

Ophuls Pod

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SPEAKERS

Jessica Knezy, Zoe Varenne, Sam Coleman, Tom Pegrum, Patrick Ophuls

Tom Pegrum 00:00

Hi, and welcome to 'Global Governance Futures', 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, other resources, listen to past shows, and to join our community, go to ucl.ac.uk/global-governance. Just to forewarn you that we did experience some technical problems with the sound in this episode, we hope that you will still enjoy this conversation. I'm really delighted to welcome Dr Patrick Ophuls to the podcast today. Patrick writes under the pen name William Ophuls. I was recently given a copy of his 2013 book 'Plato's Revenge: Politics in the Age of Ecology'. And frankly, I think it is a classic of the genre, what genre that would be may be up for debate cutting across as it does ecology, physics, complex systems science, Western philosophical thoughts, and other fields besides, and this formidable synthesis, all contained in less than 200 pages, is I guess befitting of the daunting task which the book sets out to achieve. As Patrick writes at the outset, the task before us is to find a humane and effective political response to the challenge of ecological scarcity. And this is certainly one of the most compelling attempts I've come across to address this huge systemic challenge, which is now truly bearing down on all of us. We know that species and ecosystems are declining at rates unprecedented in human history. And Patrick argues that we must embrace a politics of ecology, which respects natural scarcity and Planetary limits. And Patrick has been arguing this for a long time. He received his PhD in political science from Yale in 1973, and quickly became prominent in the nascent environmental movements of the early 70s. In 1977, book 'Ecology and the Politics of Scarcity' won the Sprout prize from the International Studies Association, and the Kammerer award from the American Political Science Association. The two most prominent associations in my field of political science and IR are. Yet few IR courses today have much to say about ecological scarcity. Nevertheless, Patrick has remained active over the decades in the environmental movement. His ideas continue to influence many prominent thinkers such as Robyn Eckersley and Thomas Homer-Dixon, who are also grappling with the implications of ecological crisis, for freedom for our democracies, and for political order. So it's really a pleasure to have you on the podcast. Patrick, thanks so much for joining us.

Patrick Ophuls 03:22

Okay.

Tom Pegram 03:24

I'll just let the pod crew introduce themselves.

Jessica Knezy 03:28

Hello, I'm Jessica. I work on the research and social media. And I'm very excited to be part of this conversation today.

Sam Coleman 03:36

Hi everyone, I'm Sam I handle the video and audio editing. And I'd say I'm really looking forward to having a chat with Patrick today.

Zoe Varenne 03:43

Hi, I'm Zoe, I handle social media as well and a little bit of the research too.

Tom Pegram 03:49

Alright, so perhaps we can begin Patrick, by laying out the central arguments. You said that modern industrial civilization is fundamentally anti ecological, that it's on a collision course with the laws of ecology. So what are the laws of ecology? And how. how are we in violation of them?

Patrick Ophuls 04:12

I guess the basic law is the law of connection. I like Garrett Hardin's formulation of it that you can never do just one thing. Everything is connected. So whatever you do with the whole system that we call this earth, is going to have consequences and if you don't respect that, you're going to have bad consequences. I guess the second law would be or a basic ecological principle is limitation. You can only do so much to nature without having consequences. Now, I like to think of it in terms of capital and income, we behave like spendthrift errors, we're using up capital, and we're overusing income. And you can just not do that for forever. We're experiencing the consequences now of violating those very simple basic principles. Now, of course, there are many other ecological laws that apply in one way or another, the law, the minimum, without phosphorus, you're not going to have very good crops and so on. But those are the three things that I think are essential for everybody to understand.

Tom Pegram 05:40

So when we sort of look out on the situation currently with COVID-19, do you see COVID-19 as kind of another canary in the, in the mineshaft, so to speak, another experience that we're going through which underlying that experience is this kind of violation of planetary boundaries, this kind of intrusion by industrial technical civilization?

Patrick Ophuls 06:10

Yeah, it's just one more symptom of the way that we're overusing and abusing Planetary Resources. We have simply gotten too big for our ecological britches, and we're paying the price.

Tom Pegram 06:26

So I'm also very aware, having now started doing quite a bit of research into biodiversity governance, it's been a bit of a surprise, how much information how much knowledge there was in the 60s and 70s.

In some respects, the research has been more a process of excavation, than innovation. And it's also a bit of a surprise that ecological collapse has really received nowhere near the same amount of attention as climate change. And you were arguing in the 1970s, alongside Garrett Hardin alongside David Orr, and other scholars, that really the writing was on the wall for homo colossus, this kind of addiction to perpetual economic growth. I guess one question would be well, what happened to that debate in the intervening years? And also, given the resurgence of that debate now in 2021, what do you see as the key differences in how that debate on ecological, ecological collapse and accommodation with nature is being framed today?

Patrick Ophuls 07:38

I'll use the example of Silent Spring, which is one of the very first wake up calls. But the lesson that society in general took from that, "oh, we have this discrete problem. We stop using DDT, the pelicans no longer die, problem solved." So there was that aspect, then what happened when the Limits to Growth came out, is it was essentially debunked out of hat, the computer there cried Wolf, garbage in, garbage out, nobody really paid any attention to the systemic argument that I was trying to make. And I and some others, were also trying to make a similar argument in prose. And people just didn't get it. And part of the problem, I think, is explained by Thomas Kuhn's 'Scientific Revolutions', people's attachment to the reigning paradigm is so strong, and is such a set of lenses through which people see and interpret reality, that you know you can put the obvious facts in front of their nose, and it will make no no impact whatsoever and the fact that even within the scientific disciplines, there's basically no change happens until the old guard dies out, and the young Turks take over. Until then there's no change. So change has to be generational. I think we are just beginning to reach the point now, where more and more people understand we don't have a series of discrete problems that we could somehow serially solve and get our act together. We have this massive problematique. It has to be solved all at once or not at all. And the solving requires not technical solutions, better mousetraps. It requires a complete revisioning and reconstruction of human society. But that, that understanding is still daunting. It's mainly the younger generation now that extinction rebellion, all those kinds of things, but understand at least the gravity of the problem, even if they haven't quite grasped what it is they have to do or what kind of society has to come next.

Tom Pegrum 10:08

Yeah, I mean, as you write in you're very helpful annotated bibliography. I mean, some of the kind of foundational touchstones for this kind of new understanding of reality as networked as complex are also rather new. I mean, in many ways, complexity science itself didn't really emerge in any kind of organisational form until the 1970s. So we're within a Kuhnian paradigm shift kind of view on that. I mean, perhaps it's inevitable that it's going to take decades to make that transition. But of course, the issue is we don't have decades.

Patrick Ophuls 10:42

Exactly. One of the problems with limits to growth and computer models were completely new, and nobody really understood them, except for a small coterie of scientific researchers. So it's understandable that the society in general, this kind of boggles, "this can't be right you know. They're saying the sky is falling, go away." You know? That kind of attitude. The amount of intellectual dishonesty around the whole debate, if you look back at it's just appalling.

Tom Pegram 11:16

There was a recent scientific paper that came out maybe two or three years ago, which essentially argued that the limits to growth forecast was more or less correct.

Patrick Ophuls 11:29

It got almost no attention the first copy sold millions, then the rest of them just disappeared, a minor headline on page three of the Times, and that was the end of it.

Tom Pegram 11:41

So I think Sam's got a question, over to you Sam.

Sam Coleman 11:44

Yeah so Patrick hearing you talk about that time, the 70s. It seems like there was an understanding that these messages might fall on deaf ears. Is that the case? And was there ever a kind of sense that you might be able to merge a political reality with the biophysical reality? Or was that something that you always envisioned coming into play at a later date in the future sometime?

Patrick Ophuls 12:11

Yeah, well, that gets to your third question, which "were you hopeful in the 1970s, that political reality was going to take account of it?" And I was never optimistic. In part, because I understood things in the way that Thomas Kuhn did that paradigms are so strong, but part of it was, so many people told me I was crazy. Or they say, well, ecology can't be everything you know? Well, it is everything but nobody wanted to understand that or the amount of resistance of the human mind, to a new way of seeing, we discover is almost unlimited. It really takes the school of hard knocks, to beat it into people's brains, that times have changed. And we're just beginning to reach that point where people realise that, oh, they talked about problems that might come down the pike in the future. Well, now they're knocking on the door and threatening to break it down. But still, nobody quite knows how to do it. They think "Well, okay, we have a problem with cars. So let's go to electric cars," they don't understand that electric cars aren't the solution, they're more part of the problem. You're just shifting the problem around from one sector to another, but you're not fundamentally changing the civilization to the way that will allow it to exist forever ecologically.

Sam Coleman 13:45

So do you feel like the social challenges that you faced in the 70s trying to get this message across are kind of much the same in 2020 and beyond? Or have they kind of changed? Obviously, the problem of, you know, ecological collapses has increased decade on decade, year on year, month and month, but are the social challenges much the same? Or have you found that there has been a shift somewhere?

Patrick Ophuls 14:12

Well, sure, ecological problems and climate change in particular has much more prominence now. And the New York Times here in the US or Atlantic magazine will have good articles about it. But to what extent that changes, the larger social and political discussion remains to be seen, they talked about, well, climate, "Biden is going to do this out the other for climate change," but I'll believe it when I see it, that somebody does something really substantial, that challenges the larger society and says, "We

can't go along like this. We need a different way of life." But of course, the problem is that the force of inertia number one is so hard to overcome, it's probably the major force in history inertia. And the second problem is that the implication is that a lot of us are surplus. Now, if you do back of the envelope calculations of what might be a reasonably survivable population on planet Earth, it's down around one or 2 billion not 8, 9 billion. And so that's a pretty hard, hard conclusion for people to swallow. I think we're in for a really serious time of troubles. When all these ecological and other political chickens come home to roost. I'm steadily less optimistic over the years, as I see how, how badly and how grudgingly we are, we're behaving in face of this massive, worldwide crisis.

Tom Pegrum 16:08

Given in as you're saying that, in some ways, these are kind of hard truths to swallow. What is the role of the university? What is the role of the academic at this moment of ecological peril? I mean, very notably, your 1977 book won these two awards from two very prominent associations in the discipline. And yet over 40 years later, very prominent scholars like Tom Hale, Jessica Green, are arguing that environmental politics remain marginal to mainstream international relations. So how can we understand that? What happened?

Patrick Ophuls 16:49

No, well, what happens is what happens in academia is that, it's, my book became a textbook in environmental politics. And I stress the word environmental, they were thinking in terms of, oh, not in my backyard, all those kinds of petty issues, they weren't thinking about the big picture ecologically in relationship to politics, it's just what academic disciplines do. I, I got out of academic life, because I didn't think it was very rewarding to play academic ping pong. Scholars debating among themselves on these very small issues. So that's what happens in academic life. I hope I'm not insulting you. But that's my feeling about how it operates and why after two years I left Northwestern, I didn't think I could write the kind of books that I wanted to write in an academic setting, you don't get rewarded for that. You get rewarded for all kinds of other things.

Tom Pegrum 18:01

Thanks. Thanks, Patrick. Yes, Jessica, you have a question?

Jessica Knezy 18:05

Yes. Patrick, you argue very evocatively. That political struggle is now urgently focused on making ecology, the master science and Gaia, the master metaphor of our age. So many might agree but argue that it's more practical to focus on reducing pollution, which I believe you mentioned, in regards to moving to electrical cars as a solution for greenhouse gas emissions. Why do you regard this as a fundamental misunderstanding of our predicament? And what would you say that these so called pragmatists?

Patrick Ophuls 18:40

Yeah, I think I've said earlier, the problem isn't better mousetraps, or better policies. The problem is we need a fundamental restructuring of our basic way of life, which is anti-ecological to its core and this goes way back in human history. We know now, for example, that when human beings migrated out of Africa into new areas, it didn't take too long, before they exterminated most of the megafauna after

which they evolved ways of living reasonably, reasonably ecological fact. We have simply replicated that on a massive global scale and until we until we understand that root reality, we will just be what we Americans call a day late and \$1 short in our response, we will, we will give ground grudgingly. We will make policies that reduce our carbon footprint a little bit but we won't to fundamentally reform our society. I think that's our basic situation. I keep coming back to it and I've had that view all along since I, my first encounter, of ecology. By the way, I should probably tell you the backstory to my work. I was a diplomat before I went back to school to get a doctorate, and I was in Tokyo. My embassy apartment was a quarter mile away from a large TV tower painted international orange most days of the year. I couldn't see it from our apartment. On the one day of the year when nobody drives in Tokyo, which is New Year day, you could see Mount Fuji 50 miles away. Then I went frequently back and forth between Tokyo and Yokohama. And there's a river that runs halfway through on Monday, it would be red on Tuesday it would be purple on Thursday it would be yellow. So depending on who was doing the worst polluting. Then it finally came time for me to leave Tokyo and the embassy sent me out to the Air Force hospital have my lungs tested. Because it turned out that too many people had been coming back from three, four years in Tokyo with lung damage. So that's what I brought back when I started graduate studies at Yale, I was originally going to be specialists in Japanese politics, Far Eastern policy but that just kept eating away at me I could just see. Industrial civilization is not what it's cracked up to be. That became the kernel around which were all of my work, essentially, grew.

Jessica Knezy 21:54

So, Sir, how would you say that we should dismantle our industrial society? And what would an ecologically focused society look like?

Patrick Ophuls 22:09

You're asking the \$64,000 question to which I don't really have an answer. Because we've gone so far down the pike of exploitation, that as one historian put it, as we climbed the ladder product of progress, we kick out the rungs behind, we have no, no easier, graceful way to climb down from the perch we're on right now. And so you could say, yeah, electric cars are better than fossil fuel cars, depending on where you get your electricity and you can think of various other so-called solutions like that but they don't answer the real problem is that that there are just too many of us on the globe, to allow us to build a sustainable society.

Tom Pegrum 23:19

Do you think some kind of model of rationing, I mean, it's... Are their models, we can look to say the situation after the Second World War in Britain, where there was quite strict rationing or in Cuba after the collapse of the Soviet Union. You know, is that the sort of, the drawdown model that you might have in mind?

Patrick Ophuls 23:43

Yeah, exactly. Once things get so bad, then there may be some possibility for government to take action, but we'll have to reach some kind of extremity. What I think is more likely is that ecological scarcity will be like a boa constrictor. It will, it will wrap itself around us and slowly squeeze us. Life in Louisiana and Texas will become unbearable when the temperature is too high. I don't know if you can until there's a certain crisis point that allows the government to step in and do exactly what you said. To

really have a realistic plan for rationing, scarcity and making a transition to a different kind of environment and the economy

Tom Pegram 24:43

It's certainly a very evocative image you, you give them the boa constrictors certainly... Yeah, slowly squeezing us in this situation. Hmm. So I know Zoe has a question. Over to you Zoe.

Zoe Varenne 25:01

So some argue that one problem the West faces is that our ideas about the future are no longer relevant. And we increasingly see wisdom being sought from non-Western indigenous and spiritual traditions such as Buddhism. But in 'Plato's Revenge,' you very much situate your response to the ecological crisis within Western philosophical thought. In your opinion, which Western ideas can and must be salvaged? And which we let go of and leave behind us as we put a path into the future?

Patrick Ophuls 25:37

Sure, actually, in 'Plato's Revenge' I do at certain points reference Eastern thought, Daoist and Confucianism and Buddhism. But yeah, I thought partly as a tactical matter, I thought to use primarily Western sources. And when you say the Western tradition it's so various we have people like Thoreau, we have people like Rousseau we have people like Hobbes, we have all kinds of things. So I tried to find within our own tradition, voices that spoke to a more ecological worldview but I am personally a practising Buddhist and so although I didn't come to Buddhism until later in life, certainly my four years in Japan being immersed in that society had an impact on my way of way of thinking. And I do think that in many ways, we have the resources within the Western tradition, going back to Plato, if you read Plato right, which a lot of people don't, unfortunately, they take mainly the rational side of Plato and my contention is that he's, he has more in common with, with Gautama Buddha than with Karl Marx. So, so there are resources there but I think we have to, to expand our worldview, to include all these other systems of thought, as well and I believe Buddhism is a very central resource for understanding that civilization based on desire is going nowhere and that everything is connected and that we have to behave accordingly.

Tom Pegram 27:39

You also weave in influences by, you know, from people such as Gregory Bateson, who is very prominent in the ecological field, in cybernetics, but these names probably aren't familiar to a lot of people who are listening. You know, again, it's curious, the kind of the, just how active and alive the debates were in the 1960s and 70s, and how they seem to be diminished how we're not really asking those questions in the mainstream at least.

Patrick Ophuls 28:16

Yes, I agree with you, it does surprise me a bit that there was so little continuity of thought. And I guess, because we were becoming so quote unquote, successful in terms of economic growth, and everybody was, the flood tide was lifting all boats, and then the end of the Cold War and the triumphalism, and so on. So all of those things just kind of brushed aside, or in the case of System Science they retreated into to the academic sphere and didn't have much impact on life outside that. Yeah, why? Why didn't

we take Gregory Bateson seriously? Why didn't we take the Limits to Growth series? Again, I think it comes back to Kuhn and how, how strongly people resist any kind of paradigm shift.

Tom Pegrām 29:20

I mean, you really take aim at the, at the kind of Newtonian mechanistic worldview. And you counterpose that to ecology as an alternative master science Gaia, as the alternative master metaphor. And then you weave a very compelling story drawing on Western philosophy from Plato on, including the founding fathers, Jefferson, and others. And I have to admit that that is not a story I'm familiar with. It was very, it was quite revelatory, how... The ecological sensibility that is hidden within Jefferson's own political thought.

Patrick Ophuls 30:06

Yes, that was that was not the dominant strain. We talked sometimes in American intellectual history about the machine and the garden. And it was Hamilton who was for the machine and essentially a majority of the the founding people in the Americas, but that garden team was always there underlying. So I think in any culture, there's always a counterculture that has ideas that are opposite and that can become relevant when the time is right. I'll change the subject a little bit here to say that the physicists themselves have resources that I think are useful for our understanding. If you look at what the physicists say about our world, it's more like Buddhism, that is your usual understanding of cut and dried science. I also think so far you haven't mentioned Jung and I think in some ways that chapter is, is in many ways a key word in my argument, and shouldn't be overlooked.

Tom Pegrām 31:34

Well, perhaps, Patrick, you could actually, a couple of points of just clarification and expansion. I mean, one, I would love for you to explain a bit more. What is it that people get wrong about Plato, here, which is so important to the thrust of your arguments?

Patrick Ophuls 31:53

Well, okay, if you look at how Plato is taught, in the academy, they go to, yeah, they mentioned the cave, which is a very Buddhist metaphor, for sure. But then they focus on his plan, his ideal plan for the city and the guardians, and this, that and the other they don't realise that this is a thought experiment that he's going to building up only to tear it down with everything he says later, particularly later, later in the book. So the reading of Plato is to my way of thinking extremely simplistic, and doesn't understand that such a different way of thinking and of arguing lies behind it that to interpret it in our broader, modern straightforward way, is absurd but I'm not a Plato expert, and so on, all I remember is being taught Plato in the academy and later realising that it was baloney, it was you know...

Tom Pegrām 33:09

And let's turn to Jung so, you know, many people will look to Buddhism as and Hinduism as sort of in a way a subjective empiricist approach to understanding the mind, to understanding the psychology that goes back millennia, whereas in the West, the focus has been less on the kind of understanding the interiority of human experience, and in many ways of obviously, psychology as a discipline, as a field is very new by comparison, we go back to Freud, at the turn of the 20th century, 19th century, and of course, Jung and others who followed after them. So this, this this concept of individuation that Jung is

so famous for, why is that so important? In your argument as to well, what might be the exit here from the the trap of perpetual growth and the culture that perpetuates that?

Patrick Ophuls 34:08

I don't have the exact quote in front of me, but individuation doesn't separate you, it doesn't make you apart from others, it makes you join others. So you join your community and the community in the larger sense, makes you more aware of not just of your individual self, but of your connection to the whole of things basically. So if you understand in that way, again, a very Buddhist understanding, but approached from a very different direction. We are all connected. We're all connected ecologically. We're all connected psychically, in many ways, to such a great extent that if we don't act on that understanding we are acting against our best, our best nature, individually and collectively.

Tom Pegram 35:12

Yes, it does seem that Jung really understood that of course, Jung is quite a controversial figure in contemporary psychology. Some regard him as a mystic, someone who dabbled in sort of Gnosticism I gather that perhaps you regard that as not a bad not a bad thing.

Patrick Ophuls 35:36

Well, I regard that not as a bad thing, the way he did it, he was looking for, for clues to the deep nature of the psyche, wherever he could find that. And it's one of the things I really like and admire about him is that he was so eclectic and all embracing, unlike Freud, who was kind of, you know, we run down these tracks and we stay on them and anything to the side we forget about. All due credit to Freud for what he did, although he acknowledged I'm following the path of the ancient poets, we were just rediscovering what, what in a way the Greeks already knew about the archetypes but couldn't articulate. In the same way.

Tom Pegram 36:29

I think Carl Rogers, the psychotherapist said once that the most personal is the most universal. It's very interesting when you read say Carl Jung's 'The Red Book', and which is, again, a very controversial work. But essentially, through whatever process he went through writing that book, he also came, all of these visualisations are there on the page, including many mandalas, which of course, is the universal symbol of of unity, and in the Buddhist tradition, and in other cultures which is quite extraordinary. So I'm curious to ask, Patrick, I mean, what would you... What would you say to people who are your age about the situation that we find ourselves in now? And, and what that we and what we might do? And also perhaps people who are more my generation, the kinds of you know, 40 to 50 year olds? And then finally, the younger generation, the generation Z, the millennials? What, what message might you have for each of those three cohorts?

Patrick Ophuls 37:50

Well, well, for myself, or my generation, I mean, we're not gonna be around long enough to see the worst happen in all likelihood. So I don't have much advice for them. The people in the middle I would just say you have to prepare yourselves to live in a very different world. I don't know what that means concretely but things are going to change and I expect quite radically, perhaps, in this decade, so be ready for it. And to my, the really young, young generation, my grandchildren, who are now 13/14. I'd

say you need to prepare yourself for an utterly different environment way of life, in which your mental fortitude and physical prowess are going to be essential. You better prepare yourself for a time of troubles that will test everybody and test you for sure. Don't think of the typical kind of career paths that people have followed for the last several generations. It just isn't going to work anymore.

Jessica Knezy 39:26

Yes, I think a lot of people in our generation have been grappling with the future and how we know what our parents have done with their lives isn't necessarily going to be available to us, those options aren't going to be presented in the same way. We spoke a few months ago to Farhana Yamin who worked on the Paris Agreement and we talked about how a lot of young people just kind of want to live off the grid and live alone and really go back to the roots and reconnect with nature, is that the answer? Is the answer for us to retreat into smaller communities that are food secure in and of themselves? And what, is that an option? Do you think? What are your perspectives on that way of life?

Patrick Ophuls 40:21

Yeah, I remember back to the pro whole earth catalogue and the back to the land movement and how that fizzled out. I think some people have had success in going that route. That's, that's not a solution for society as a whole it may be a solution for individuals or small groups. My vision of the ultimate future if we come out the other side of this is they will go back to some kind of agrarian society with all that, that implies, that we will have to find some way of living off the land sustainably. And that will, that will require us basically, to go back to small hold farming, I think. But that's in the very long term.

Sam Coleman 41:17

Patrick, it's interesting, because we've talked about Jefferson and we've talked about kind of Jeffersonian agrarianism but there's also the idea of the agrarian myth, and how the kind of to have a patch of land may have led to a kind of consumerism, where a white picket fence, I need to... An ownership and has there been a kind of distortion of the agrarian ideal? And where did that go wrong? And if we move into the future towards something like that, how can we prevent that from happening? Again?

Patrick Ophuls 41:52

Oh no! Yeah, no, what I would say is, is more emphasis on holding things in common. If we could make that a central principle, that may be the way to avoid having people all go off in their own individual direction have, as you say, the white picket fence. My property is mine, it's not yours, you.. Everybody holds this life in tale for future generations and once that becomes a dominant principle, that, that you're always considering the interests of the grandchildren, great grandchildren, and how do you live your life, then I think other things will fall almost automatically, you wouldn't do certain things, if that's the way you thought.

Sam Coleman 42:48

And just a quick follow up on that one. We talked about options for you know, young people going forward and I think there's an inevitable socialisation you know, that you can be very kind of in inverted commas "woke" when you're at university and then there's the inevitable finding of a job and the inevitable movement towards the kind of systemic ways that we've perpetuated the situation we're in?

Do you think there's a kind of, a middle ground, a kind of, you have your conventional job by day and by night, metaphorically, you're working in a much more profound and meaningful way, I'm reminded of the Frigga Haugh '4-in-1 Manifesto', where, you know, with less working hours, you have an almost equal amount of time to commit to some kind of community project or an environmental project, for example, do you see that as a kind of palatable middle ground? Or have we moved beyond that point of palatable middle grounds, and we just need to swallow the hared pills?

Patrick Ophuls 43:56

You know, I'm not so sure there is a palatable middle ground? What I think there's and old spiritual maxim that, that you, you pay your dues to society, but you don't give your soul to it, you live in society, but you're not of it. Does that make sense?

Sam Coleman 44:23

Yeah, absolutely, I'm reminded of, you know, give unto Caesar what is Caesar's. You know to borrow another kind of belief system, you know, pay dues to society, and then, you know, move on up from there. Thanks, Patrick. Yeah,

Patrick Ophuls 44:40

I mean, we're born into a certain society and there's no escaping that. So we have to do what that society demands you to do to get through life, but you don't, you don't have to sell yourself to that. Then with your... You spend your life in a way that makes you happy and fulfilled, as best you can within the circumstances that surround you. I mean here I am, I live in Los Angeles, I have to drive a car, what would the alternative be? Yeah, I could use Uber, I'd still be using cars and, you know, it would cost a lot of money. I'm here with my grandkids. But I try to, I try to be outside that as much as possible and the way I think and approach life and in the way I help to raise my grandchildren. I wish I could be more optimistic and positive and think, well, there's a, there's a way out of this. There really is no way out of this in the conventional sense, we will get through it. But the price will be high. For many, many people.

Tom Pegram 45:59

So what role does hope have then in that kind of context? How do we understand hope for the future in the situation that we find ourselves in now?

Patrick Ophuls 46:20

See, I wrote a poem about it, but it's not handy, unfortunately. So I can't read it to you. But the basic idea was okay, we will reduce the world to plastics and palm scum. But from that, slurry of plastics and palm scum will arise new forms of life. I have that kind of long range feeling that, that life is greater than any of us. I'm not worried about the planet. We're ephemeral and disposable. The planet, the life of the planet will go on. So that's my hope.

Tom Pegram 47:06

So cultivating a bit of a cosmic sensibility. Just how mysterious it all really is. Perhaps finding some, yeah, some comfort in that.

Patrick Ophuls 47:19

Yeah. And a Buddhist sense of detachment. This is this is all a play of life and we live so many lives within it, that it getting overly concerned or attached to one particular thing just isn't worth it in the larger context.

Tom Pegram 47:40

Well, I think that's a really a very good note to end on. Thank you so much for your time, Patrick, and for all of your work, which I've really enjoyed reading and I would highly recommend. So yes, thanks so much, again, for joining us.

Patrick Ophuls 47:59

Well thank you for having me and the best to all of you.

Tom Pegram 48:04

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