Forrest Landry

Thu, 6/3 11:39AM • 1:18:51

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

question, people, problems, sense, discernment, effect, nature, conversation, genuinely, notion, process, governance, clarity, kinds, thinking, complexity, discerning, communication, dynamics, forrest

SPEAKERS

Jessica Knezy, Zoe Varenne, Sam Coleman, Forrest Landry, Tom Pegram

Tom Pegram 00:01
Hi, and welcome to 'Imperfect Utopias' based out of the UCL Global Governance Institute. This is a podcast about the challenges facing humanity and possible global responses. If you're new to the show, and you want to get a list of our favourite books are the resources, listen to past shows, and join our community go to ucl.ac.uk/global-governance.

Tom Pegram 00:35
We're really excited to have Forrest Landry as our guest today on the podcast. Forrest is a philosopher, a writer, a researcher, a large scale software systems designer, and much else besides. He's also a businessman who places ethics and metaphysics at the core of his business model. Forrest has spent decades refining his thinking on metaphysics, his connection to realism, freewill and choice, among other fundamental concerns and many of his writings are available on his website magicflights.com and I can highly recommend them. He's also turned his attention to questions of civilizational design, and the importance of value ethics in the context of mounting complexity and global systemic risk, connecting that big picture frame to the micro Forrest and collaborators are currently working also on a project that they call ephemeral group processing, which uses technology to facilitate and scale face to face conversations in a way which has only recently become possible. So we've listened to some really intriguing conversations with Forrest on other podcasts. And we're excited to be able to pose some of our own questions today. So thanks so much for joining us Forrest. Before we get into it, I'll just invite the podcrew to say hello, I think we've got a full house today.

Sam Coleman 02:03
Hi so my name is Sam, I primarily run a lot of the back of the house stuff for the podcast, so audio and video editing. And I've been looking forward to this conversation for a long time.

Jessica Knezy 02:12
Hi, I'm Jessica and I also do some of the video editing and some of the research for the podcast. And I'm looking forward to our conversation today.

Forrest Landry 02:21
Beautiful. Thank you.

Tom Pegram 02:23
So perhaps we'll begin by kind of finding our bearings a little bit, so to speak. By the way Jess do you want to jump in with the first question.

Jessica Knezy 02:32
Yep, can do. So when it comes to addressing Wicked problems, such as mitigating global systemic risks, civilizational collapse, ecosystem destruction, why do you place so much emphasis on asking the right questions? And why do we so often fail to do this?

Forrest Landry 02:52
So in regards to language usage, right, so for instance, we do our sensemaking, generally by talking to one another. So in effect, we can look at the process by which we make sense of the world in terms of looking at linguistic features, and the nature of communicative process. So things like information theory, stuff like that can sometimes be relevant. When we look at the usage patterns, in conventional speech, you know, the way people talk to one another, we notice that there's basically three kinds of actions that a person can take, they can ask somebody to do something for them, they can say something that is essentially a belief or a thought that they have, or they can ask a question to seek more information. And so when we, when we look at the patterns of how sensemaking is done, we find that a lot of the best parts of it hinge on these questions. So in other words, when we look at the overall pattern of language, we notice that it's not actually that often that people ask questions, they mostly make statements. So just even in answering this question that you've asked, I'm going to actually spend more time speaking statements than I will actually speak in questions. And this is just a natural thing that we do, right? You can ask a good question in maybe a few seconds, and it might take me all of 10 minutes to actually answer it. So you know, in that sense, there's a real focus the questions can give two key transitions in a conversational process, key transitions in our thinking and our sensemaking. So in effect, there's a real emphasis when we're looking at say, you know, methodology and science, epistemic methods, and so on and so forth to actually bring it back down to what are the key questions that allowed us to even have an orientation as to what was important to think about? In fact, what is important to think about is itself a question. And so in effect, we can explore the terrain of things that matter when we're thinking about governance process, as essentially being organised by the kinds of questions that we ask ourselves individually and as a group. Another piece that comes into this, which I think is maybe sometimes overlooked is that it does actually change the nature of the social relationship. So for example, when we're trying to figure something out, we're in a kind of reflective inquiry. And so rather than speaking at one another, trying to convince, you know, another person to do something, we're standing side by side, and we're looking into the world, and we're trying to basically make sense of the world to understand what is a good basis of choice? What are the things that we're needing to solve? Or the kinds of problems that that are that are needing to be addressed? And what is the solution even going to look like? So in that sense, there's less egoic conflict, because people aren't, again, trying to convince one another something, they're not in a, a point to point relationship, they're in a side by side relationship. And this, this enables a lot more possibility and conversation that would otherwise be apparent. Another dimension to this is that in Western culture, in

some cases, there's a little bit of a stigma attached to asking questions, you know, there's a sense by which people have a sense of vulnerability right there, they're indicating something they don't know. And then there's a risk that they may fall down in someone else's esteem. Or that they may be making themselves vulnerable in terms of whether or not they can assess whether the information they're given back is real or not. So in this sense there's a real hesitation, a lot of times for people to ask questions, because they don't really want to get into entanglements, where they're either going to get vulnerable or that they are, in a sense going to be felt that they're putting another person on the spot. So you know, asking a why question can sometimes be felt as quite challenging. And so in effect, there's this caution, particularly around the process of asking questions. Another dimension, for example, is that the person that's asking the questions are usually in control of the conversation or directing kind of where things go? So there's a kind of implied power in the question asking process. So for these and other reasons, the notion of question asking turns out to be really, really important in terms of the flow of conversation, the insights, the result, the kinds of directions the problem solving can take, what sort of things are discovered, I mean, there's just this really rich territory of, of value that is available from that kind of process.

Jessica Knezy 07:20
Thanks very much, I was drawn to the term egoic conflict, and assessing truth and vulnerability and these barriers to reflective inquiry. How can we as students, studying global governance, but also just in our daily lives, encourage this type of communication, this type of reflective inquiry?

Forrest Landry 07:42
One key distinction that I think is critically important to being able to do that is to explore the difference between judgement and discernment. Judgement is a kind of process, it's sort of a choice not to make a choice. Again, you know, once you've pigeonholed another person or a thing, you don't have to consider that anymore, it's dealt with, and that's the end of it. Whereas if we look at discernment, discernment is a sort of exercise of continually to feel deeper into something to look at the nuances, to consider the details to really explore the nuances and to try to find out what is really going on by essentially a kind of increased exposure or kind of increased, you know, inquiry that is engaged. And so in effect, I described this difference between judgement and discernment, first of all, just as a kind of entry point. So that when we're in a conversation with another person that we can try to sense what is the basis of choice from which they are speaking? Where are the values that they are essentially holding? And how is that shaping the conversation? So you know, in effect, there's a sense of being deeply curious about the situation deeply curious about the other person. And, to some extent, also not wanting to be influenced in a way that might be, you know, essentially unconscious. So for example, you know, when looking at a governance process, obviously, it goes into politics and politics is a lot of conversations where people are trying to influence one another, to shift their behaviour, to shift their votes or to basically take on values that they might not already have, or to, you know, basically cause a kind of alignment to occur between groups of people, and so on. So, for all of these reasons, there can often be a lot of time where people are making statements with one another, they're doing kind of argumentative form, using logic and rhetoric and all the rest of that sort of stuff to essentially shape the action of conversation, it isn't necessarily something that is integrating of choice in the same sort of way as an inquiry would be. So in this sort of sense, part of what I'm suggesting is, is that you know, we really want to pay attention to what's going on, what is the, what is not just the message, but the

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context in which that message is being delivered. It's sort of the medium is the message in some cases. And to a large extent, if we become more aware of these contextual issues, we can be more discerning about how to respond appropriately in a given situation. So, in this sense, you know, when we're looking at the process of engagement, you know, we want to be engaging in a way that essentially is in balance. And to do that, we can't just have one perspective. And to hold that perspective more or less, without any variance, we actually want to have enough curiosity and a capacity to do perspective taking. So that we can essentially integrate that other person's point of view while still holding on to our own. And through the capacity to see from more points of view than at just one person at once. Right to see from both points of view, that we can gain insight into a situation that might not otherwise be available. Obviously, if the other person is engaged in a conversation, where they're trying to convince you of something, and they're not seeking to do any kind of inquiry or perspective taking at all, then to some extent, you're not going to be able to get the same richness of process that you would with someone who was in sort of a reflective process with you. So in a sense, just even knowing what kind of conversation you're in can be a huge help. The other piece too that comes into this is, is that, once you've entered into a sort of reflective inquiry process, and you're, you're really trying to get into the dynamics of the communication, you're really looking at a kind of correction for a number of biases that would otherwise occur. So for example, you know, I mentioned a minute ago how, you know, vulnerability might predispose us to not asking as many questions and to just do more parable, or narrative or those kinds of things. Whereas if we are essentially trying to genuinely deepen our understanding of the world, and so on, so forth, and we want to basically be able to see from multiple perspectives and really get into the situation, understand what might actually be important. We're going to need to essentially reach a little farther than just, you know, thinking about communication, it's just a back and forth sort of thing, right? We're looking at question transformation, how do we take a question, it's in one direction, and sort of widen the envelope of what's being asked? How do we, you know, essentially take that curiosity into a space a bit deeper, that accounts for some of the action bias we might not otherwise, we might otherwise be feeling. So for example, you know, for purely biological reasons, we have a predisposition to try to ask "how" questions so that we can do something to respond to a situation, think of this as a kind of premature optimization or a desire to act as a kind of dispositional state that in a lot of situations is actually, you know, if you don't have reflexes to deal with, you know, catching a ball or whatnot, you know, it might hit you, and therefore, you know, you need to be aware basically, right? But in in governance work, for the most part, we're actually sitting and looking at more chronic problems than acute ones, and an action bias can actually get in our way. So in effect, the inquiry process and the nature of the communication process can, if it's conducted, well can help us to move around some of these biases and actually get down to the nuance of how to deal with what otherwise would be very serious chronic issues. So we can move past just the "how" question and look at the "why" question. And maybe beyond that, to look at the what question, what matters, what is the thing that is essentially the basis of our choice? Ultimately, how do we know ourselves as a community, that we as a community can essentially make good choices in response to situation in the world at large? So these are some of the considerations that come into that that I believe are relevant to what you asked.

Tom Pegram 13:44
Yeah, I think Forrest in a sense, as a group, we've kind of intuited that this is the problem. And it's definitely formed the ethos of this project for us, but it's very exciting to hear you flesh it out and to think

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about how we might put that into practice, both in this kind of forum, but also, of course, in the seminar room, as we discuss global governance and global politics. So I want to hand over to Sam, I think Sam's got a question for you.

Sam Coleman 14:10
Yeah, first, thanks for you said so far, it just wants to ask a bit more about discernment on global issues and how we can discuss problems when the egoic kind of nature of international policy often seeps in, in these kind of conversations and how can discernment help with that? And also, as a side note, I wonder if you could touch on cosmopolitanism and some of its potential flaws and where that stands with the under, trying to understand multiple perspectives and multiple different groups that are coming to the table?

Forrest Landry 14:51
Okay. The main thing that I think is I feel frequently overlooked in a lot of these spaces is that we are actually biological creatures. And so part of the exercise of discernment is essentially to just literally understand our own natures. So it's not just that I'm trying to be discerning about the other person, I have to in a sense be discerning about myself as the vehicle through which I'm being discerning about the other person. And so in effect, you know, there's a lot of biological heritage that we carry that that that, you know, it's been, it's been identified in a sense of psychological biases, but it also shows up and this is something that was actually quite surprising to me as a kind of sociological bias. So when you're mentioning cosmopolitanism, to me, that's, that's connected to this notion that some of the biases show up at a cultural level, as well as at a personal or interpersonal level. So let me give some sort of x example or try to explain a little bit more about what I mean by that. So for example, if we're looking at, say, intergroup process, you know, we have one political party talking to another political party, or one country talking to another country and things like that, a lot of times there's going to be a significant amount of that communication that's going to be oriented around the group that process itself. So for example, we as biological creatures have a very strong desire to be part of a group, I mean, this is, you know, connected to survival mechanisms, if you were, you know, you roll the clock back 10,000 years, and you're part of some tribe, and that tribe mostly is just on its own in the middle of the Amazon or something like that, you know, to be cut off from the tribe is effectively to essentially have a life sentence here, you're not going to live very long, by yourself in the woods, there's a lot of skills that are needed, in order to endure an environment like that. And although it's possible, it's, it's really quite challenging. And so, you know, part of the benefit of being with a group of other people, and particularly a large enough group of other people is that there's enough variety of skills held by different people, and there's enough just common support, you know, you can't stand watch 24 hours. So you know, there's a kind of rotation that's going on, and so on. So in effect, the dynamic of we do our best capacities, when in the company of other people is really, really felt at a very strong biological level. So things that will seem to us, it will appear to us to separate us from our tribe, our group, whatever we self-identify as being a part of, whether it be at a national scale, or at a political party scale, or, or some subgroup, religious organisation or whatnot, there's going to want to be quite a bit of the choice making process that each person in that group is going to be making to signal belongingness to that group. And that can actually be a pretty powerful influence on the behaviour of the people that are in communication, you know, between one group and another. So, you know, I'm mentioning this, because if you, if you get discerning about it, like if you, if you get to the point where you have enough

self-knowledge that you can begin to notice these tendencies in yourself, then you get to be able to recognise them in other people. And I'm not saying that, in a sense of judging them for being "Oh, they're just basically responding to some sort of, you know, deep impulse to belong," but actually have compassion for that, because quite frankly, it is a, it is a deep human need. And so in effect, there's a, there's a sense here, by which, by feeling through some of the places where we can sense that another person is essentially having to take the actions that they take in the speech acts that they are engaged in, you know, being able to separate the compulsion, part of it from the part of it, where they are essentially free to navigate, you know, have a little bit of room to express their own opinions, or to describe some things that are actually deep situations within that group that they need to, to essentially inform the other party about. So in this sense, there's a need for us, if we're really going to interpret the signals correctly, that we're receiving from, you know, another group of people in communication, that we want to be discerning about these differences so that we actually know how to interpret what it is that we're hearing. And if, moreover, there is a sense that by doing that, that the compassion that you're able to bring into that particular process is felt by them, genuinely, then to some extent, you know, you're coming back into that working with rather than working against.

Forrest Landry 19:26
It's not that unlikely for us to hypothesise that most people actually have a common set of values. I mean, you know, we're all going to, in a sense, be interested in the same sorts of things clean food, clean water, clean air, you know, shelter, medicine, and communication all being good stuff like that they work well. So in effect, there's a sense here that, you know, we want to take care of our families, we want to take care of our communities, we want to we want to have the kind of connections that matter and that are meaningful. And to some extent, you know, the ways in which we implement that and the ways in which we discover the ways in which that can be done is largely going to be cooperative. I mean, there's really no way that we're going to be able to solve all these problems or any of them specifically just by ourselves. So in this sense, being more nuanced and discerning about the nature, the communicative process, the nature of the emotional dynamics, understanding the, the fundamental metaphysics of the subjective objective relationship and what communication is as a fundamental protocol and process. You know, being discerning about these kinds of things allows us to essentially move into a space of clarity, that enables us to find solutions that otherwise would be opaque. So particularly when we're dealing with complex as distinguished from complicated things, it's the clarity that's going to make the difference. And that's clarity that results from discernment. So, you know, in all these ways, the questions you're asking are actually quite profound ones, and they connect to a lot of profound things. So mostly, all I can do at this point is just give you some sketches as to how these ideas are connected together, and the ways in which they become relevant in actual practice.

Tom Pegram 21:02
Sam, do you have a follow up?

Sam Coleman 21:03
Yeah, no, I just wanted to, from what I've gathered, it seems that it starts from a place of introspection about one's own kind of limitations, or not limitations, but just the matter of fact of the human body and the human mind. And I quite like that aspect. Because there's often agendas thrown around that academics are the only people that labour under the illusion that they labour under no illusions. And I

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think it's quite an interesting thing to think of it starting from an introspective position. And I was wondering if that was an intentional thing, or can it happen, kind of simultaneously with understanding the introspective aspects and the kind of, the one human animal aspect?

Forrest Landry 21:49
Yeah, it's all that and actually more I mean, this is delightful. So the notion here is connected in so many ways. I mean, when we're thinking about the sort of academic perspective, a lot of times they're coming from a kind of emphasis on the objectivity. So they're looking for mathematical models, and they're trying to factor their own person out of it, because obviously, that changes the epistemics of the process. However, what I'm describing is, I'm actually talking about it in an intensely personal way, right. So in a sense, the knowledge of self in terms of how my own biological process is essentially influencing my behaviour is not in place of this mathematical understanding, but it is definitely a different thing. So in that sense, that element of "Know thyself" goes back to Greek ways of thinking, you know, the notion that if I know myself very well, then I can know you. And in that, there is actually this third poll, like, for instance, when we're thinking about governance dynamics, and you notice I'm saying governance, not government. That's a point we want to bookmark and come back to, but I think the thing that, that I'd like to mention here that's particularly relevant, is that it's not just essentially an inquiry into self, it's also an inquiry into world. And that through our connection to self and our connection to world that we can have connection to other. So there's, there's actually three it's not just two, I mean, when people think about the scientific method, for example, you know, they have a hypothesis, they do an experiment, and they get some results. And then they test to see if that result is consistent with hypothesis. But there's this whole other dimension, that's usually overlooked in discussions of this, which is that the scientist isn't just doing this by themselves, they're going to actually say, "Okay, well, I'm going to go to this meeting over here, I'm going to talk to my fellow scientists. And we're going to hash this over for a little while, see if we can come up with a better hypothesis." And so in effect, there's a peer review thing, or there's a, you know, some sort of discussion or dialogue that's going on where there's essentially perceiving from multiple perspectives, and maybe things like replication of the experiment with other people in other situations. And that this is essentially part of the epistemic processes. And just, "am I reading into this well enough to have good hypotheses myself? Do I have an imagination that has the scope and the capacity to imagine the kinds of situations which might be relevant to theorise about? Can I imagine the kinds of things that would be necessary to do in the world to validate whether my imagination corresponds to something about the real state of the world?" And so in effect, the exercise of the freedom and the flexibility of the imagination is something that I do with my fellow peers. Right? I'm not necessarily going to be imagining all possible scenes, because I can't see from all possible perspectives. But if I'm talking to other people, I can now start to see from that person's perspective, and that other person's perspective and that other person's perspective, and what ends up happening is is that it increases the flexibility of my imagination, and through that I become a better person. So in this particular respect, we're really talking about a kind of grounding that takes it out of the, the notion of the sort of popularity contest of people thinking that everything is negotiable. Right? If you're in a scene where the person that you're working with and so on so forth, has never actually had to make anything in the actual embodied world, they've never held a hammer, they don't know what a screwdriver is, they've never actually operated a saw or anything like that. They're just not going to understand that there are things about the nature of reality that are basically the case whether or not I have any belief about it. There have been jokes made

about, you know, legislation trying to decide that the number pi is going to be three, rather than, you know, the transcendental number 3.14159, on, on and on and on, right. So the notion here is, is that if we become skilful at recognising our own natures, our own capacity for imagination, and we become skilful in our integration with the actual natural world, we know how the world really works, we develop a kind of mastery of ourselves and mastery of our physical surroundings, then we can actually be genuinely present in relationships with other people. And this is again, it's an exercise in discernment. But it's three kinds of discernment. It's inward discernment, natural discernment, and other discernment. So self, world and other. And there's a kind of skilfulness that is needed in each like the nature of how I'm discerning about my own emotional state, my own feeling state versus the nature I'm discerning about, you know, is this table saw actually running smoothly? I happen to be a woodworker. So that's a metaphor I'm going to use. Versus, you know, is this other person that I'm talking to being honest? Are they actually telling me what matters to them or are they basically trying to convince me of something? You know, to purchase the red car rather than the blue one? So in this particular sense, there's a whole lot of dynamics that are connected to these kinds of things. And I wish it was easy. But the idea here is that the more I can create clarity, through discernment, inwardly and with the world, then I can also create discernment with the other. I hope that's not too abstract a question. I realise it's a somewhat abstract answer, but it's meant to be an embodied one.

Tom Pegram 27:24
Yeah, no, I think that's very helpful. And I'm sure we're going to continue to probe in that direction. I mean, you did bookmark governance. And I would be very curious. Of course, the podcast is called Global Governance Futures. So why governance and not government?

Forrest Landry 27:44
It's a subtle distinction. But a government usually refers to a class of people. So a kind of specialised function and a sort of representative model. Whereas governance basically refers to a kind of process. So rather than being a noun, it's a verb. And in this particular sense, we really want to recognise that if we're talking about governance, it needs to be integrated with the process of life, it needs to be integrated with people's actual lives. And if it isn't, then it just feels like some sort of top down imposing force and of course, people are going to reject that. Or if it's representative, then you can end up with these kinds of symmetries where the representatives are going to basically be acting on their own interest rather than on the interest of the people that they are ostensibly supposed to represent. This is called the principal agent problem. And so in effect if we're genuinely going to solve problems like this, we need to have a kind of integration that, you know, I guess is sort of described more in terms of things like democratic models. But it's not so much that I'm trying to advocate for that so much as I'm just simply trying to point of view that if we're essentially going to account for an awareness of what makes good choices, if we're going to do a sort of feedback mechanism that integrates all the information that is actually relevant, that's necessary to make good wise choices, particularly in places where it's absolutely crucial that we do make good wise choices. You know, exponential tech, or x risk, or certain kinds of chronic problems are very much in that category. They're large, sometimes slow moving, occasionally fast moving, and we're gonna need to be really, really capable of being able to make choices with these awesome powers that technology has given us. And so in effect, we kind of got to upgrade our game. And if we have artificial separations, in terms of the information flows necessary in order to be able to make those kinds of choices, well. We're going to make an already

very difficult problem impossibly hard. So in that sense, there's a need for us to think about the dynamics of how information flows through the system to essentially ensure that basically, the right information makes it to the right places for those choices to even be possible in the first place. And by right places I basically mean, you know, at the face, you know, there's a sort of metaphor of the people that are working closest to the surface, are going to know the most about the situation, they're going to have the most direct contact. And to some extent, we actually need to incorporate that as part of the process, not just as an information source and an actuator of some sort or another, but literally part of the dynamic itself. And we see this in nature. So for example, you know, just in the nervous system of one's hands, some of the responsiveness happens, and before it even makes it to my elbow, or before it even makes it to my shoulder, right, there are reflexes, that effectively mean that some of the choice making is happening in the dynamics of the flows themselves. So this is why I use the word governance rather than government, because government would imply a kind of artificial separation, the brain is doing all the work. That's not even close to true. I mean, there's so many other things that are going on, we have stuff that's in our digestive system that is deeply involved in how our brains work, we have all sorts of connections between brain process and immune system process, which are barely recognised that science and technology have only recently started to uncover some of these connections. I was just reading an article, what, three days ago where they discovered this new connection between the immune system and the nervous system, quite frankly, I think in a lot of respects, the immune system is at least as complicated as the nervous system is. Although this is speculation, I actually feel there's some real ground for that. Anyways, we're getting off of the topic. But this gives you some ideas as to why the subtle notions again, being discerning about this, between, say the notion of governance, versus the notion of government, you tell people you want a world government, they're going to reject it, you tell them we have a governance that includes the whole dynamic of the world, they might actually feel more comfortable. If it's truly and honestly that, of course.

Tom Pegram 31:51
Yeah. You also drew this distinction earlier between complicated and complex. And we actually had Dave Snowden at UCL yesterday. Yeah, yeah, was a great conversation. And something else just, I just want to put in the mix here is, is uncertainty in the face of complexity. And when we talk about global governance, it does sometimes sound impossibly grand to aspire to design it at that scale. There are many problems that we haven't solved from, you know, classical problems around political stability, or whatever it may be, that themselves serve as kind of a substrate for dealing with these novel new global systemic risks. So how do we begin to make sense of... What is the sequence of choices that have to be made to, to ensure the future of organised human life? How do we make good choices at a civilizational scale? Which makes sense also, looking up from the ground, shall we say?

Forrest Landry 33:05
Well, I'm glad you asked that there's a kind of third substrate. So you mentioned, you know, this notion of kind of this broad view, right? And then underneath that, what are the enabling architectures that create the capacity for that broadest view? And underneath that, there's this other substrate, which we've been basically talking about, which is, what are the communicative practices that enable that intermediate substrate to itself be supported? So in effect, this is part of the reason why, although it may seem that this is a fairly obscure way to go, I'm spending a lot of time thinking about things like ephemeral group process, or the nature of communicative process, I'm basically following in the

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footsteps of Habermas, who, you know, I consider to be one of the greatest sociologists that have ever lived. So in effect, you know, he's pointing out that, you know, we do reason we figure things out through communication, and that, in effect, if we get really, really good at this communication process, we're going to actually get better at this thing called community process. So if I'm trying to figure out how to solve problems at a political level, I kind of need to actually understand how to solve problems at an emotional level. And if I don't really have good things, like, you know, just dealing with people's individual traumas in place, the communication process is just going to be really messed up. Because you know, people will get triggered and they won't be responding from as holistic a perspective, they'll actually be caught in the trauma of their past. So, although I myself don't claim to be, you know, a great trauma therapist and so on, so forth. I know some people who are and, you know, I feel that it's actually quite important for us to get very, very skilful at knowing how to navigate just even our own emotional process in order to know how to navigate social process at a community level. And for that community itself eventually through some skilfulness at the community level, knowing how to be part of a tribe and so on, that we could effectively start to think about things at a broader scale, even than that without getting caught in again, all of these sort of pitfalls, for example, and this is maybe just an odd way of saying this, but we as a species, we know how to talk to one another, but we don't know how to communicate. We have language, but we don't have communication. Not yet. We're getting there, we're understanding it a little better. But there's a lot more that needs to happen at the, at that level of, again, the nuance of that process in order to basically parse out the kinds of things which are merely reaction, versus those things which are truly choice. To really notice, what are our values, like to essentially come into the self-awareness as a community as to just what is it that we care about. Now, ultimately, I can say things like, we care about life, right? Not just our own, but others too right? The ecosystem we live in, to some extent is necessary to support us as beings. So it's probably relevant for us to take a little bit of an altruistic perspective around that. And so in effect, the notion of how to genuinely be able to be skilful in that particular way, therefore, becomes a kind of mastery of process that doesn't necessarily imply anything about control. I'm not necessarily going to be able to predict, even so much as one instant of time of the next thing, any one of you is going to say to me. Right, I can't I can't predict the even the first word that will be the next word you say. But that uncertainty doesn't mean that I feel uncomfortable having this conversation, I can feel, you know that we are in good relationship enough to basically be able to address these kinds of things that you've, you've looked at these kinds of issues, at least sufficiently well, to have invited me into this conversation in the first place. So I'm looking more at those kinds of issues. And I'm feeling very confident that by really working well with these kinds of things that to some extent, the capacities needed to deal with global catastrophic risk is actually going to be found there. Now, there's some technical reasons why I have that confidence. But that gets into some theory, which at this point, might really be quite abstract. So I'm gonna leave that for now.

Tom Pegram 37:32
Okay, thanks Forrest. I know, Zoe's got a question, over to you.

Zoe Varenne 37:37
So I'm just trying to think how to phrase this in the most succinct way. You said that, if people were, if you were to tell people, global government was necessary, they might reject it, but they'd be more welcoming towards global governance. How would you communicate that to them? Because I do think

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that global governance does still seem quite abstract and remote from the experience of someone in the street, who'd be more of a globally governed individual. But so how would you I guess, trans-, communicate that urgency for a need for perhaps global governance, if you believe there is one? And how do you do that bearing in mind that there are concerns over centralised power and corruption and other things?

Forrest Landry 38:21
I think you just actually answered the question, you have to answer their concerns about power and corruption. I mean, you know, quite frankly, almost all of us the world over are suffering from collective action abuse of so many varied kinds that, I think, you know, most of the people in the United States, particularly are in some sort of reaction, you know, we're basically looking for individualism in order to essentially be, to some extent independent from collection action problems. Right, you know, if I, if I basically make it so that I, I have some sense of self sufficiency, then to some extent, I've immunised myself against the abuses of power that governments can take. And now obviously, this isn't completely true, because none of us is ever going to be completely independent of the environment, we will always have effects on one another, no matter how far away we live from one another, if that was even a possibility. So in this particular sense, I think the key is very much associated with genuinely and honestly addressing how do we put together systems of collaborative choice, that aren't going to be degrading into corruption issues, quite frankly. So I actually think most of it is, is learning how to create systems that are just literally unlikely and almost maybe impossible to become corrupted. If I'm looking for a governance that I can actually trust, a commons that I can actually invest in, I'm going to want to know that the stewardship of that Commons is good enough to be worth my investment. There's a kind of social contract in that. And so I'm basically looking to see whether or not the structure and the design of the social contract is of such a nature...

Forrest Landry 40:12
I'm sorry, this phone just won't turn off. Give me just a sec, if I can kill it. Right, thank you.

Forrest Landry 40:22
So the main idea here is that we have a deep recognition that things can go wrong quite easily. And that almost everything that has been tried in the past, if we look at all the different models of governance that have been attempted, or actually just governments that have been attempted, all the different cultures that have been tried all the different communities and business models and experimental paradigms, for religions, and so on, and so forth, there are so many experiments that have been done in this particular space. And I think the thing that is new, that basically means that we have a genuine hope of actually doing it differently, and succeeding this time, is that we know a heck of a lot more about ourselves than we ever have. Right, we've learned things about our biology, we've learned things about our minds, we've learned things about computer science, and about all sorts of things in the world, and so on and so forth. And we have a way of actually sharing and integrating that particular knowledge such that we can actually do things that are beyond the skill of any one of us. And so in that particular sense, I actually feel that there's some hopefulness that we can address the problem of how to make an uncorruptible government, one that genuinely represents the interests of the people. And that it may actually be the kind of thing that it's not so much of whether we can find the will to do it so much as it's a question of whether or not we've recognised whether we've done so or not.

Right? If somebody basically had a solution and said, here it is, would anyone else even notice that, that was genuinely a solution? Would we have the skill to be able to receive an answer? Right, so now we have to look back at our capacities, can we recognise what an answer looks like? Can we actually see that something is genuinely holistic? So in effect, this comes back to the questions, we have to upgrade our capacity to perceive a solution, we have to genuinely know what the problem is. So in this particular sense, there was a, at least in collaboration that I've had with other people. And you mentioned Daniel and Jordan in particular. There were a long series of conversations that, again, I don't know for their part, but I do know that at least from my part, that I eventually arrived at a space where I felt that I understood the problem, that I felt that I was able to use that understanding as a kind of litmus test, to see whether or not my thinking was even in the right direction.

Forrest Landry 42:50
Right, without having some sort of real deep knowledge as to how did things get so fucked up in the first place that we can't necessarily answer a question like, how do we prevent it from getting fucked up again? Right. So in this particular sense, you know, it really does come down to are we asking the right questions? Do we even know what an answer looks like? And so in effect, we're, you know, we're way far away from at this particular point, presenting anything even remotely suggesting what a solution will look like. But at least we have, at this particular point, firm ground to know how to proceed forward. And it's from that particular basis that at this point, I can say, hey, this looks like it might be an outline that is at least vaguely the right shape, because it addresses this, this, this and this, these are the key issues that have been identified as literally close to the core of the problem. Now, obviously, it is complete hubris for any of us to think that we have any capacity to design global civilization, I'm not going to suggest that that's going to be something that happens as a result of any one of us no matter how skilled we may be. But I can certainly say that, by creating the right kinds of conversations, we can at least create the capacities for us to imagine what a solution like that might look like. And that involving the people who are on the street in that kind of conversation, that they can have the confidence that their questions have also been addressed. And I don't think anything short of this is going to work.

Tom Pegram 44:19
So I want to pick up on a thread there, Forrest, thank you for that. It seems that in some ways, what we're having to do here is to really navigate that difficult line between realism and idealism. And you said you know that we have all of this knowledge now, accumulated knowledge across different fields, insights from biology insights from psychology, we know who we are. And if we-

Forrest Landry 44:42
Beginning to know who we are...

Tom Pegram 44:43
Yeah, beginning so if we take for instance, a leaf out of E.O. Wilson's work, famous socio-biologist. If we were to use that frame to think about what's happening right now, we might be quite concerned about you know, austerity, economic stress, putting people into situations of bio insecurity, putting people into situations of I guess, perhaps territorial tribal dynamics. These are not propitious conditions, one might say, to have a conversation around how do we actually really organise that scales above, you know, certainly above the nation state, but perhaps even, we're talking more fractured, more

physically isolated group units in that context. And I'm wondering, how do we begin to make sense of that situation and move forward. And I did want to link this in. There's a toolkit, which you've, you've expressed elsewhere, which I really like, this idea that we need three things, we need a compass, we need a map, and we need a location. So if that's our location, what's the map and the compass for and how do we move forward?

Forrest Landry 45:59
So the metaphor is, is extendable in quite a few different directions. So part of what the map is, is essentially the knowledge that we have. So when you refer to, you know, our knowledge of ourselves and our knowledge of a situation, you know, there's these geopolitical issues. There are places where there is actual devastation, where people are essentially in danger of starvation and so on. That in effect, you know, the map is essentially our understanding of the situation is essentially a prospectus of the whole territory of actuality. And if it's a good map the prospectus of the territory of potentiality, Dave Snowden has also done some good work in the adjacent possible which is part of that space. The compass is our ethics. So in effect, there's a, there's a sense here as to what the heck do we mean by making a good choice. So for instance, you know, it's usually referred to as the North Star, what is the value system that we are effectively using to guide our day to day choices that we can look up every now and then, and just tell whether we're on the right course, the current position, basically means we have actual situational awareness to know where we are on the map. So for example, you know, if I'm standing somewhere, and I take the compass out, and I take a look, and I say, "okay, North is that way, I'm going to go that way." But I don't happen to know my current position. If I happen to be standing on the edge of a cliff, I'm going to have a really sharp sudden fall, right, it's not going to be a good thing for me to go forward from that particular position. Because even though I'm going in the right direction, I certainly don't want to step into this huge hole. Same if I happen to be looking at a cliff and it's in my face, you know, the compass can be pointing right at it in the right direction, but I need to go around. So the map tells me, what is the trajectory that I can follow that will have the result in my going in the direction that is consistent with the values of, of whatever the community or the person is just making those choices as to how to navigate. So in this particular sense, we do need all three, right? If I, if I try to operate with just a map of the territory, but I have no compass, I have no way to align, I might know where I am on the map. But I don't know which direction the map is going in, I have no particular desire to go in any particular direction. So I might as well just sit down and stay put. If I have, basically the map and the compass, but I don't have my current position then I have that cliff problem I just mentioned a minute ago. The one thing is, is that if I have the compass, I can at least if I don't have the map or my current position, I can look around and construct some sense of my current position. And I can look around and construct at least some sense as to what the local map is. Now, it's not ideal, but at least it's something. So in this particular sense, I personally have spent more of my time thinking about the ethics aspect of the thing, because I feel that as being the tool that at least enables the possibility of those other tools. Whereas if you don't have a compass, then you don't really not only have any place to go, you don't know why you're even going there. So that's where that metaphor sort of lands as far as this is concerned. And I think that when we're looking at, you know, there are some global issues, there are some things which essentially, are certainly transnational concerns, you know, things having to do with the environment, various kinds of plastic pollution, or you know, whether there's warming or not, and so on. These are all things that are actually concerns that cannot be dealt with at any single national level. So, in effect, I think that because we all have mutually a stake in the

interest of the wellbeing of the world that to some extent, we are actually going to want to have a conversation around these things. And it's not so much a conversation in the sense of I'm trying to control something to happen. But in the conversation itself, there is at least some possibility that an alignment of action can be discovered and we can coordinate together. We can begin to see places where cooperation is genuinely in our mutual interest. And so we can look at things like multipolar traps and how do we solve that? So, in effect, there's a, there's, there's a series of deeper dynamics, it's like we're going from this notion of finite games, there's this wonderful book by James P. Carse, called 'Finite and Infinite Games'. And right now, most of the time, people are thinking about national politics as if it's some sort of finite game, you know, who gets the most cheese? Honestly, you can't take it with you, you're going to be on this earth for a short time. And, you know, really, at some point or another, you want to recognise that, that's not actually about winning, right? If you if you if you think about, you know, winning in the finite sense, it's just not going to make sense with respect to the ground of the actual life. So we need to, first of all, think about it as being how do we play so that we can continue to play?

Forrest Landry 50:56
How do we essentially solve these problems, create enough capacity for us to be able to solve these problems, so that the conversation can genuinely continue. And, you know, to have enough humility in that process, to basically be able to say, "Listen, I actually need your help. I need your perspective, I need your thinking, I need your imagination. I can't do this by myself, I'm saying that as a nation as much as I am as an individual." So in this particular sense, again, it's not going to be it's not going to be about control, it's not going to be about ego, it's not gonna be about some sort of national scoped priority, it's going to be essentially about life. And so in this particular sense, you know, part of what our discernments is needed to do is to literally just understand what the hell do we mean by life? How do we support that? Right? If we're, if we're working at, you know, rebalancing the relationship between man, machine and nature, then there's fundamentally going to be a sense in which we actually need to comprehend what is our nature? What is the nature of this technology? What is this nature of this world we've been born into? Because if we're going to be the stewards of that, in some sense, that essentially allows for the continuance of ourselves as a species, that we get conscious, sustainable evolution actually, right. We're going to need to be more conscious, in order to create sustainability and the capacity to evolve, because the rest of the world isn't going to stay still, it is going to evolve, it'll either do it with our help, or it'll do it against us. But certainly nothing in the world stays the same. It's always change. So therefore, we need to get better about thinking about causation, we need to get better at thinking about choice. Science so far helped us with the causation piece. At this point, we need literally a metaphysics to understand how to think about the choice piece, one that is actually commensurate with the science. And there's a lot more that can be said about that. But that's a whole other day.

Tom Pegram 52:53
Yeah, one of the insights that has really struck me in the complexity science reading that I've done, which is not huge amounts, but Paul Cilliers' work who tries to bring an ethical frame into complexity, arguing that ultimately, within complex systems, there's no view from nowhere. Therefore, we all must we all must be ethical agents within the system.

Forrest Landry 53:15

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That's right.

Tom Pegram 53:16
Seems like a profound statement. I know that Sam's..

Forrest Landry 53:21
It's pointing to something. Yes. There's a realness there. Yes, exactly.

Tom Pegram 53:26
I know, Sam's got a question, Sam.

Sam Coleman 53:29
Yeah, hopefully, this transitions in quite nicely. But we've talked about the North Star, and about the importance of being able to discern and also talk to a wide variety of people. And it seems like concepts like governance and governments, science and modernity, all have a kind of baggage to them, like a kind of national understanding. I don't know if you're

Forrest Landry 53:52
Maybe.

Sam Coleman 53:54
Yeah, I don't know if you're different across the work of Wang Hui on modern Chinese thought, but he talks about liberating the object from its positionality as an object. For example, when we think of when China thinks of Empire, it's very different from when a kind of a jaded British student thinks about Empire, you know, and how can discernment help us with those kind of things, for example, modernity. Obviously, we've talked about the kind of the real meta level of the human kind of animal, but in the kind of the mid-tier concepts of modernity or science or progress or, or Empire and how can we get across, how can we use discernment sorry, to talk to very radically different cultures that have very different etymological roots of those kinds of concepts?

Forrest Landry 54:47
Well, I would point out first of all, that some of those concepts aren't as radical or as far out there or as different as they would initially seem to be. I can't claim that I know a lot about Chinese philosophy, I wish that I knew more. But the parts of it that I have encountered that I've really been able to feel into it, you know, things that are connected to, you know, notions of Zen Buddhism, for example. There's this emphasis on the notion of flow and being with the flow. And there's this, you mentioned the notion of de objectification, like I'm displacing the notion of object as being the centre of the universe. And I think that Western culture, for the most part, has, actually taken this idea that objective is the centre of the universe, that if it's not objective, it doesn't matter. Whereas if we go into it a little deeper, for a little more discerning about the nature of what it means to be objective, the nature of what it means to be existing, existential, and the nature of what it is to be real. We'll notice through this discernment that these concepts aren't actually the same. That they are subtly different, they make different claims, they actually have different utilities, they, they show up in different places, and in different ways. But that they are actually, also if our discernment is really good, deeply connected together, that the relationship

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between objectivity, existence, and, for lack of a better word reality, are distinct, inseparable, and not interchangeable. They each have their own nature. They never occur by themselves purely. And I can't use one of those terms of place of the others.

Forrest Landry 56:42

So in this particular sense, if we if we really look at the inner essence of say, a sort of philosophical tradition, as it occurs in China, and we look at the deepest essence of some of the things that occurs in the philosophical traditions of the West, we may actually discover that there really is some overlap. And that, that overlap is actually meaningful enough, that we can have a conversation across what otherwise seems to be insurmountable political divides. Now, reaching that perspective, takes some real discipline. It takes a kind of progressive involvement with this practice of discernment, with this seeking of clarity. And with a willingness to be curious about the deepest elements of the mysticism of these traditions, and mysticism of the perspectives and the philosophies and of the practices that enable them. And that through that we can find the ways in which to reach out and actually make the connections, and also to be able to kind of disentangle, you know, the biases that result from over objectification as a process. Because Eastern mysticism, frankly, also has its own sort of hang ups, there are things that it gets wrong to say on the same sort of way that, you know, the Enlightenment movement has created great benefit, there is a shadow side, there's this other part, that basically is actually the sort of watch out for it's a kind of trap. You know, science and technology have told us what we can do. But they don't give us any clue about what we should do. And somewhere along the way, we actually have to find a way of how do we make choices about what the should is, which means we need to actually ground that in something that is not associated with the object, it's associated with the flow. So in effect, it's almost paradoxical that to some extent, the answer to Western philosophy is found in Eastern philosophy. And the answer to Eastern philosophy is found in Western philosophy, because both of them is supported by something even deeper than that. Now, it's probably a pretty rare human being, that's going to go through this sheer amount of time and effort necessary to do this. But on the other hand, at this particular point, given the severity of the issues that are involved, I think that's pretty needed. Right? It's actually worth it for someone to do that. Okay, it's actually worth it for lots of us to do that. Because quite frankly, anything less than that is, is not honouring the sheer nature of the problem itself. Right? If we're looking at existential risk, if we're, if we're dealing with the kinds of things that could literally end all life on Earth, it seems to me that, that problem is serious enough that it is worthy of our study time and attention to a level of depth commensurate to the nature of the problem itself. And then anything less than that, it's just, well, a kind of ignorance really. So in this particular sense, what I'm suggesting is, is that the questions are actually real questions and it is genuinely worthwhile to become skilful in these practices, so that the conversations that are genuinely needed that help us to get around the biases of the West and the biases of the East, because you're right, the notion of how Empire looks.. Hell! The day to day notion of how to make choices on a on a personal basis, all look very different. And there are some things where I would basically say, "Man, I'm glad I don't live there, because if I had to deal with that, I would be really really unhappy," right things that, that to me impinge upon what I hold to be high and sacred values of, of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. But on the other hand, I also recognise that, if I take that notion of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness as an individual too far, which many people have, that I can create side effects like pollution, or these global commons problems that are effectively worse than the thing that they may have been a reaction to. And so in effect, there's a, there's a sense here by which we really need to call back to the

root, go back to the nature of how these things happened, and to do so with enough humility and compassion to be able to genuinely respond.

Sam Coleman 1:00:58
And on that point, Forrest, have you come across any challenges with reducing in seeking to understand a shared understanding? Because I'm thinking of Franco Moretti, who tried to understand a kind of global literature, so what does love mean, in a global sense, and he looked at, for example, in a very systematic way, the literature of a vast array of countries, and he found the one of the challenges of that process was that they lost a lot of the nuances of the individual understanding and even on the, just the individual level of talking to, you know, a friend, if I'm seeking to understand the kind of shared position, how can I fight against the urge to not oversimplify, but reduce some of the complexity in the kind of, in the hope that I might find some shared understanding?

Forrest Landry 1:01:55
This is a great question, it's actually very relevant one. Most people when they're trying to do an exercise of broad scale, broad scale semantic analysis of the type that you're talking about, find themselves in the horns of a dilemma that they didn't realise that they had set up. There's a difference between simplicity and clarity. And so in effect, when they're trying to basically look at how all these different cultures look at the concept of love, there's a sort of averaging effect that goes on, because the notion of simplicity is the driving basis of the math. So for one thing, you can't just look at the concept of love by itself, because that's too nuclear, it's too finite. But in the constellation of the concepts around it, where you're doing this reification across the whole series of these concepts, it is possible to do something which isn't a simplification, but a clarification. So in other words, rather than trying to come up with the average of something we're trying to come up with the essence. Can we find an essence that clearly supports all of these different manifestations? Can we distil which is different than average, down to the principle of the concept? Can we express it in a series of deeper understandings that are profound enough to genuinely hold as a construct that principle, the statement of that principle, and again, this isn't going to be just a sort of formalisation, as it might show up in mathematics, it can look like that. But the form isn't at the thing. It's like the map and the territory, and the map is not the territory, what you're looking for is the true principle. And you can formalise that in various ways. And if it's a really good, well clarified principle, you'll find that the formalisation part of it is easy. And people may say "wow, that's, that's really beautiful. It's really insightful." But what's really important is the degree to which is profoundly clear. A great understanding isn't defined by how simple it is, how simple the equation is e equals mc squared, very simple equation. What's important about it is its profound clarity. The more profoundly clear a metaphor is, a construct is, an idea is a principle is, the more it will truly hold all of those different cultures and hold them well. That in conversations with any one of the people that are speaking in those particular things, if you are able to create a capacity in that conversation to convey the depth of the principle, you'll know you got to write because they'll say "Yes, that's it." And it's in that electric moment that you know that you're on the right path. And this is a whole different exercise. And so we talked about discernment earlier, this distillation process is one of the vehicles of that sort of discernment. And it moves us to a different place than just some sort of vague average of what the concept of love means. It brings it down to something sharp, precise. But that's just a side effect of the principle's clarity.

Tom Pegram 1:05:32

Thanks, first, perhaps just to shift focus a little bit, but along the same theme, really interesting. Can simplicity be in tension with clarity? And to make that acute, I'm just thinking of, you know, in the climate space, right now, there's growing emphasis on geoengineering. I read yesterday that apparently, China's now engaging in sort of modification of weather systems, and scientists are seriously talking about, you know, refreezing the polar ice caps. These are engineering solutions, perhaps to a very serious problem. Do they display clarity?

Forrest Landry 1:06:15

No. [laughs]

Tom Pegram 1:06:17

So if you were to explain to a student who is that say, wants to make a real, wants to contribute to climate action, and thinks the best way they can do that is to go into what geoengineering to go into engineering? What is the blind spot there that they need to, they need to sit with and take account of?

Forrest Landry 1:06:36

This is a little delicate to represent, but I'll try my best. There's a kind of underlying triple between complexity, simplicity and clarity. It feels like simplicity and complexity are. And by the way, I'm using the word complexity. But I could just as easily have meant complicated. But the idea is that simplicity and complexity feel to be an opposition. And I can't use simplicity as an answer to complexity, right, I have, I lose too much information, I can't make a good choice. If I don't have enough information, if I'm not thinking about all the factors. So taking a complex problem and forcing it into a simple perspective, which unfortunately, most democracies inevitably do. Any kind of mob rule process is going to result in taking complicated issues and trying to make them simple so that it's simple enough for people to vote on, it's usually meaning for sure the bad things are going to happen. It's, well, I won't get into all the rest of this and that but the idea here is, is that if we actually want to solve problems, we need to do it with clarity, clarity can act as a solvent against complexity. If I have true clarity, I can see into complexity, I have insight. If I have insight, I can anticipate things like unexpected consequences, because I have a way of operating that's more closely connected to the principle of the system itself. In that case, I can actually see the kinds of things that will genuinely make a difference without necessarily being likely to cause even worse problems. Oh, I don't know, 10 or 15 or 100 years down the road. So in this particular case, the reason why I was a little like, just sort of feeling like the geoengineering things were maybe not on the right track was because I haven't yet sensed. At least this is an opinion. Okay. But I haven't yet sensed that they know whether or not they're reacting to a symptom, or whether they are addressing the underlying cause. And until we can really even make clear distinctions like that, and to essentially have a sense as to what are we genuinely doing? Then the chances of unintended consequences are actually phenomenally high. So it's not that I'm against geoengineering by itself as a principle. I think that there are certainly things that we probably should be doing as far as geoengineering is concerned. But when I look at the solutions that are presented, the thing I'm filtering through is, how good is the thinking process by which they've come up with a solution? Have they actually done enough due diligence around things like the precautionary principle? If they haven't even addressed the precautionary principle or if there isn't some modelling that basically shows that they understand the nature of the natural systems well enough to have basically said, "Hey, there's actually

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real clear connection between things that have happened in Earth past, and what we're trying to do to give us confidence that, at the very least, Earth has tried this before, right, we're not doing an experiment that has never been done and therefore have absolutely no idea what range of consequences we're going to have." So for instance, when I see things like, just to give you a couple of specific examples, there was a suggestion about spraying sulphates into the atmosphere in order to do cooling. I personally think that it's just a terrible idea. I don't see any real ground for that. But on the other hand, when I see is a slight suggestion along the lines of that certain serpentine type crystals and reactions can be enabled in beaches and in quarries and stuff like that, that would absorb co2. I say actually, you know, the carbonate cycle and the rest of the stuff that actually makes a lot of sense, right. It makes sense geopolitically, it makes sense environmentally, it makes sense in terms of the resources we have. And I'm not saying that this is a solution to the whole problem. Obviously, there's a whole lot that needs to be thought about. But I'm not adverse to the notion of using technology to heal nature. In fact, I think that ultimately, we're going to need to right? We're going to have to. I'm more concerned as to whether or not the nature of the thinking that's gone into the solutions that are being proposed is coming out of some sort of misguided reaction to symptoms, or actually hasn't done enough integrative synthesis of the whole dynamics of the problem, to even have a really deep understanding of it at the level of principle and is therefore, actually just in reaction, the more that you enter into a kind of reaction system, where you're basically healing the symptoms, you're actually increasing the brittleness of the whole system, you're going to end up with feedback cycles that are in a sense, going to be amplified in terms of their criticality, it moves us closer to existential risk. So for me, the difference between, say cloud seeding versus, you know, serpentine management is enormous. I mean, it's just, it's just like night and day in terms of the level of process that's gone into it. Now, that's an opinion on my part. And I could very well be wrong. You know, as I talk to people and I learn more about these kinds of things, I find myself sometimes shifting my point of view based upon conversations that I have, and that's part of the curiosity piece that comes back to the discernment. Am I thinking about this clearly enough, myself? Right. But I think that ultimately, anytime that we're looking at that triangle of simplicity, clarity, and complexity, that we're gonna have to favour and just even notice the difference between simplicity and clarity. Because there are so many people in the world that think those two ideas are the same, and they aren't even close. Right? If somebody offers you the simplest possible object, a sphere of black coal, like perfectly polished, simplest object, versus handing you a diamond with lots and lots of facets, the same size. Hell, man, you got to be pretty naive to not take the diamonds, right? The complexity of it, it's the thing that makes it beautiful, right? You stick it out in the sun, you're gonna end up with prisms all over the place. So in this sense, you know, when we're looking at, you know, what is enlightenment about? What is what is the nature of this process actually oriented towards? Go for clarity.

Tom Pegram 1:13:08
Thank you, forest. And I think we're rolling to a close, thanks so much for this conversation. It's been very rich, and we've really sort of traversed the matter to the ground in multiple times, multiple iterations. And given us lots to think about, I do want to give the last question to Sam.

Sam Coleman 1:13:26
Sure. So yeah, thank you Forrest for an amazing discussion. We've talked about the importance of questions, we talked about the importance of concepts and asking the right questions, and talking to a diverse range of people. I also just wanted to ask on a final note, is it possible to... How can we include

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nature into these discussions? Obviously, nature can't talk for itself. But it seems like it's an important entity to kind of discuss with these issues. And I was wondering if you'd had any thoughts on that?

Forrest Landry 1:14:03

I have a lot of thoughts on that. Unfortunately, that is what I would call a category three question, which basically means this isn't a context that is sufficiently developed for me to actually answer it. So I'm going to have to punt

Sam Coleman 1:14:15

Not a problem, it was worth a try you know.

Forrest Landry 1:14:17

[laughs] I would love to hear what Zo has to say I didn't quite get an introduction with you. And I'm curious to know what your background and question would be if we have just a minute to address one.

Zoe Varenne 1:14:31

So I'm Zoe, I am part of the podcast, I kind of do sort of help with the research and some of the admin random bits work. And I'm just quite overwhelmed by the discussion. I'm just sitting here trying to process it all. And I think it's really, what's really stood out for me in the conversation is this idea of communication and the fact that we have language but we don't have communication. And I guess if I had a question, it's difficult to boil it down to just one. But how do you see like a, like global communication improving? Because we're all constantly talking to one another, like just the fact that I'm here in where I am, and you are, where you are and we're well, I hope communicating, I don't know. I think we... How would you communicate better? Like, what would you advise? I guess you said, like clarity and simplicity, but even like, taking it in your day to day life and every conversation like how do we take clarity and communication forward in all of our interactions? Because I'm guessing? Well I...

Forrest Landry 1:15:37

I hear your question. Yeah, I have actually an answer, which works both at the level of individual person to person, and I believe, would also work at the level of government to government. And it's, on one hand, it's surprisingly simple. And on another hand, it's, it has nuances that are easy to overlook. To facilitate communication with another person, I must grant them three rights, the right to speak, the right to be understood, and the right to know that they have been understood. These rights can't be taken, they can only be given. So in order to enable communication, I have to give you these three rights, I have to voluntarily without any strings attached without any kind of presupposition of outcome without any, any expectations that those rights will even be returned to me. I give those three rights. And in the reaching out and the vulnerability of that process, I hope and pray that they will themselves also be so skilful and so motivated, of their own free choice without strings attached, and so on, to grant those three rights back to me. And in so far as we now have the three rights that I give, and the three rights you give back, that those create the six capacities that form the handshake, for protocol closure, and communication. And this shows up whether I'm dealing with TCP IP stacks on the internet, or deep emotional communication with a lover, or one nation to another, they each have the right to speak, the right to be understood, and the right to know that they have been understood. And it is only when each one can truly know that they have been received by the other, the deep essence of their meaning has

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been received by the other, and the questions that they ask in the envelopes of understanding that are created as constellated by those questions, that we get the handshake that moves it from speaking at to speaking with. And from that evolves the capacity for the conversation to continue. I believe that would be a wonderful place to adjourn. Thank you for that wonderful question, it was entirely appropriate.

Tom Pegram 1:18:09
That was good medicine. Thank you, Zoe. And thanks so much Forrest. We've really enjoyed this.

Tom Pegram 1:18:17
Thanks for tuning into 'Imperfect Utopias', to get access to all of our content, and to stay up to date with future zoom calls, workshops and events and more. Check us out at ucl.ac.uk/global-governance. If you liked this content, please do leave us a comment and subscribe. Until next time!