, that we come into it and certain things sort of are blasted at us and we are receptive or nonreceptive to them, rather like a photographic plate or a sound recorder. I don't believe that's the way it works, on a whole number of levels. The first is that I think we have responsibilities on several levels, and this needs to be said, because it's not known anymore. One is—and I know you would share this—that the way in which we attend to things changes what there is to attend to. And that means that we are—whether we like it or not—we have a moral responsibility to be careful about how we use and how we dispose our attention, because we can create bad things by attending in a certain way, or we can produce a good result by attending in another way with a different disposition of one's heart and mind.

[02:25:52:09]
So I think that's one. I think another is that we may actually in some sense help to bring about at a sort of more cosmic level a turn for good, for promoting the sacred. So I don't think—my model of whatever it is that we mean by the divine Ground of Being is not just sort of sitting there passively, but it is interacting with its creation, the creation that it has grounded, and that it is coming to know more of itself, and its creation is coming to know more of itself in the dance of evolution that the two do together.

[02:26:34:03]
This is really a Whiteheadian idea, and it's one I find compelling as I find much of Whitehead's philosophy deeply compelling. And I think there are other ways, too, that we can help prepare things in a way which is, even if we don't succeed, is a fine project to devote our lives to.

So in the Lurianic Kabbalah, there is a story of creation which is rather different from the one in Genesis, but it begins with the divine being, the Ground of Being, Ein-Sof, bringing something into existence, because Ein-Sof is essentially relational. The foundations of everything are relational, and I believe, and I think you have said this too, that I certainly think that relationships are prior to *relata*. Relations are at the foundations of everything. And the *relata* come out of the network of relations at the intersection points. We see things that attract our attention, if there's a thing.

[02:27:35:13]
So if that's the case, then anyway, you'd expect this divine being to want to create something that was other than itself in order to have a relationship with it. And if God is, as is held in almost all spiritual traditions, love, then love needs to have an other. And it needs also not to compel that other, because it cannot love something that is entirely predictable and under its control.Otherwise it's not other at all.

So that view of the cosmos, which I think is wonderfully developed in Christianity through the idea of a God that makes himself vulnerable by a creation that is free either to reciprocate his love or not reciprocate it.

[02:28:21:06]
I want to come back to the Kabbalistic story. So the first act of this creative God is not to stretch out a hand and make something happen; it's to withdraw. It's to rein itself in so there's a space for something other. That's called Tzimtzum, which simply means "withdraw." And then the second phase is called Shevirat HaKelim, which means the shattering of the vessels, because in this space that's been created, there are twelve vessels, then a single spark comes out of Ein-Sof and lands on the vessels and shatters them.

In fact, it only shatters eight out of the twelve. Explaining why would take me too long, so let's just accept that.

And then the third phase in which humanity, according to the Judaic tradition, has a particular role that only it is capable of carrying out, which is to repair the shattering: Tikkun, "repair." And the idea is that we are tasked with creating again these vessels so that they are more beautiful than they were before they were shattered. And the image that always comes

to mind for me here is the Japanese art of kintsugi whereby a piece of ceramics that is broken, is repaired, sometimes with lines of gold and is considered more special, more precious, more beautiful afterwards than it was before.

[02:29:58:17]
Now, if it is true that we have the capacity to see how to repair things and no other beings can see that—and I think that is probably right; it's no disrespect to to the rest of animal life—that probably we have this ability to see other things and see beyond and foresee things in a way that they probably don't. So I think if that's the case, then we have a special role there, and we may even have a role in bringing about the existence of God, because—that may sound very strange and possibly blasphemous, but the way in which I think this works is like this: we all know Pascal's Wager. Pascal's Wager was a simple one: either there is a God, or there isn't. If there is a God, then it's very important that we should recognize and reciprocate our relationship with that God. If there is no God, then it won't do us any harm to behave as if there was a God.

But I think there's a third possibility, which is McGilchrist's Wager, and it has the first two of Pascal in it, but there was a third one, which is that maybe we play a role in the development, the evolution, the furtherment, the fulfillment of whatever is divine. And if that's the case, then once again, we have an incredibly ennobling obligation, which is to make sure that we do help that good progress in the world.

[02:31:16:14]
So on various levels to do with how we dispose our attention, the role we play in repair, the role we play in furthering and bringing about the divine, we can influence things and we may not be able to stop certain specific wars or whatever, but that's never been part of what is imaged here. Part of what is imaged here is that we, like it or not, are gathered up into something that we have to respond to.

And I believe that the reason for there being life at all, and especially human life, is because whatever it is that is the Ground of Being needs response. It needs that response. And while it can be satisfied by the response of the inanimate world up to a point, what life brings—because I believe all life is sacred, but also the inanimate is sacred as well. The difference is not that one suddenly is involved with consciousness and the other isn't. I think they're both manifestations of consciousness—but the thing about life is that it can respond enormously much faster and to a greater extent, so that things can move instead of having to wait for this very slow, slow process. With creatures like us, there can be an acceleration of the evolution of the cosmos and the divine Being that grounds that cosmos together.

[02:32:46:16]
So all in all, there is an enormously optimistic, in my view, and real—and I know I'm a skeptical person in many ways, but I'm also skeptical of skepticism when it rules things out that we should open ourselves to. And if I'm honest about my thinking, my reading, my experience of life as a person, as a doctor, and so on, I do believe that this is the way the cosmos is and how we relate to it. And that is surely something that brings hope, brings dignity to the human condition. And it also takes the burden off us of having to solve certain specific problems.

I'm not saying we shouldn't try to solve those specific problems. We must, but it's in a sense secondary. It's like the role of the emissary is to get on and find ways of, you know, purifying the oceans. This is terribly important, but it mustn't stop there because, as I say, you can purify the oceans, you can save the rainforests. And if the only reason we did that was because of our own economy and for our own flourishing, we would have lost the main reason, which is because these things are powerful, beautiful, rich, complex entities that have their value in themselves. They are intrinsic in their nature, not of extrinsic use to us.

Vervaeke:
Should I reply? Or do you want to reply?

Schmachtenberger:
Go ahead.

[02:34:16:05]
Vervaeke:
First of all, I share that vision in a lot of ways. As I mentioned, Kabbalah comes out of the intersection of Neoplatonism with Judaic thought, but what I would like to try and afford and not make—and there's a big difference. You don't make wisdom; you cultivate it. You don't do nothing; you cultivate the conditions and it has to take root and it has to flower, right?

[02:34:42:01]
I would like to afford something that could work at the global level that needs to be addressed here, given the novelty of the global level of the problems that Daniel has—so I'm trying to find something that is properly pluralistic, so running through Whitehead and running through Kabbalah and running through Sufism is this Neoplatonic framework and then running through many things in, for lack of a better word, I don't like the word, but the East, right, is a Zen sensibility. And then there's ways in which really helpfully they converge, but they differ. So proper opponent processing between them is possible. And then the idea is this could take on a life of its own such that something could, well, exapt out of it, emerge out of it. That's what I'm proposing. And so I think that's needed, because we need something where, like the Silk Road, everybody can participate in it, but the Christian can go on the Silk Road and then return with their Christianity enriched. The Buddhist can go on the Silk Road and return, and their Buddhism is enriched. But there's also something that's alive, like, at a global level that is also affording something new to be born. That's the proposal I'm making.

[02:36:05:07]
McGilchrist:
I agree with you. And there was nothing in what I said that suggested that it was restricted in its scope.

Vervaeke:
Yes.

McGilchrist:
In fact, I was talking about the way in which we actually have power which is not mechanistic, and therefore to do with the effects of individual actions of human beings, but

was a relationship with the cosmos, in fact. And you know, one of the great sayings, of course, is to live the change or be the change you wish to see. And so in all these movements, I think that has to begin with one's own orientation and one's public commitments. These two go hand in hand.

Vervaeke:
Yes.

[02:36:49:24]
McGilchrist:
And you can't create wisdom. You can't instill wisdom. It's not like that. But you can follow people or admire people or model yourself on people. We all do this whether we realize it or not. We have people that we have thought exceptionally influential and venerable, that we don't somehow have rules about how to be that kind of person. But we know intuitively there is this kind of a person, and we get moved towards what that is.

And so—sorry, you wanted to comment?

Vervaeke:
Well, there's two things about that. One is, yes, there's empirical evidence supporting this [...] very recent, that the thing that is singularly most predictive of people aspiring and carrying out an aspirational project—properly aspirational, not utilitarian, but "I should be better than I am," is the degree to which they have internalized the sage, internalized the role model. That's the thing.

[02:37:41:05]
McGilchrist:
Yes, absolutely.

Vervaeke:
And that's the perspectival.

McGilchrist:
Exactly.

Vervaeke:
And then the second thing is, you know, Thich Nhat Hanh said, the next Buddha is the Saṅgha. I think there's a way in which the role model doesn't have to necessarily be an individual; it can be a community in a powerful and new way that is also something [...].

McGilchrist:
We also need that.

Vervaeke:
Yes.

[02:38:06:15]
McGilchrist:

And if there's going to be regeneration and—you know, tomorrow I'm going to Bristol to take part in the Local Futures symposium, the idea there being that if there's a future for us, we must generate it locally. We mustn't rely on the global everything to supply us. We must start growing our food locally and trusting and using the contributions and gifts of those around us, not just through an abstract machine like Amazon. Now, I mean, that may be difficult, but it's an important aspiration, and I think it's necessary too. So we need to be balancing in the sense of opponent processing.

Vervaeke:
Yes.

McGilchrist:
We need to be able to pick up the things that need to be done at a global level. But we also need to be modeling that at the local level. And what we need to do is create the circumstances in which wisdom can grow, because it can't be made to happen. All you can do is stifle it or permit it. It's like a gardener cannot make a plant. The gardener can either permit the plant to flourish or stifle it.

Schmachtenberger:
This brings up a place where I was wanting to go, which has to do with more local religion.

McGilchrist:
Yep.

[02:39:22:11]
Schmachtenberger:
First, I just want to acknowledge, you were kind of reifying choice, so we're not just receptive beings here, but we have choice, and inherent to reifying choice was obligation, and that obligation was not imposed from the outside, but was the result of a kind of recognition. And I really like that. I think that's an important thing—that obligation, wisdom, restraint, I think are all going to be critical topics. And as you said, we can't impose that on people. We cannot mechanistically make it, but it can be cultivated.

To your project, the idea of a deeply respectful, giving-the-benefit-of-the-doubt inquiry into the previous religious philosophic endeavors that had some success, and some kind of synthesis, not homogenization, but a synthesis that recognizes that they might orient towards different but meaningful things, and holding those together is useful. I think this is really good and I'm appreciating that you said Western and certain Eastern things, but what comes to mind is that both what we call the Western and Eastern traditions are very new relative to most of sapiens history.

Vervaeke:
Yes.

Schmachtenberger:
And there's a reason I'm saying this that isn't just kind of like the obligate point, to point out that there's a global south and there's things pre-civilization. There's actually a really important reason I bring it up is, if we've had, you know, some hundreds of thousands of

years of sapiens existence, and we've only had these kinds of religious philosophic structures for some small number of thousands of years, most of human experience is in this other thing. And a big part of it was that it was always local.

[02:40:47:05]
And that means that it wasn't trying to create a memetic structure that scaled, and there's something intrinsic to memetic structures that scale that goes along with techno-economic military structures, that scale that I think is worth exploring a little bit.

You were mentioning in one of your talks that intelligibility is not just about abstraction where all the differences go away. Being able to notice uniqueness and instantiation and distinction, and you've—

Vervaeke:
Difference. Difference has to be as real as sameness, and that's the fundamental challenge to reductionism. Reductionism says, only what things have in share as the same counts as real.

Schmachtenberger:
So there's something about scale, standardization, and reduction that go together very well. This have been pointed—this is deep to the Postmodern critique.

[02:41:38:02]
And wisdom cultivation is always unique to the moment. It's not trolley problems, right? It's instantiated. What is a good choice in this moment, utilizing all of the capabilities: left hemisphere, right hemisphere, all the chakras, however you want to think about it, and also unique to this person, unique to this time in context? So I find it interesting that almost every indigenous wisdom tradition that developed in much smaller contexts where everyone had much more intimate relationships to each other, rather than abstracted relationship— we're all Christian, we're all Hindu or whatever—that they were all animistic.

And so in terms of like the Catholic and Hindu conversation around, Is God transcendent or is God immanent? They if anything erred on the immanent side, right, that the Creator is indwelling within the creation. And if the Creator's indwelling within the creation, maybe also beyond any part of it, so transcendent not meaning elsewhere, but beyond any aspect, but indwelling in each aspect, then any destruction of anything is sin, is a violation of the sacred.

There's something about erring in the direction of immanence that is less dangerous. I find that interesting.

McGilchrist:
Erring in the direction of immanence.

[02:43:04:05]
Schmachtenberger:
Yes. And there's something about also at the small scale. Like, we're talking, we're having a conversation, a lot of people are going to get to see. But we're not necessarily taking people through a practice that is inducing the kinds of states, the right-hemispheric state where the

numinous is there, right? Where the sacred is there, where the intimacy is there, and I don't want to violate something I'm intimate with.

You know, there's something about the small-scale that has high intimacy, high touch in which I'm not relating to the abstract concept of, “They're Christians. They're on my side. They're not Hindus on the other side,” or whatever. I'm relating to this unique person and this one and this one here that is inherently, I think, hemispherically different.

I was also thinking about—so I'm curious how much you see hemispheric dominance having to do with scaling, is one question. I'm also very curious about—and I've had other friends want to ask you this—if matriarchal and matrifocal cultures had any difference in this particular way, given the—is there a evolutionary difference in tending the babies and tending life that orients in this way? And then we come back to the challenge of, we have global scale problems that have global drivers. If the Chinese are, the US has to, and because the US is, the Chinese have to. We have to deal with that. But scaling, if it involves standardization, abstraction, and a loss of instantiation, is inherently part of the problem.

So how do we get something that is profoundly instantiated and profoundly unique, profoundly local, and also cultivate that in a way that has the distribution that it needs?

[02:44:31:21]
McGilchrist:
Yeah, and I'm sympathetic to animism. And one interesting thing here is as if you experimentally suppress the left hemisphere for, say, ten to fifteen minutes, people describe things that they would normally consider inanimate as animate. So they see the sun as animate moving across the sky, giving energy and such. And if you do the opposite and suppress the right hemisphere, they see things that we would normally think of as living as not. So people are like bits of furniture, like zombies or simply machines. So there's clearly a difference there.

Schmachtenberger:
So fascinating.

McGilchrist:
I'm a panentheist, and I think that's an important analogy, if you like, but it goes further than animism, and it manages to bring together immanence and transcendence. So, pantheism simply says, God is all the stuff that there is. Panentheism says God is in all the stuff that there is, and all the stuff that is is in God.

Now, I think that is a—maybe you don’t need to explore that too much, but I would say that is a very, to me, important, and sounds to me, feels to me, a wise way of thinking about the world and would also, if taken seriously, stop us fighting between religious groups,and would stop us despoiling the natural world, and would instill a sense of proper reverence.

[02:46:13:23]
And there's nothing, of course, in religion that says that we've got to see ourselves over and against other people. In fact, in many religions, your first duty is to those who are not of your kind. I mean, I know that's part of Zoroastrianism, actually, but it's also in Christianity. That

doesn't mean that the history of these religions has not been a war between those who really understood the mystical meaning of it and those who used it as a lever for power and influence and for adversarial approaches, power grabs.

So all of that—now, you said something else. How do we—what was the first thing that you?

Schmachtenberger:
Scale.

McGilchrist:
Yeah, the thing about scale actually brings me to something that I was thinking when I was listening to you talk to the Consilience Project or Conference, which is that you made the important point that what gives something a sense of reality and tells us something about itself is in the differences, not in the samenesses, but of course we need to be able to aggregate things in order to be able to live. We can't experience everything as new and original and unique.

[02:47:29:20]
Vervaeke:
Of course.

McGilchrist:
We have to generalize and both hemispheres generalize actually, but in different ways. So the left hemisphere generalizes by, there's a feature here that they have in common, whereas the right hemisphere generalizes by either being a sort of what Wittgenstein called a family resemblance. So there being a general gestalt holding together of things.

But what's really intriguing is people think that because the left hemisphere is focused on detail, that it must somehow not involve generalization, and that because the right hemisphere is, sees the whole it's neglectful of the individual case. It turns out that to understand the unique case is very strongly dependent on the right temporal parietal region. It's the right hemisphere that understands uniqueness.

The left hemisphere doesn't understand uniqueness, because it's already categorized things as “I see, it’s another one of those that goes in that box.” So—and there's a huge literature on that, and some of it that I report in my newest books. But the point there is that there are two ways of thinking of the small, if you like. One is the tiny part that is a detail. The other is the uniqueness of something, which is not strictly measurable.

[02:48:56:01]
It's “How big is the uniqueness of your wife?” You know, um, excuse me, this is not a sensible question. And also in generalizing, the right hemisphere doesn't generalize in the sense of trying to find a way in which it all fits a known schema, but sees the bigger picture, whereas the left hemisphere manages to get that wrong by not seeing the bigger picture, but seeing lots of examples that can be generalized.

So the conflict between sameness or oneness on the one hand, and difference and multiplicity on the other crosses the hemispheres in a recognizably different way, and I think

what's important about union and division is that we need them both, not just one, but we need them to be unified, not divided. So at the meta level, union trumps division, but it must not abolish division.

[02:49:48:09]
So we need in our ontology to be able to at least distinguish, but that distinction doesn't mean there's an irreparable separation. And unfortunately in the way we talk, we often think that if we differentiate, we've completely divided and sundered, whereas it's very important to realize that distinction is enormously important. To be able to discriminate differences is what we have a mind for, how we come to experience the multiplicity of life. But it doesn't entail us in a sort of abandonment of a sense of the togetherness as well.

Vervaeke:
Well, I'd like to reply to that and reply to both of you. And again, the argument I was making at the Consilience Conference is that intelligibility is actually the complete togetherness of the integration and the differentiation. If you have—

[02:50:45:13]
McGilchrist:
Exactly. So that's good.

Vervaeke:
Yeah. Like, there has to be both for there to be intelligibility.

McGilchrist:
We're agreed then.

Vervaeke:
Right. And the Neoplatonistists were very much on about that, the One is that it is not the one of the numerical sequence, they're only using that word because—so they go on and on about this is not the numerical one, this is not—we're talking about the Oneness of integration and differentiation which are very hard—there is no logical oneness between them. There's the deeper Oneness of intelligibility upon which logic rests. Logic presupposes that deeper thing, and therefore, we're called to it.

And then what they get to—see, we're Cartesian and we think the appearance-reality distinction is just the inner-outer, the subjective-objective. The ancient world had a different way of understanding the appearance-reality distinction. It was the one-many, which is the problem we're talking about. And what it did is it said, this deep reflection Neoplatonism on intelligibility and the one and the many—the emergence up, the emanation down, they're completely inter-penetrating, right? What it came to in, like, the coincidence of the opposites is this idea, right, that *scientia intuitiva*, right, that you have to be able to see the whole in every part and the part as properly participating in all of the whole.

[02:52:15:00]
You get the same thing in the Zen—not the *same* thing, sorry, wrong word, that's a logic word—you get something convergent from the Zen tradition in Indra's net, how everything is the center of everything else, and that it's a different way of framing things. And I would also

say the transcendent and immanent have to be completely inter-penetrating and you see late Neoplatonists like Nicolas of Cusa and like Eriugena proposing this.

I'm worried about our category of animism, because for me it sounds like us trying to capture *this* transjectivity and *this* transjectivity and then stick it into substantial things, which I think is—I'm worried about that.

[02:52:52:06]
For example, I don't think life is a property of an organism. I think it's a property of an organism in relationship to its environment in a profound way. And so, again, I think we're agreeing, and I'm just trying to say that I think that if we can teach people sets of practices that get them to realize this as a deep ontological truth, then they will be called to new ways—and we can't say what they're going to be—

McGilchrist:
No, exactly.

Vervaeke:
—but they can be called to new ways of bringing the small and the large—I'm not happy with even though those words, the immanent and the transcendent—they'll be called to new ways beyond our current grammar for how to bring them into relation. That would be for me evidence that the new religion is emerging.

[02:53:40:15]
McGilchrist:
What do you think about that?

Schmachtenberger:
Well, I'm curious, because the term "new religion" is provocative—

Vervaeke:
I expect it to be so.

Schmachtenberger:
Right, and especially in the presence of there being existing religions that have billions of people in them. I don't think you mean that it has to replace or supersede those existing ones. I think it can reify them.

Vervaeke:
Yes.

Schmachtenberger:
And I think, you know, we would probably all agree that all of the religions have different ways of interpreting them, some of which lead to holy war, and some of which lead to sacred responsibility in different ways. And so the question, of—because it's very interesting, obviously, Zen and Vedanta and Lurianic Kabbalism and Christianity are culturally different, historically—

Vervaeke:
Of course.

Schmachtenberger:
—mythopoetically. But you could say that there might be certain underlying structures they all have to have to orient the human adequately. There's almost like a meta-metaphysics that is necessary.

McGilchrist:
Exactly.

Schmachtenberger:
Where does it get the relationship of the one and the many? Does it get the relationship of the determined and the freed? Does it get the—

Vervaeke:
The inner and the outer, yes.

Schmachtenberger:
—all of those things, and it might be that those meta-dynamics have both the capability of giving rise to new philosophic inquiries as well as reifying the versions of the existing ones—

[02:55:00:20]
Vervaeke:
Exactly.

Schmachtenberger:
—that are capable of being in a harmonious relationship with the other ones and capable of being able to understand and steward the power of our technology well, which I would say, if a religion doesn't do that, it's not adequate for the purpose of being able to orient humans in the world today to steward the world.

Vervaeke:
You almost sung that, and it was beautiful. That's it. Yes. Sorry, I got enthusiastic.

Schmachtenberger:
So then I think one question I have for you since you've been thinking about this project, but for all of us, is, how might we imagine the reification of the existing religions in a direction that allows them to have something meaningful to say about ecological overshoot and planetary boundaries and AI and synthetic bioregulation and the war in Ukraine and whatever, like, to orient them to be able to play a role in the stewarding of the **world** to that in the development of wisdom individually, that the stewarding of the world locally—and not just locally, because it's all that—how might we see the reification of those religions and the development of new ones, or at least new philosophic metaphysical systems, the interface of—and then how do we see the interface of those with the other systems of human coordination?

If I value things differently, does my economic system change? If I have a different relationship to what is a good problem to solve, does my tech design change? How does education and media change, since those are affecting the nature of human mind so profoundly?

So the reification of the religions, the development of new philosophic traditions, but also the development of those you say you can't force it, that you can garden or nurture it. How do you imagine being able to garden and nurture the type of adequate wisdom moving forward in all these ways?

[02:56:55:06]
McGilchrist:
Can I just ask you a more terminological thing?

Schmachtenberger:
Yes.

McGilchrist:
You used the word “reify” and “reification” a lot.

Vervaeke:
He uses it positively.

McGilchrist:
I know, but you mean “validation”?

Schmachtenberger:
Sure.

McGilchrist:
Because “reification” to me means “making it a thing.” And of course that's what we don't want to make it. So?

Schmachtenberger:
I mean, um—

McGilchrist:
“Thing”-ifying.

Schmachtenberger:
Yeah. So when I was saying “to reify” I mean to be able to interpret the religion in a particular direction that is commensurate with what it must be, given the constraints humanity faces. So there’s kind of like a pragmatic forcing function on the metaphysics.

[02:57:31:21]
Vervaeke:
It's like “re-” in the respect, looking at it properly, right? That's how I was getting it. And you're nodding, so I think that's landing. So—

Schmachtenberger:
What is the “real” interpretation, is what the scholars will argue on. So there's an interpretation of, what does this really mean, that can be different. And also, as you said, we're not just painting meaning on the walls of a meaningless universe, but there is a—no, there's actually something intrinsically real they're pointing to.

[02:57:58:21]
McGilchrist:
There is. But there's no one way, as it were, of saying it.

Schmachtenberger:
Right.

McGilchrist:
That's very important.

Schmachtenberger:
That's what I was saying, is that there's something like, almost like how every personality—very healthy, psychologically healthy people don't all become the same, right. As we become psychologically healthier, we don't become the same. Cultures also wouldn't become the same, but they would be—and the culture is almost like the psychology of the many. The religion could be thought of that way.

[02:58:24:07]
Vervaeke:
Yeah, but that's that's how proper pluralism differs from relativism. Think about—let's use a biological analogy. There are universal principles of evolution, but evolution doesn't say that all the creatures are going to be the same. It in fact tells you that all the creatures are going to be very different and contextually sensitive, not only spatially, but temporally, right? So there can be universal principles that predict why you must be contextually sensitive.

Schmachtenberger:
Yes.

Vervaeke:
And I think that's the kind of thing I'm trying to point us towards. And then what you can do with—I mean, I think Iain has said this off camera and me too—I get a lot of people that come to me and say, “You've given me a language so that I can go back and rehome myself in the religion I was brought up in.” And then you can think about that homing process as a much deeper kind of education than what we now have. It's closer to what Zak is talking about when he's talking about education as ensoulment, et cetera.

So let's talk about that kind of education, and then we could properly empower people. Let’s do a concrete example. Okay, let's say the proposal I've been making–not just me, people like Filler, a whole bunch of people, Carse, all these people are wrapping into this in part—but Filler makes this argument in one of his recent books, that to really try to get—really, really try to get the Trinity within Christianity is saying that relationality is

primordial. Really get it. Don't think of this as three guys stuck together; think about them completely interpenetrating, interconnected, relationality, intelligibility, the "*logos*," the reality, the indwelling in people, the spirit.

See, all of that is deeply profoundly relational. Go back and start to practice your practices that way, live that way, and then people are going to find different things relevant and salient in the world and their relationship to the world. And it could open up the, like, you could switch people from the having mode to the being mode. It could make a difference in, right, in their relationship to their spouses, but also in relationship to economic systems. And you understand.

[03:00:21:16]
Schmachtenberger:
Okay. So I want to—yes. The pragmatic question I'm asking is, so let's say the Vatican calls you up and says, "We agree, we would like to have a uniquely Catholic version of this, and maybe we're stoked if there's a uniquely Muslim and uniquely Hindu kind of enlightenment of similar types. But we would like a kind of Catholic version. How would you change the way we approach our practices, philosophy, et cetera?" Or let's say that the minister of the Department of Education reached out and said, "We want to implement, K through 12, a wisdom-development process. I'm very interested to hear your thoughts on, how could the institutions start to actually implement wisdom-development practices? Practices, insights, philosophies such that, rather than just we're compelling the person on YouTube—"

[03:01:30:15]
Vervaeke:
See, so this is where I think it's different from Zak. I think we have to create enough ecologies of practices within the community before a reformation of education becomes possible, because unless the lived normativity of the culture changes, attempts to change the education will just be co-opted by the current machinery. I've been inside of education long enough to see how that works, right?

Schmachtenberger:
Everybody gets, you got to do stuff with the parents, and you got to do stuff with the culture. If the kids are getting trained for the market, that has inherent limitations. So it becomes tricky because to change anything, you have to change everything. So there's some sequence.

McGilchrist:
You can't start with one thing. You've got to do lots of things together.

Vervaeke:
Exactly.

McGilchrist:
Which if you change the grounding that has led to the problems we have, it will lead naturally to these things flourishing.

[03:02:18:01]

Vervaeke:
Exactly.

McGilchrist:
But at the slightly higher level, but how we do that has got to be through an implicit process, because if we try to—as I'm constantly saying—if we try to instigate the things we think are valuable into people, we have not instigated those things. Instead, we've instigated a kind of chain of thought, which is actually contrary to the way in which we want.

Schmachtenberger:
This is your very first book, right?

[03:02:43:14]
McGilchrist:
Yeah. Exactly.

Schmachtenberger:
You cannot make implicit things explicit without damaging them.

McGilchrist:
Yeah, that's right. That's *Against Criticism*, yeah.

Vervaeke:
But Polanyi's argument was that you can—and this is Plato's argument too. You can't make people wise. You can—properly, again—seduce them so that they can come to love wisdom.

McGilchrist:
But I was going to go on to say though really, I mean, what I was going to say is, we can't do it by the direct approach, but we can do it by a more implicit and less direct approach. And that approach is actually, sadly not original, but is actually to start reeducating—I mean, or educating is what I'm trying to say. I think we stopped educating children about forty, fifty years ago. We started indoctrinating them and giving them information and testing them on how much of that they retained. But we didn't do the really important things, which are relational. All the people who really inspired me and taught me did so by their being who they were, and by the way in which the spark jumped across the gap, in the way that Plato describes in the seventh Epistle, that this is how philosophy is done, not by writing it down. Mysteriously, Plato completely betrayed Socrates into doing this.

[03:04:12:00]
So we need to reimagine what an education is. That would mean freeing up teachers from a dead weight of bureaucracy. In fact, that's one of the very practical things that could be done tomorrow. We should go around universities, go around hospitals, go around some schools and look very critically at all the superstructure of management and so on. And I reckon about 80 percent of that could go tomorrow and nobody would suffer. In fact, there'd be a lot more money for doing the things that we really want to do. We've become sucked by parasites, if you like, which is the externalization of the left hemisphere's drive for control, which is administration.

And so, I mean, that's a practical answer to the question, but also we need—apart from freeing up teachers to teach in a way that is individual, responsive, and alive, rather than just the carrying out the procedures, we need actually to—I'm sorry—give people back their cultural tradition. They need to read literature that—it's not fashionable to say this, but they need to understand the last two thousand years. Otherwise they don't know what they're doing here. They have a very shallow rooting, so we actually do need to teach history, literature, philosophy, music, all our culture, not just IT, not just procedural learning, but actually creative, empathic understanding of other people, not sitting in judgment on our forebears or on other cultures, but in fact trying to see our way into how they sort of work, because they're no stupider than we are, and they might actually have seen something we've lost.

[03:05:56:03]
Vervaeke:
Okay, so I have a proposal to specifically, practically proceed about this, which is—first of all, I'll put a pin in something. The problem we face, of course, is that bureaucracy has wrapped itself around a pseudoreligious ideology that justifies its existence tremendously.

McGilchrist:
Absolutely.

Vervaeke:
And so that's problematic.

McGilchrist:
It's a pseudoreligion.

Vervaeke:
Yes, very much. And what I would want to say is, I don't think we should have teachers in any one institution. So if you look—I'll just take the West, but there's parallel things elsewhere—you had the university, you had the monastery, and you had the church, and they were all interrelated. And one is a knowledge institution, but it has reverence for the wisdom institution. That's the monastery. And then you have the church, but the church is like. "Oh, but all of these ideas and all of these philosophies have to transfer to real lives." Right?

[03:06:47:02]
McGilchrist:
If I may just add, also hospitals.

Vervaeke:
Yes, yes, yes. And what I think we need is, we need to have teachers in multiple kinds of institutions that are acting again in this opponent processing with each other, not adversarial. Part of the problem is, you know, and then the Protestant Reformation comes in and splits them from each other.

McGilchrist:
Absolutely, yeah.

Vervaeke:
And we get all that, all that. But the proposal is, because what we have is, we have this idea that teachers are only legitimate if they're in this one institution, and if we have everybody out—I face this, with the stuff I do outside of the university, it's like, why are you doing that? Right? And I know lots of excellent teachers that can't find a home in the university because they want to do the kind of stuff that the universities aren't—

McGilchrist:
Don't any longer do.

Vervaeke:
Right. And so I think we need to think of a living system of teaching institutions where you've got people sort of—but they're bound together in a field again, where the relationality is important. This is the pole of knowledge, this is the pole of wisdom, and this is the pole of life. And they have to all—and we have that. And I think that's also something that we need to think about bringing back in terms of institutional structures that could actually transform society in the way we're talking.

McGilchrist:
And I'd like to just add—sorry—we need to encourage and provide institutional support for people who are bright to oversee the whole picture to some extent.

[03:08:22:15]
Vervaeke:
Yes.

McGilchrist:
That doesn't happen in our culture anymore. It used to happen, and it used to happen in this university. But now everything has shifted here, as everywhere else in the Western world towards ever greater specialization. Now while we need specialists—of course we do—it's not one or the other. We need people who also are able to take the broad, right-hemisphere view and see, Crikey, look what's happening here.

And, you know, I believe that what I've done, if I've done anything in my writing, is to open people's eyes. That's why they write me. And of course, once you see, "You see what's going on here?" And we don't have any institution to do that. But back in the sixties, I think the RAND Corporation and others sort of put money behind people that they thought were going to be good, and they just gave them a desk in an office and a Xerox machine and said, you know, "Do what you want." And out of that came a lot of, you know, genuinely innovative, creative thinking. And we need to bring that back.

Vervaeke:
Could I respond to just that one thing? So because this is dear to my heart, because I represent the discipline that is all about the synoptic integration across the disciplines: cognitive science.

McGilchrist:

Right.

[03:09:49:14]
Vervaeke:
And trying to create the lingua franca between neuroscience and information processing, machine learning, psychology, linguistics, anthropology, philosophy—trying to do that. And there has been a turning, an increasing recognition by some about the value of this, because the specialization went into psychology, in which we incentivized people to innovate something that nobody else had discovered before, finding the effect, the new effect, right?

And this is one of the driving motivations of the replication crisis, because if you don't pursue synoptic integration, you don't work out your theoretical grammar well. Your conceptual vocabulary is vague and equivocal, and then the fact that you get empirical data is almost irrelevant, because if you get a vague enough construct that isn't bound or responsible to anybody else's work, of course you can find empirical verification.

And so the replication crisis has basically started to put up a flag. Some people are recognizing it, that we need the synoptic integrators as much as we need the specialists. So that. I just want to put that out.

Schmachtenberger:
You've both made this point, and I think when people look at the arguments about all the things that are supposedly getting better in civilization, some of which are, they relate to things that specialization does well. And when we look at the things that are getting worse and heading towards global catastrophic risk, they look at the lack of integrate—they arise from the lack of integration across specialty areas. I think that's actually very important. So you were speaking to that, the existing educational institutions have a history that we actually want to revive some things from, and that we've actually lost some very important aspects.

[03:11:33:22]
You were also speaking to not just the educational institution as a single thing, but lots of them. You didn't mention guilds, but also there, that education needs to be many institutions, and maybe in light of the current situations in the world, some new institutional design as well.

But you said something else that I found really interesting when you talked about cutting some of the bureaucracy and administration, which was almost like an externalization of left-hemispheric dominance, what David Graeber calls "bullshit jobs," that there's this recursive relationship between kind of left-hemispheric process and building a world that is the result of that, that in turn conditions that, and that kind of recursive relationship means we're not just asking, how can we develop things that will give people more wholeness, more integration, more numinous, more sacred, but also how can we undo some of the things that are excessively making us hypertrophic on the wrong modes of mind? And I think we have to do both.

McGilchrist:

Well, one good thing that might come out of a scarcity crisis is that we find quickly what are the things we can dispense with and what we can't, at least if you maintain enough right-hemisphere overview of what's going on.

[03:12:48:24]
But I fear that now the power is concentrated in the hands of, frankly, mediocre people who occupy administrative jobs, and that they're not willing to really relinquish that power. And anyway, it's their validation, but we do desperately need to do it. And you're quite right that what happens is, in a culture like that, people are trained to go into jobs like that, and the people who fit the role best are not the people you'd want to be making big decisions about our lives, but they go into it. And the thing is a positive feedback loop.

Schmachtenberger:
So how do we break the positive feedback loops that orient us towards futures nobody wants? And how do we—or at least weaken them—and how do we simultaneously develop other positive feedback loops—because they have to have some positive feedback or they won't be able to do anything—that move us in a recognition of the sacred ways, individual and collective governance?

We did not answer that question in full. We spoke to different elements of what it might need to entail. But the clock is saying that it is time that we must wrap.

McGilchrist:
Well, there are questions that we can answer, questions that we can offer a direction for, and questions we simply can't in the nature of things answer. So I think we've done the best we can.

[03:14:14:21]
Schmachtenberger:
Yes.

McGilchrist:
And I'd like to think that we could shout this from the rooftops, and some people, just a few might listen.

Schmachtenberger:
So this is my kind of closing question is, if some people do listen and respond and there's interest, maybe we'll deepen this conversation and explore some of these: How do we weaken the existing positive feedback loops? How do we deal with the fact that power is entrenched in certain ways currently? Like, there's a lot of very interesting open questions we could get into further. But in closing thoughts, I guess now for the listeners who have made it through all of this, any closing thoughts that might give them some sense of orientation and or agency in the relationship to all these topics?

[03:15:10:20]
McGilchrist:
Well, I'd say, don't despair. That is achieving nothing whatever, and it's bad for the soul. So we have a duty to see what is hopeful, and do—we're not asked—nobody is asked to do the

impossible. We can only do the best that we can. And that means doing things in our own life and with our own life and furthering larger causes in the way that we are best in a position to do. But we all have a role, and I think one of the things I tried to emphasize was that although the materialist, reductionist picture results in a vision of the cosmos as a heap of junk with no meaning, beauty, or purpose, and that we have no role here, I would, you know, I'd go to my death to defend the opposite point of view, that actually it is beautiful, it is rich, and it is our pleasure, our duty and something we should be grateful for to help further that.

Schmachtenberger:
I like that you said that "I would go to my death." That's the sacrifice in service of the sacred.

McGilchrist:
[laughing] There needs to be a sacrifice.

Schmachtenberger:
Yeah.

Vervaeke:
I would want people to hear that the love of wisdom and the love of being are real possibilities, that there are already people of good faith and good talent doing this individually and collectively, and that that opens up a possibility for a kind of transformation, so that as you fall in love with being again, instead of the reciprocal narrowing that we've just been talking about and how we get addicted, because that's what addiction is, a reciprocal narrowing—a reciprocal opening is equally possible. This is what Plato proposed with anagoge, and that that is still actual, and there are people and communities and practices that you can go to, to actualize that, to realize that. And there is nothing stopping you from doing that right now.

McGilchrist:
May I make a hemispheric comment?

Vervaeke:
Sure.

[03:17:35:01]
McGilchrist:
The left hemisphere closes down to a certainty; the right hemisphere opens up to a possibility. And so what you've really said is we need to further the processes of the right hemisphere, which are always expanding and exploring, rather than those that close down to the arid bit of something we think we know.

Vervaeke:
Yeah, I'm not proposing cognitive closure. I want continuity of contact.

McGilchrist:
I know you. That's why I've said it.

[03:17:52:09]
Vervaeke:
Yes, yes.

Schmachtenberger:
I think the religion—the concern about religions that many people have actually has to do with people orienting to certainty with them, and then closed-mindedness and holy wars and whatever, as opposed to the exact opposite: holding the mystery at the center, holding the unspeakable, the unknowable, but the real, and so there is a epistemic humility that is built in forever.

[03:18:18:00]
McGilchrist:
Yes.

Schmachtenberger:
When we spoke about this yesterday, and you said don't despair, we actually—I liked in our conversation, you were saying, when we are actually open to the beauty of reality, there's a sense of awe and gratitude and humility that comes of that.

McGilchrist:
Precisely.

Schmachtenberger:
But when we're open to the beauty of reality being harmed, which is within the factory farm and on the war field, and whatever, we're also, feel the suffering of others, such that it's overwhelming, and the overwhelm in the suffering and the overwhelm in the beauty are related, because if the reality wasn't beautiful, you wouldn't care. And both of them make you transcend your small self, and both of them motivate the sacred obligation.

McGilchrist:
Yeah.

Schmachtenberger:
So there's something where the sacred obligation just comes from seeing clearly, letting yourself be moved by the beauty of reality and associated with that, the meaningfulness to protect it, and the role of the new religion, philosophy, whatever, insofar as it can help people be more sensitive to both the beauty and the sacredness, and thus a protective impulse towards reality, is what I am hoping people take away.

[03:19:29:06]
Vervaeke:
Excellent.

McGilchrist:
Well, thank you both.

Schmachtenberger:

Yeah, likewise.

Vervaeke:
Thank you both.

Schmachtenberger:
It was a joy.

McGilchrist:
It’s been a great pleasure.

Schmachtenberger:
Really a joy being with you.