

Vinay Audio

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SPEAKERS

Jessica Knezy, Zoe Varenne, Sam Coleman, Tom Pegram, Vinay Gupta

Tom Pegram 00:00

Hi, and welcome to Global Governance Futures, based out of the Global Governance Institute at University College London. 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. We're really delighted to have Vinay Gupta join us this episode, one of Twitter's great iconoclasts Vinay has one of the most lively, eclectic and dare I say provocative Twitter feeds out there. One which I've been following for some time now. And no stranger to challenging topics been a has been working at the coalface of risk, resilience and humanitarianism, for decades now, including a stint at our very own UCL Institute for Strategy, Resilience and Security. He's perhaps best known for his work in the crypto space for helping you launch the Ethereum blockchain platform in 2015. And he's currently CEO of the company Mattereum, which is using the blockchain to build a system which can authenticate physical goods. In his spare time, he's the founder and lead for the Hexayurt project or refugee shelter, which he has designed to scale quickly in case of humanitarian disaster. And Vinay is also a meditation instructor who's devised his own bare bones meditation technique called the cutting machinery, specifically designed to increase psychological resilience in the face of challenging situations. So thanks so much, Vinay, for taking the time out to speak with us today. It's great to have you here.

Vinay Gupta 01:55

Good to be here. Good to be here.

Tom Pegram 01:57

And before we get to the questions, I'll just invite the podcrew to introduce themselves.

Sam Coleman 02:03

Hi, my name is Sam. And I run the video editing, and hopefully some of the thought behind the podcast.

Jessica Knezy 02:11

Hi, I'm Jessica, and I'm one of the founders and I do research for the podcast.

Zoe Varenne 02:18

Hi I'm Zoe, I help out some of the logistics and also some of the research for the podcast.

Tom Pegram 02:25

Alright, so. Shall we begin with some scene setting? How difficult is the situation that we currently face as a global collective right now? So to put a bit more meat on the bones of that, I mean, how do we begin to make sense of the core social problems that we confront, given their complexity. And to put that into context, you know, a week ago, the IPCC released its 2021 scientific assessment, declaring Code Red for humanity. Already, the news cycle has moved on given events in Afghanistan. And running along in the background, we have COVID-19, and the possibility of repeat waves of infections. So do all of these data points have something in common? And where do we begin when it comes to defining the core problem or problems that we face?

Vinay Gupta 03:31

So there's a lot packed into that question. I saw a recent piece on existential risk. That said, you know, the definition of an existential risk is something so bad that it even affects rich people. And I think that that's a really important lens to bring to all of this stuff, you know, like, "no, oh, it's the apocalypse, everything is completely horrendous, half of the human race will die in the next 20 years, but only the poor half, don't worry, right." And that kind of thinking, pervades all of our thinking about these issues. You know, during COVID, we divided into two classes, the class that got to work from home, and the class that had to turn up and do their jobs in a mask and hope that they weren't going to die. Right? And that class division where, you know, the middle class and I include myself in this, manage our COVID risk by having people deliver things to our houses, rather than going shopping. And you sort of hope that their workplaces are taking appropriate precautions, but you know they're probably not, you know, that kind of fundamental class rooted hypocrisy is super deep rooted in everything to do with the crisis that we're currently facing. Right? That is absolutely the bedrock of where we're at. Climate change is not that hard to handle if you're going to have rich people massively slash their private footprints, and by rich I mean the top 600 million people in the world. I'm not talking about 14 billionaires no longer having super yachts there aren't enough of them for their personal consumption to be particularly significant, right? It's the, you know, billion or so middle class humans on Earth that are really doing the bedrock of the environmental damage. And if you're going to wind down their standard of living to something which was sustainable, climate's a fairly manageable problem, right? But when you take, you know, class based intransigence about hanging on to privilege, and then you square it with the fact that that is already overpopulation by the rich, you know, the planet can't support on the current technology base, a billion middle class human beings with, you know, three car garages and state of the art health insurance. Never mind 8 billion human beings without standard of living. And when you take this kind of class based intransigence plus the fact that we've got limited debt or logical solutions on the table, you wind up with this seemingly immovable force hitting an immovable object, what is irresistible for a technically movable object, right. And all of our problems right now are of this nature, where if you can get human beings en masse to behave differently, these problems are pretty easy to get around. But in the position that we're in with human beings are essentially just randomly following their own self-interest and fighting each other for every scrap of food. Even relatively simple

problems, like COVID should have been relatively containable, even relatively simple problems like that become these enormous monsters.

Tom Pegram 06:30

So let's drill down on this a bit more then. I mean, you've raised lots of different points that I think we can click on. I mean, one would be, I mean how, how do we understand the kind of historical origins of what seems to be a highly defective, maladaptive kind of social operating code that we're currently having to work with? And, you know, how important is it for us to sort of trace backwards to the source of the problem before we can even begin to build out some kind of adequate, something that looks like an adequate solution.

Vinay Gupta 07:10

So, you know, most of our countries started out as small businesses, you know, if you think of like UK PLC 500 years ago, you know, UK PLC was probably, I don't know how many people worked directly for the crown? 3000? 5000? You know, if you were a small kind of the crown with a, you know, a handful of soldiers and a bunch of artisans, and maybe some scribes and a judge or two. And then you had a vast sea of peasantry who were basically concerned with growing turnips, and the occasional sheep. And over a few 100 years, that's scaled up in population by a factor of, I don't know, maybe 20, something like that. And the complexity has gone off the charts because of the growth of technology. And there's also been this massive, pervasive, transformative, you know, process of globalisation, where these things went from being relatively isolated to being massively networked. So if you imagine that happening for companies, you know, if you took Ford's management practices from, say, 10 years after it was founded, and attempted to apply them to modern Ford, it would collapse. You know, if you run IBM, like you did when IBM was at a prior company, it would collapse. And I would suggest that we're running our governments on much the same governance principles and methodologies that we were using for them hundreds and hundreds of years ago. And the most kind of visible example of that is the ballot process, where your pencil scratch on a piece of paper once every four years, that's been in place since the invention of dirt. And unsurprisingly, it doesn't seem to be helping us sort of navigate the kind of complex modern environment that we're in all that well. So I would, I would suggest that basically, it's just government hasn't changed as much as everything else has changed. And as a result, government is less and less able to cope with the environment that it's in. And things which should have been caught pretty early and dealt with are being caught far too late by the time which they're crises.

Tom Pegram 09:10

Yeah, so let's talk about a little bit so last month, the senior director at KPMG, reran the models from the famous 1972 Limits to Growth report which predicted that society would collapse sometime in the middle of this century. And this senior director basically found that the results still apply, that the original findings were confirmed that on the current sort of industrial growth trajectories across various metrics, we are on track for collapse. So I mean, you've pointed to questions around, you know, ideology, questions around social organisation, class divisions, but also we're in a context of hard physical limits, earth energy systems. How do we navigate a context of what would appear to be looming collapse. What's your take on collapse? What is your timeframe for collapse? And how does this qualify the claim that we can fix this situation?

Vinay Gupta 10:15

Okay, so the reason I smile when you say the word collapse is you think it hasn't happened already. Right? As I've said to people for years, collapse means living in the same conditions as the people that grow your coffee. Right, for whom has the world not collapsed? The answer is rich people. Right, you and I are probably top I don't know what 3% of humans in terms of access to wealth? Yeah, a little hard to measure because, you know, salaries versus access to university level resources versus inherited wealth versus, you know, access to debt. How you measure wealth is a tricky, tricky question. But at the end of the day, we're what winners look like in this environment. And above us there are several tiers, winners and hyper winners and hyper hyper hyper winners. But from the perspective of almost everybody in the world, they would change places with us in a metric heartbeat. Right? So for us, we say, when will the collapse come? Everybody else, they've already experienced the collapse. You know, these poor folks in India who you know, 50 Celsius in a city that doesn't have running tap water for everybody, never mind air conditioning, that's a collapse. You know, "what do you mean, there's no more water," "there's no more water until the truck comes at 6pm." "But you know, my kids are thirsty." "Well, there isn't any water." Does that sound like collapse conditions to you? Right, if that happened to me I would consider myself to be working through a collapse. So you know, to paraphrase William Gibson, you know the collapse is here, it's just not evenly distributed yet. And, you know, we have to live with that fact. It's just, we are in a world where there is a small elite, which is hanging on by its fingernails, to the illusion of business as usual, while the rest of the world is going very rapidly to hell in a handbasket.

Sam Coleman 12:17

On that point, Vinay, in terms of the unequal distribution of the collapse, there's inevitable elements of colonialism and past wrongs. I want to ask, how far is the situation we're in now, how far is it important to balance righting wrongs and solving a problem? Are they the same thing? Are they things that we should but don't have to include? Or what's your opinion on the kind of righting past wrongs and its relation to just solving the problem plain and simple?

Vinay Gupta 12:50

So my current take on this is the only kind of action on racism and colonialism that I think matters at all is reparations. Right? I think anybody that is not talking about racism in terms of reparations [fly attack interlude] I think that anybody that is not talking about racism and context of reparations is basically wasting everybody's time. Right. And when I say reparations, we're looking at by some estimates, a bill of about 45 trillion pounds, as the wealth extracted from the UK, from India by the British, right? The UK is 45 trillion up and India's 45 trillion down. And the capital, which fuelled the Industrial Revolution, was stolen at gunpoint from the Empire. You know, it's not a coincidence that the Industrial Revolution and the Empire are happening at the same time, the cheap raw materials and the gold that pays for building the machines. This is all stolen. Right? The Empire goes out there to feed Industrialization. So you know, then you say, "Well, what possible role could reparations have in the process of managing the climate problem?" And the answer to that is, how are we going to pay for all of the poor countries leaping over the phase of coal and oil and natural gas, going directly to solar panels and batteries and windmills and all the rest of that stuff? Because they don't have the access to capital to make that transformation. So I think this is a relatively straightforward equation. The West pays its debts to the

developing world and the developing world deploys that money, so that we don't make the climate problem any worse in the process of pulling ourselves out of poverty, and getting into a position where we have a reasonable standard of living for our people. Right, there's no complexity about doing this, right, other than the fact that it's going to, you know, absolutely economically cripple most of the Western powers.

Tom Pegram 14:51

Can I just ask Vinay when you said there's no complexity to doing this. Some scholars or panellists, looking at energy systems are sceptical about the potential for renewable green tech to essentially replace fossil fuel energy, that we are inevitably going to move to a situation of energy scarcity, which will be very different to what we've experienced over the last 150 years, energy abundance due to the energy return on investment that oil and fossil fuels produce. So I was just wondering if you could address that, that sort of level, that complexity, which some analysts would, would say, actually is going to be a key stumbling block in trying to make this transition.

Vinay Gupta 15:36

So the, the crux of that problem is being able to put on, you know, say, six or eight kilowatts of heating in, you know, 4am, when it's minus 10 Celsius outside requires a gigantic energy infrastructure, which you're not going to immediately be easily able to do with renewables. But that's not the condition that the majority of the world faces, the majority of the world live in hot countries, and you don't really need electricity for heating, except very, very rarely, you probably don't even need it for cooking because your houses are pretty well ventilated and you could cook on, for example, wood or gas. Right, your, you know, if you are going to use electricity, maybe it's going to be a single small induction plate that's burning, you know, 600 watts for 10 minutes, right? The, the possibilities for renewable energy are vast when you don't need to use it for heating. Right heating, you know, I mean, if you put on a kettle, right, the kettle is something like three kilowatts, two kilowatts. You know, a phone charger is 10 watts. So, charging 200 phones, or running one kettle, if you're not using the electricity to make heat, we can do renewable energy for everything everywhere very, very, very rapidly. And then when you do need heat possibilities, you do that by woodburning, from sustainable forestry. And those kinds of combinations, I think can get to most of the human need for energy. And then you've got to deal with a handful of countries which are so freaking cold, that you have to do something catastrophic in order to be able to heat their homes in winter. And my guess for that is you might wind up with a lot of nuclear power, right, but maybe it's offshore wind. Most of the people who are trying to model global energy demand, are imagining that this kind of ludicrous first world wealth bubble can be extended to cover 8 billion people. And the truth is, most of those 8 billion people would like it, but it's not happening. But getting into a position where your children can get a decent education because they have nightlights and they can read in the evenings and you know, you've got access to television and other forms of entertainment and you know, maybe you've got some cheap VR gear in the backroom for your kids to use that level of energy consumption where everything that you're powering basically runs on five volts, you know, if you can charge it with a USB cable, we can do renewable energy for everybody. Right? And why do we think that this first world wealth bubble is going to continue to exist in an environment where most of the humans are starving? You know, let them eat cake is not really a thing. And the less stable the world gets, the more this kind of let them eat cake style environmentalism starts to fall to pieces. It's not about

making the ludicrous first world wealth bubble sustainable. It's not about that. The books just don't add up. They can't be done. Why are we even trying?

Jessica Knezy 18:36

So in regards to this first world wealth bubble you've spoken about how unsustainable the current governance system is, and how stagnant our means for electing leaders are and, and about how gross reparations for the overexploited countries are going to need to be and the massive policy changes and the reduction of, or the change in lifestyle that is going to be necessary for the top, you know, 10% or, you know, whatever the number is. So, the current government system where we have leaders that are holding on to power, I, in my perspective is a big problem in terms of the lack of proactive policy and the fact that changes aren't going to be made during the current election cycle. So the electorate is not going to respond to problems that are not visible or in the collapse for the, for the first world. So what are the other options? And do you see some form of global authoritarianism panopticon as inevitable? Are there any kind of government structures that we can draw inspiration from in the past?

Vinay Gupta 19:49

So I think you could fix all of this with two very simple changes to how democracy works, right? And, you know, you're gonna laugh, but you know, if you've got to make a cut somewhere, I think this is how you do it. And I think the answer is you just stop anybody over the age of 30 voting, we just withdraw the franchise from anybody that is going to be dead by the time the climate crisis really hits. And I think if you stopped anybody over the age of 30, from voting, we would very rapidly wind up with progressive governments that will take climate change seriously, because all of the voters are going to be young people who will be here to reap the whirlwind when this thing lands. And you can implement that in a weekend, right? There's no bureaucratic problem, we just take everybody on the voters rolls over the age of 30 and we take them off, boom, problem solved. In 20 years, you'll have sane eco environmentally centred governments that will do the right thing to solve these problems. And it's a lot less unthinkable than most of the other answers that people have for how we reform the system.

Jessica Knezy 20:56

That's, it's really interesting I've never heard before. And I agree with you, except for the fact that a lot of people under the age of 30, are exposed to media cycles that are fleeting and full of misinformation and the education and the knowledge is simply not there for the majority.

Vinay Gupta 21:16

This is the second part of the proposal, which is you make the term limit you... Sorry you make the electoral period of service, 12 years. So rather than having four year governments elected by everybody who have 12 year governments elected by people under 30, so if you're going to be stuck with these people, for 12 years, you're going to take selecting them extremely seriously, because you don't get rid of them in four years. Secondly, also, it also means that the politicians don't spend all of their time campaigning. So I want to point out that this retains all the principles of electoral democracy, right? We don't let young people vote because they're said to be irresponsible. Well, that's exactly the same reason we shouldn't be letting 85 year olds vote, they're irresponsible. You can tell that because of the choices they make when you let them vote, which clearly indicate that they have diminished responsibility relative to climate, because they're voting for a comfortable old age rather than for saving

their grandchildren. And you know, that kind of irresponsibility, maybe that shouldn't be allowed. And I'm, you know, I'm obviously making kind of a bit of a sort of, like, reasonable proposal model here, right? Like, I'm deliberately taking an extremely provocative position. But, you know, simply getting rid of these people from the electoral process by deciding we're not going to let them vote because they have no stake in the future. If you do that in a sensible way, right. It's simply an extension of the same reason that we don't let for example, 15 year olds vote, right, we've already got a democratic principle where we deny franchise to certain kinds of people based on their opinions, no children voting, no teenagers voting, in America, no people that have been convicted of a certain class of crimes voting. Right. So we've already accepted the principle that we selectively remove franchise because we don't consider people to be fit and proper for exercising it. Let us consider how we might extend that principle to solve our problems. Oh, my god, you're talking about taking the vote away from old people? Yeah, I totally am. Right. Now, is that a sensible proposal or not? If we're talking about climate emergency, and something must be done, and this is absolutely the worst crisis we've ever faced, that might be the cleanest and most bloodless proposal for rectifying the situation. Right? How serious are we about our own survival? Because the existing system doesn't work. What is the simplest change you could make to the existing system to get a working change? And I would suggest this is one of a class of proposals that might be relatively simple one shot fixes that involve radical restructuring of the society, using the existing machinery with slightly different parameters. Right? You have to be between 12 and 30 to exercise a vote, if you're not between 12 and 30. You no get democracy no more. Well, but what, right, you tell me why children can't vote? Well, they can't vote because they're irresponsible, Oh, you mean like old people. But old people have the benefit of a lifetime of experience? Yeah, in an environment, nothing like the one they're in and they still act like it's 1970 and it's a national disaster. You know, so in the scope of radical policy changes to fix the world, I think you've got to say that is one of the least radical, radical policy changes. And if you don't like the result you get, you can always move the number back. Right? Same thing with 12 year term limits. Why is it four years? Why is it five years? Why isn't it 10 years? Why isn't it 15 years? It's just a number. And it's a number that we can adjust. There's nothing magical, where you know, five years is the ideal number for democracy. You can't make it work at 12. It will be different, but different is what we need. And these are reversible changes, nobody's being disenfranchised of property that can't be given back to them. You could try it in a bunch of countries and see if it goes well, and if it doesn't go well, you try it somewhere else differently. That, you know, compared to things like direct democracy, and you know, bioregionalism and these kind of really radical structural changes, this kind of stuff is much, much, much safer to try. Because if you don't like it, you can put it back again. And yet, I think it's radical enough to deliver us the changes that we need.

Zoe Varenne 25:32

So I just kind of want to pull on something that Jess said about misinformation and education. You mentioned that for young people to be able to vote, they would have to select very carefully because it would be 12 year terms. How would you propose, I guess, sort of resolving the education issue? Because if we're going to give young people and everyone an adequate access to education to make these decisions, society's going to have to reform in some pretty drastic way? Because even though the changes seem simple, they're drastic, how would you go about that? How would you change education, to avoid sort of the disenfranchisement and the conspiracy theory runaways that we have today with young people?

Vinay Gupta 26:18

So I have a lot of respect for conspiracy theories. Right? I mean, they.. Take a conspiracy theory, that turned out to be true, right? Have you seen this list of Wikipedia of conspiracy theories that turned out to be true? There's a long list of conspiracy theories that turned out to be true. So I think that we, you know, are headed down a very dark path, right? When we suggest that there is an official received version of reality, which is correct and that is taught to you by the education system, and everything outside of that as a conspiracy theory. And here I would point to the question of whether or not COVID-19 was originally cooked up in a lab in China. Right? Is that true? Or is that not true? Well, you know, kind of depends who you will ask. And it kind of depends when you ask them. Right, lots of different people have said lots of different things. I think it's entirely credible, that this thing, you know, was originally an American occurrence where somebody got exposed to a virus from a bat, it started in America, then circulated to China. I also think it's perfectly reasonable that somebody was doing a bunch of genetic tinkering with viruses because they wanted to understand them better. And that happened in China and the virus jumped to people who worked in the lab, and then from there to the world. Now, you know, there was the point not so recently, when Facebook was banning people for discussing the possibility that the viral outbreak happened in a lab in China. Now, a lot more people are beginning to take that seriously and have, you know, like mainstream politicians who are raising that as a realistic possibility. So when we say education is the answer, we have to be very careful that we mean education and not indoctrination. Right? And if education is the answer, you know, beyond the scientific method, what can we teach people, which is true. If you want to teach people truths, you've got basically, you know, mathematics, and the scientific method. Everything beyond that is just temporary. And here, I would point to the Pentagon's UFO report. Have we all read the Pentagon UFO report, it's only about nine pages? Department of Defence says "By the way, we've got radar traces for what appear to be physical objects that are moving in ways which are outside of our definition of the laws of physics," we've learned more about physics from watching the UFOs using the Pentagon's radar systems than we have at CERN and past 30 years. Because we now know for sure that the existing laws of physics we have are dramatically not the way the world really works. And we've got radar data to prove it. It's not like you can have an optical illusion on a military radar, right? So what is it that we are to teach people? The scientific method and mathematics, maybe some history, but it's very hard to say what is real in a really definitive way. And if we're going to be basically telling people the parameters of their reality that may not be education as we understand it now.

Zoe Varenne 29:24

I think I more... I didn't mean so much indoctrination, but I mean, how do we give people the tools to determine their own truth?

Vinay Gupta 29:32

Well, I mean, is that not? I mean, when we say determine their own truth, right? Do you think the CIA was responsible for the crack epidemic in America?

Zoe Varenne 29:45

I'm not sure, maybe?

Vinay Gupta 29:47

Right. It's kind of an important question. If you're American, you're black. The question of whether the CIA was deliberately importing cocaine into Los Angeles right, as a continuation of the cultural warfare that started when they decided they were going to criminalise marijuana because black people smoked it a lot. You know, we've gotten government documents about the war on drugs, which make it very clear that it was intended originally as a tool of cultural oppression. Right? If we're going to teach people to make up their own minds about things, I think they're going to be very angry about a lot of the things that have been done to them over the last 30, 40, 50 years. And the stuff that has been going on particularly in America is like something out of the freaking X Files, you know, the Tuskegee Syphilis experiment. Right? You know, how is anybody supposed to trust an institution that did that to their ancestors? You know, if you let, if you really educate people to make up their own minds, you know, I think they're going to be very unhappy. Why was Alan Turing? Well, how did Alan Turing come to die? Right, the guy who is dramatically, centrally responsible for a huge part of the Allied victory in World War Two, right, you know, injected with a bunch of hormones, driven to suicide, or possibly assassinated, why did that happen? If we're going to be able to make up our own minds, we're going to have to get serious about getting transparency from the governments about what they've actually done. If you want the people to make up their own minds, they're going to need first class access to data. And that means declassification of almost everything. In the process. I think that people are going to get very, very, very angry with the state because the state has been doing a lot of incredibly evil stuff, not only on their behalf, but also to them on the state's behalf. So, you know, I'm all for education, but what is it we're going to teach people?

Tom Pegram 31:40

So I'd just like to circle back to that question of truth. You know, and certainly when we think about truth, as it applies to say, moral claims. So and to put it perhaps more starkly. I mean, how do we actually arrive as a collective at wise decisions? So the standard empiricists model in science brackets, such questions outside the appropriate scope of science?

Vinay Gupta 32:08

The first question is, are there any wise decisions? Right, I mean, only available data, there are things that you think are a good idea, but if the available data is 50%, wrong, and a third of the data you needed to make the wisest decision, it's impossible to make wise decisions.

Tom Pegram 32:28

Right, okay. But as someone who's worked a lot in existential risk, obviously, you've, you're very familiar with, and you've thought a lot about the precautionary principle.

Vinay Gupta 32:37

Sure.

Tom Pegram 32:38

So how does that relate to that argument, it would seem that even in the in, in a situation where you don't have sufficient data to know what the consequences of your actions will be. Sometimes it's, the wise decision is not to actually perform the experiments or whatever it may be.

Vinay Gupta 32:51

But all of these things are horrifically imponderable. So, you know, if we simply banned biotechnology completely on the basis that, you know, like, Hey, come on, if we're gonna wind up with 90% of the human race dying, it's gonna come out of a lab. Right? So we take a position that we're going to ban biotechnology, we're just going to stop teaching that material, we're going to defund the department, and we're going to get rid of biotech as an industry. Great, then the next plague runs around, we don't have the mRNA vaccine preparation capacity, and it kills 90% of us. Or we go down the other truck, and we go whole hog on biotechnology. And you know, every high school is teaching people how to edit DNA. And then we wind up being wiped out by a series of designer plagues produced by angry 14 year olds. Right? You know, we literally don't have enough data to know what decision is the right decision, and we can't get enough data to know that right? Which decision is the right decision?

Tom Pegram 33:47

So perhaps just to be provocative? Here's another example. The development of say, AI weaponized drone technology.

Vinay Gupta 33:54

Yeah.

Tom Pegram 33:55

Is that a good idea?

Vinay Gupta 33:56

Well, I mean, if that's how you're going to end the age of oil, you're just gonna send out a bunch of robots to blow up anything that looks like an oil well or a coal mine. Maybe it's great. Right? I mean, you know, the question is who's holding the weapon? You know, if we give Greta Thunberg, control of her very own robot army, is the world more or less likely to be here in 100 years? Hard question. You'd have to be very wise to make that call. Right? I'm not sure anybody is that wise? You know, I think at the end of the day, we are still in a position where we're asking people to guess.

Sam Coleman 34:36

Just on that point, going really old school, Plato, guardians. Where do you stand with that idea, but it seems that in a lot of societies, the idea of a leader, so there might be in France, for example, there's a prime minister, there's still a president, you know, a figurehead. And do you think that we need to move beyond guardians or is it this weird paradox where we need people to lead, but no one is ever able fully to lead because of human cognitive issues.

Vinay Gupta 35:11

So my, my suggestion is that it's not a human cognitive issue, right? I think it's an information theoretic issue. Most of the really important decisions are decisions where we simply cannot move the outcome until the experiment is run, and we can't run the experiment twice, because we're going to have destroyed something that we can't get back in the process. So if we model this as somebody is going to have to roll the dice, right? You know, we've got the best available modelling about whether or not you

do the following thing with your central bank and with a bit inflation, deflation, or a healthy economy. We've run all the numbers, we think it's about 30%, likely in each direction, which policy are we going to pick? Right? Well, how do we decide? So if we model this as when we have to make a decision and there is no right or wrong answer? Because we cannot get access to the data because the data doesn't exist, and we don't have the modelling power to predict. How do we make those decisions. That to me is the job of your head of state, or your Supreme Court or your system of government, whoever is the, you know, the.. Actually maybe not Supreme Court, but the kind of ruling structure, whether it's an individual or a group or the entire population by plebiscite, however, that is done, that structure is there to make the decision when there's just inadequate data, and somebody's got a guess. And the critical thing about that institution is, that institution is there to say, "We made the decision in the best possible way. And at that point, we're going to have to live with the outcomes whatever they may be." That is a very different thing, from the kind of normative bureaucratic function of government, where it has to figure out the best way of managing to collect taxes on vehicles, you know, like, you're collecting taxes on vehicles there aren't many unknown unknowns, you could kind of figure it out. And all you need is a bunch of reasonably intelligent people who are interested in doing the right thing to solve the problem. Right? Those kinds of decisions, I don't think any country has really gotten dramatically better or dramatically worse performance out of that level of bureaucracy. You know, you can argue maybe California is worse and Singapore is better. But yeah, the end of the day, there's not much in it, the high level decision making where it's like, we don't have adequate information, we're just gonna have to take a guess at this. That job, I think we have enormously different outcomes, depending on how we get people into those positions of power and what they're allowed to do. And you could take a diversity as large as say, you know, the great dictators in the mid 20th century compared to say, the Swiss. So yeah, I think that kind of bureaucratic normative levels of government, I don't think it matters that much how we do that. But the really, really big decision making where you have to basically stare into the unknown, roll the dice, I think there's huge room for improvement there.

Sam Coleman 38:05

So to merge the two ideas, we've been talking about in terms of decision making, and also voting for leaders. One of the issues that seems to me is that we're voting for leaders who will guarantee hopefully, the prosperity of our plot of land that we happen to have been kind of birthed on. But we've also looked at, in a previous discussion, it's kind of the problems with voting for a group that will govern the whole planet. And some of the issues there. And if you could just talk a bit about that, that'd be quite interesting discussion.

Vinay Gupta 38:40

Yeah. Planetary scale governance. I mean, realistically, if we're going to get planetary scale governments, it's going to be the UN Security Council which is to say all the nuclear nations basically just telling the rest of the world how it's going to be from now on. Right? There's no other body that exists that has any realistic ability to enforce globally. So if you don't have the ability to enforce the people that don't like you are just going to ignore your opinion. So further into the climate crisis, I could very easily see a rule by security council being the thing that turns the UN into an efficient body. Right? I'm very sorry, you know, you know, Elbownia, you have been continuing to run your oil extraction thing outside of the mandates that were set by the UN. And you've got three days to stop or we're going to carpet bombing, right? We're simply going to destroy your royal infrastructure, if you won't turn it off,

take it or leave it. Right, that kind of ability to enforce. The only way you're going to get that is if the UN Security Council basically declares itself to be the Supreme High Ruling Council of Earth, and then starts pushing mandates down the pipe. Right, because, you know, we're not willing to get like, even if you had ran a planetary democracy tomorrow morning as a parallel institution, you know, one human, one phone, one vote. Right, could we do that? Sure, we can do that no problem. You know, it could advise, it could be wise, it could rule, it could make the kind of, you know, it could have a Council of 35 people like Nelson Mandela, who basically define how the world was gonna work. And then all the people who have nuclear bombs will simply ignore them, it might be able to exert influence, it will not be able to exert power. So, you know, you could have enormous social movements organised globally, that kind of pushed in the right direction that voted for politicians with the right policies that tried to have a coordinated international response by coordinating responses into each country and interconnecting them. And I would point to, for example, the sort of international network of green movements or green political parties, or International Federation, Red Cross, and Red Crescent has been things like that. But on the other side of it, just having the nuclear cartel take over the world, and then start giving orders by how things are going to get done. That seems much more credible. I'm not saying it'd be good, but, you know, even having a bad group of people visibly in charge might be better than having nobody visibly in charge.

Tom Pegram 39:03

You know you've written, you've written that our existing political structures, and I assume, you know, that is both national and perhaps international, perform extremely poorly, because they cannot handle complex, long duration, multi-actor conflicts. And what you seem to be suggesting here is that one solution is to just reduce it down to the nuclear cartel that would make the game theoretic, you know, strategic considerations much simpler. Possibly.

Vinay Gupta 41:43

Yep.

Tom Pegram 41:44

But I was also... I wanted to push you Vinay, what is what is the role of the state in this phase shift, or whatever we might call it. So, you know, you've had quite a lot of people on the left, arguing that we've experienced a transformation of the state over the last three decades, a sort of neoliberal hollowing out of the state. And the COVID-19 response has been a vindication of the old command and control state apparatus. They point to examples like South Korea, compare those to some of the failures in the West. And I'm, you know, I'm curious to ask, you know, to what extent do you think the left position has credibility when it comes to the role of the state reinforcing that kind of old traditional model of linear command and control, bureaucratic state authority. And I also wanted to push a bit more, when it comes to a sort of a transboundary global threat like ecological or climate collapse? Does the left have a credible political programme?

Vinay Gupta 42:45

Nobody has a credible political programme. There's nothing out there. Right? I mean, if you start measuring, you know, grammes of co2 and calories of food and kilowatts of energy, you know, you either have a global standard of living substantially below Mexico with very, very few exceptions. That's

track one, or there's track two, you develop a bunch of wizzy new technology, and that wizzy, the new technology sorts the entire problem out for you. Right, those are the only two tracks. There's nothing else. Right? Like there, there just is no magic pixie, where you have perfect, perfect social organisation, you can have a middle class standard of living within your co2 limits, there's just nowhere there. Right? We don't know how to do that. So, you know, the left can tell us that, you know, they're going to have a just, fair egalitarian world, in which everybody has a little car and a little house, and they've got, you know, perfect insulation, all the rest of that stuff. And they're still going to be showing us a plan for a world which is consuming like five planets worth of resources. Because by the time you extend that to 8 billion people and their kids, you're really, really, really sort of out of chips, right? It just isn't there, right? So similar, we've probed plans on the right or the centre or anywhere else, the reason that you don't tend to see costed plans down to grammes of carbon, calories of food, kilowatt hours of energy, is that when somebody does those kinds of caustic plans, they come to the conclusion that Western civilization is completely unsustainable. And then they start to freak out. Right? So rather than getting a clean model of this, it's like, okay, we're either headed for kind of global Mexican village levels of living, or we're going to do something really, really radical with technology. If we were very clear about that, 30 years ago, by the way, we knew that 30 years ago, just nobody would talk about it. We could have spent the last 30 years spending half of our defence budgets on fusion reactors. And if we'd gotten clean working fusion 50 years ago, because we declassified everything and we'd worked our arses off with a deal with like, \$200 billion of your budget to spend on fusion, we would have cracked it by now. Right? Or ultra-cheap solar, that's at 10 times faster and cheaper than the solar that we have now under batteries and all the rest of it like, because we didn't model that there is no political solution, we didn't really double down on the R&D for the technology. And that is a huge strategic error that we've made. And, you know, at this point, if anybody approaches me for a plan to save the world that doesn't come with a spreadsheet, forget it, I'm not even examining that. You know, and by the way, the carbon emission thing, GDP intensity per, carbon intensity per unit of GDP, is basically 250. I think it's a lot more maybe 260. But call it 250 grammes of carbon, per dollar of consumer spending, PPP adjusted. So what that means is if your carbon budget is two tonnes per person, which by the way is India's current consumption, then you're in a position where you can spend basically \$8,000 a year, and that is your hard cap for environmental sustainability. Everything after that is eating into the future. And in fact, we've already overspent so much that we don't even have that two tonnes a year really, we have zero tonnes here.

Tom Pegram 46:15

So I've been thinking down into this, into the spreadsheet side, if you will, of this issue. And I've been reading a bit of work by Tim Garrett and others who basically argue that it's not actually possible to decouple GDP growth from co2 emissions, although many continue to believe it is possible. It's a bit like you, you sort of add a couple of lanes to the motorway, and what happens, well the traffic volume increases, which is quite fascinating, really.

Vinay Gupta 46:45

Oh, yeah. I mean, it's a huge mess, right? It's a huge mess. And we're very bad at dealing with that mess, because we're very hard at dealing with the inevitability of change. So, you know, let's talk about geoengineering for a second, right? So that these guys at project Vesta, and their approach is, you're just going to grind up a bunch of hills into olivine sand, and then you're going to throw the sand into the

sea, and the carbon dioxide in the seawater reacts with the sand, and then that increases the ability of the oceans to absorb more carbon dioxide, and you can basically pump the carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere using the ocean. Looks pretty safe as geoengineering goes, the costs are remarkably manageable, and it looks like it might work. Right? Wouldn't it be funny if we just did something simple and sensible like that, and it sorted out the entire mess? Now, how do we get to the bottom of whether that's workable? How do we get these guys the money to give it a try? And how do we get the money to scale it to the point where the world is already doing it at a level that works? If only we were able to make sensible decisions because somebody acted like they were in charge and could make stuff like that stick? So you know, let's say that project Vesta works and olivine grinding is actually a solution. And then the UN Security Council just imposes global carbon tax to pay for the people grinding up the rock. Problem solved. Right? If we don't act like idiots, we can deal with this stuff. The problem is we are pathologically addicted to acting like idiots because rather than being honest about our problems and dealing with them, we just pretend that nothing is happening.

Sam Coleman 48:27

So where do we think that change is gonna come from? Because as an individual you want to hopefully have some kind of agency and control over your future? And so there's been a real rise of kind of bottom up climate activism and, and all that, but if I said, "Oh, my mate Vinay says that we should start living like Mexicans." So should we start recycling a bit more and all this kind of thing? Do you think the change could ever come from that on a broad scale? Or will it only come from a government legislation? We need to wear masks otherwise I'll get a fine or will it be a kind of top down bottom up hybrid?

Vinay Gupta 49:06

If you try and live a zero carbon lifestyle in the UK, today, the government will arrest you and throw you in jail. That simple, right? Why will they do this? Well, the first thing you're going to start with is zero co2 footprint house. Right. And you're going to build that out in natural materials like wood and turf, and you're gonna build yourself a hobbit hole in the woods and then you're gonna get busted for not having obeyed local building codes. But the same thing happens if you want to build an ultra-efficient high tech house, you know, I got aluminium over Styrofoam sheeting. The whole thing is completely air sealed all the air circulation is done using an air to air heat pump. And, you know, the whole thing runs on solar panels and isn't connected to the grid and all the compost is... The toilet waste is composted using a composting toilet, you're still gonna get thrown jail for building that and living in it. They will force you to bulldoze it because it doesn't fit their way of doing things. "But it's much more environmentally friendly." "Yeah, we don't care." Right? Same thing if I build an ultra-lightweight car, right? "Hey, it weighs 200 kilogrammes. It's made out of carbon fibre, it gets 950 miles to the gallon, and it runs on alcohol." "Yeah, that's really nice. You're not allowed to put it on the road. But it's really environmentally"- "Yeah, we don't care." So it is illegal to live with zero footprint right now. And if you do innovation towards that goal, and you attempt to test that innovation, by living in it, you will go to jail. The laws have to change. And whether you think that, you know, having this kind of anarchy where people can design their own lifestyles and their own technologies and try it is a good thing or a bad thing. Even if you want this stuff regimented and licenced you have to start rewriting all the building codes and all the vehicle codes. So that the first indication is what the co2 performances and then after that you're allowed to figure it out.

Sam Coleman 51:04

So what's the- Is there a role of this kind of group that we discussed at the start of the podcast that huge middle class that top couple of percent? Or is the idea that there should be a role for that group, part of some kind of colonial saver, inclusivity complex that we've seen in a lot of kind of conflicts that might be going on right now, for example?

Vinay Gupta 51:29

So here, I have to put on my Indian political radical hat for a moment, right, which is, I totally ignore white people when they talk about being upset about racism, unless they're in support of reparations. If they're not in support of reparations, they're only interested in the emotions, not in the money. And let me tell you colonialism was not about emotions. It was about money. So however much bleating is being done by white political radicals about, you know, oh, my God, anti-racism, it's so terrible intersectionality this, that and the next thing? I ask them a straight up question, what's your plan for reparations? And if they don't have an answer, I totally ignore whatever else they have to say, because they haven't understood the problem and I'm not interested in their chatter. Simple as that colonialism was about money. Fixing colonialism is also about money. The second part of that is, so what do we do with the mass of people that feel bad about the way the world is going and want to do something better? I think in the UK, the Labour Party is very, very vulnerable to attack by the greens. And I think that a concerted effort to blackmail the Labour Party into assuming... into passing radical environmental policy points by blackmailing with the threat of mass defection to the Green Party is a highly realistic way of forcing the Labour Party in a green direction. And you know, I call this the reverse watermelon strategy it's red on the outside and green on the inside. I suppose red apples are like that they're red on the outside and green on the inside. So I think that in the UK locally, the possibility of simply forcing green values down the neck of the Labour Party is very plausible. It would also be nice if we could force some socialist values down the neck of the Labour Party, I think that would be a great idea, too. Because right now they've fallen into this kind of Blairite trap. And in that Blairite trap they're basically like a more functional version of the Conservative Party. And that turns out not to actually be what British people want for the most part, because when you give them the option of some kind of middle of the road Scandinavian socialism, they'll take it, as we've seen in for example, Scotland, you know, some kind of middle of the road Scandinavian socialist future for the UK, I think is entirely plausible, it'd be nice if we had a political party that represented that. But getting those folks who also have some kind of green politics, that is going to need some shenanigans and some machinery. But for the, for the most part, I have to find a politer way of putting this. There are an enormous number of people who are expressing their discomfort about the future by kind of whining. Right? There's a kind of whingy almost like neo-vegan complaining about the environment. And I think that Greta Thunberg, has done a really good job of demonstrating that there is something beyond whining to be done, and that, that something is actually pretty effective. Right? But, you know, turning the emotional sense of something is wrong, and something ought to be done into a set of actual policy proposals? Nobody's built that bridge yet. Even the Green Party's platform is a joke, right? If you turn it into spreadsheets, it makes no sense. There's no deliverable. So somebody is going to have to build the technocratic bridge of doing the numerical modelling of these possible future societies. And then nailing down those numerical models as platform points, here is our numerical model. And it says we're going to sink 50% of our defence policy into energy research. And we estimate that's got 70% probability of delivering on one of these four breakthroughs, and a 30% probability of delivering something even better. Fantastic, right? Now

we're going to do a whole bunch of cost adjusted modelling for those risks. And at the end of that, we can say that's going to be our energy policy, until we actually start getting this down to grammes and calories. Nobody's environmental policy means anything, in the same way that nobody's anti-racism policy means anything until we get down to reparations. You know, at the end of the day, it's about money. It's about numbers, it's about grammes of food, it's about whose children starve to death when.

Jessica Knezy 55:51

So in building this bridge, I've been listening to this conversation, basically, entirely through the lens of this alternative democratic structure that you mentioned at the beginning, which was where you have only the young people choosing, and you mentioned that we've got two avenues, we've got a lowering standard of living for the top 10% to somewhere around Mexico and having radical technological developments where AI makes the decisions, is that correct?

Vinay Gupta 56:17

Not where AI makes the decisions. But where we go and fix the fundamental industrial processes.

Jessica Knezy 56:23

Using technology?

Vinay Gupta 56:25

Using whatever means are available, right, artificial intelligence, solar panels, fusion reactors, you know, if you really double down and say like, look this is a technological crisis, you wind up with, you know, Manhattan Project level force being applied to both geoengineering and clean energy and clean food.

Jessica Knezy 56:47

So if you are a candidate in this new democratic structure, what would your three policy changes be? And how would you share why they're the ones that are valuable and why they work to a group between the ages of 12 and 30.

Vinay Gupta 57:04

Okay, so the first thing is, I would declare a global permanent state of emergency, until not a single human being died of starvation in the previous 12 months. Right, we have to get really serious, it is a humanitarian emergency until people stop dying of starvation. And to that, I would also add certain kinds of preventable disease in a few events. But starvation is really easy to measure. That's the big one. Once people understand that the government that they're dealing with actually cares about their lives, and is interested in helping them to stay alive. At that point, it becomes much easier to trust your government. So if we say, look, we're going to eradicate homelessness, and we're going to make sure that there are no people that have untreated mental illness, that could be helped. And we're going to take care of all of that stuff. And we're going to do that stuff first. At that point, it's much easier to believe that the government actually cares about your individual wellbeing than the current situation, where the government talks about caring about your wellbeing and still allows, like, for example, war veterans, who gave the productive part of their lives to that government to rot in the streets with ongoing mental illness and homelessness and alcoholism. So step one, nobody gets left behind. Step

two, that includes your grandchildren, where we're not going to sacrifice your grandchildren's wellbeing for your current entertainment. So at that point, we're going to start putting an unbelievable amount of money, energy, power, intellectual capital, behind solving the fundamental problems, right, we're going to absolutely step on the gas, and we're going to fix this. And that is going to be space lit, race level spending. In these you know plenitude of high tech areas. And that, you know, begins to percolate through the university system it percolates through funding, the research councils and all the rest of that stuff. You put the country on a war footing until such time as you've gotten some kind of reasonable solution to the real problems we have. And then the third thing is we start questioning the role of inherited wealth. And we start looking very seriously what it takes to, you know, level, the enormous non-productive accumulations of wealth and power inside of the various corners of society that have been hanging on to those privileges unearned for literally 1000 years. Right. And that third point is extremely important because the people that feel like they are generationally insulated from the consequences of their actions, by wealth, that was won 1000 years ago, or 500 years ago, or 200 years ago. Those people are hogging a dramatic amount of the innovation capital in this society. Right, you just can't get things done in this world. Because the incumbents are very, very, very fond of stopping people changing things, and we need to change things really quickly. So the idea that you are specifically going to strip power away from incumbents and push it towards the edges, believe it or not the critical tool for doing that is inflation. Right? If you couple inflation with the right kind of approaches to things like taxes on land, you can very, very, very quickly create circumstances which break down inherited wealth, and they breakdown unearned income, and they push those resources back into the mainstream where they could get some actual work done. And I think that, that as an approach begins to offer a much more universal democratic mandate, where it's not that like your great grandfather won the lottery, and your family will be unproductive for the next 12 generations. Rather, it's you know, you got yourself a nice house out in the country, and you'll be able to hold on to it indefinitely, but you're not going to be able to hold on to the five villas dotted around the world, unless you're doing something that actually matters to people. And I think the combination of things like land value taxes and controlled inflation, have the prospect of making it nearly impossible for people to build little castles and then hideout in them. And you know, how much of the productive assets in the Western powers is currently hung up in those kind of wealth reserves? It's a lot, right? And breaking those things down, you know, is that socialism? I just think of it as running a competitive economy, where we make it very difficult for people to hang on to assets that aren't doing good, to any kind of productive use. A few percent of inflation and some kind of sensible taxation on things like property, very quickly, you can force assets back into productivity. Vote Gupta. Progressive utilisation theory for all.

Jessica Knezy 1:01:57

These policies are, are very effective if the society recognises the collapse already upon us. And as you said, at the beginning, many rich societies don't recognise that society has already collapsed. So how do you push that into the brain of a voter and sort of establish a decision making process that isn't centred around individuals?

Vinay Gupta 1:02:23

So the politicians are all liars, and we require the politicians to be liars before we'll let them run for election? That's how it works, right? Campaign Finance? You know, both parties are pandering to the rich in America. Even in the UK to a dramatic degree, the Labour Party is funded by the same corporate

interests that fund the Conservatives. So the first thing you got to do is you have to demonetize politics. Right? Just get rid of the concept of campaign finance, political parties have members, members pay dues, or some other, you know, appropriate mechanism but no corporate money and no large individual donors. The rich do not get to buy a political voice. And, you know, potentially you turn the entire thing into mass amateurisation. Right. Is that a political campaign? Sure. The political campaign is run by local volunteers that come around and knock on doors and that's all there is. There is no advertising, there is no nothing is that unthinkable? Sure it's unthinkable? Is it any more unthinkable that a lot of other unthinkable things we're facing? Not really. You know, breaking the world by poisoning the atmosphere, that is unthinkable. Nuclear war that is unthinkable. Biological war that is unthinkable. Somehow we find ways of doing those unthinkable things. Why not these unthinkable things? You know it's not irrational, right? If you look at the level of effort that we put into the Trident thing, you know, nuclear retaliation, okay, we might agree that nuclear retaliation is an important capacity to have. But a lot of other things that are also very important, let us also fund those. And it's not a simple guns and butter thing. You know, like, if you're going to be spending an awful lot of money on high tech Science and Industry type stuff, it returns benefits to the whole of the society whether that spending is on nuclear submarines or space probes, or, you know, sensible looking electric cars. You know, as long as you're paying scientists and engineers to go out and do science and engineering, and as long as the result has been published in either patents or open source, you know, you're generating economic growth in a very realistic way. You know, I absolutely believe that you can have things like defence Keynesianism work. I need a shotgun to take care of that damn fly. I absolutely believe, you know, things like defence, Keynesianism work. And it's not just defence Keynesianism. It's a lot of other kinds of scientific, you know, scientific establishment Keynesianism. And again, what's the evidence that works? Look at America, their entire economy is basically held together by defence spending and if the defence spending stops, America will implode. Well, fine okay you're gonna have Keynesian spending through the scientific and technical establishment, but let's make that green energy and efficient cars and efficient houses, rather than only nuclear bombs. And, you know, crazy laser cannons.

Tom Pegram 1:05:25

Well, thank you, Vinay. Could a run for political office be on the cards?

Vinay Gupta 1:05:31

Um, if somebody shows me a political office worth running for, I would certainly be very interested in doing that. But right now there is no political office worth having.

Tom Pegram 1:05:40

Well, you heard it here first. I think also, what you're saying really is, you know, that, that this is, in a sense, a call to adventure. It's about empowering people, especially young people to believe that they do actually have agency. And indeed that, you know, a very old fashioned idea that the state can actually be a vehicle for, for the kind of change they want to see in the world.

Vinay Gupta 1:06:04

Yeah, and look, the problem is the state is under the control of the old, and the old people are not willing to sacrifice to solve the problems of the young. So if we believe that young people are the future, we have to stop old people voting. See? I said it with a straight face. Does that sound like something

you could see in a campaign ad? Vote for me, I'll stop the old people voting. There's a political platform for the 21st century.

Tom Pegram 1:06:28

Great, okay. Well, we are running towards the close. Thank you so much, again, for taking the time out of your busy schedule. I do want to hand over to Zoe for our last question.

Zoe Varenne 1:06:42

So I guess my last question is, what advice you have for young people who are just, you know, taking in the enormity of the task that lies ahead of us, and you know, trying to carve out a career path so that we still can participate in society, and not all get thrown in jail for trying to have alternative lifestyles, and also stay mentally well. Particularly, I feel like meditation and wellness has been co-opted as part of the hustle culture, it's like, "oh, you're feeling really overwhelmed by the fact climate change is gonna ruin your life here do 10 minutes of meditation, you'll feel great. We're also making billions of dollars off this, but no worries." It just kind of feels like, it kind of feeds into. I mean, I don't know if it's necessarily true, but it feels like there's a mounting anxiety in general, like depressed, like, all around generational depression, because of the way the world is. If that's anything new, I'm not sure. But it feels like it's almost in the interest of the world, or of the powers that be to keep us in that state, and feed us this false, false wellness culture? How would you advise young people to stay mentally well, and resilient? What have you found really works for you? I guess is my question.

Vinay Gupta 1:07:55

So what works for me will not really work for young people, because I was lucky enough to do the majority of that work in the 1990s, where I could spend four or six hours a day meditating, because I was living in Chicago and my friends had big apartments, and they were out at work all day, and they didn't mind having some, you know, a Hindu meditator, you know, borrowing their spare room, and you know, I'd be in town for a while, and then I move on to the next place, right? Like, the ecological niches that supported me becoming enlightened have largely dried up. Right, it's very hard to find the kind of economic slack to do that kind of massive practice these days. And that's a real problem. I mean, it's very, like of the people that are kind of my students, very few people have the ability to put in that kind of practice. And as a result, you will not get people getting enlightened in their 20s, they'll get enlightened in their 40s and 50s. And that there are certainly issues around that. There are some, also some good groups working on those problems. So practically speaking, the first piece of advice I have is this, right? The, the simplest way of approaching the kind of general malaise of the young at this point, is flipping the switch on responsibility. Right? It's either you that's crazy, or it's them that's crazy. But one way or the other, somebody in this situation is crazy. Either the young people are crazy for thinking that the world is getting into a really difficult corner, or the old people crazy for thinking that everything is fine. Right? You know, these are two diametrically opposed worldviews. One of them is right, and the other is wrong. A lot of what causes the young people stress is that they've been trained to respect everybody else's opinion. And most of those people are just wrong. So thing one, Greta Thunberg, has figured out the correct way of solving the malaise of the young, which is she makes it very clear who is right and who is wrong, and she makes it very clear what her position is. And I think that should be seen as being like dropping a seed crystal into a solution. You know, young people can crystallise around the Thunberg breakthrough. I've been thinking about this very hard. And I have to

say, You're wrong. You're the problem, and you should change. And we've had enough of this, right? And I think for most young people, the majority of their anxiety and their kind of low grade mental illness would go away if they simply accepted that other people wrong, and they are right. And they've been trained not to think that way because we tried to train your generation to be nicer. And it turns out, we made them nicer to the point where they can't make up their minds. So thing one Greta Thunberg is the crystallisation moment. It's like, oh, I've just figured out how I can improve my mental health. You bastards. What have you done to us? Step one, right. The second thing is, you know, yoga is effective, right? Hatha yoga. Hatha Yoga is effective. But Hatha Yoga is an interim practice. Right? So there are a couple of practices before Hatha Yoga, then there's Hatha Yoga, then there's a thing called pranayama, right. And pranayama is the funny yogic breathing thing. So, we have enormous numbers of people doing Hatha Yoga, and almost nobody is doing pranayama. So as a result, they're getting stuck at a developmental stage, where they've got tonnes of physical energy, and they've got no idea what to do and their consciousnesses are very unstable, and they're really distractable. And I see huge amounts of this from the young generation of yoga practitioners. Because if you don't do a lot of pranayama, in the five years after you've done a lot of asana practice, you don't develop proper yogic consciousness, you get stuck at an interim stage. And right now Hatha Yoga is getting a lot of people stuck at the interim stage, they have to do the pranayama. And after the pranayama, that's when the meditation really becomes super effective. So, you know, the way that you get out with a map mindfulness thing is you have to put the steps of yoga in the proper sequence, right? First, you have the, you know, you do the moral clean-up, then you do the physical postures, then you do the breathing exercises, then you do the meditation, and just getting those developmental stages in the right order, will very rapidly push people out of this kind of mindfulness gutter that they're in, into something that looks like the stable practitioner of consciousness, you know, there's a very, very, very real set of steps to be made there. And then the third thing is, again, the sort of effective action principle. The young people perceive themselves to basically be being picked on by the whole society, because everybody has more stuff than the young people. Right? You know, you've got all of the money that really should have been going into the pockets of the young, went into Iraq and Afghanistan over the past 20 years. As a result, the young people are screwed financially.

Vinay Gupta 1:12:51

And on that level, I think a general acceptance that the young people who've been cheated out of their sort of educations and their healthcare and all the rest of this stuff by 20 years of war. You know, that is not the common understanding for the young people of what went wrong in their societies. But the 2008 financial collapse is because all the money went into Iraq and Afghanistan. And now that we're leaving Afghanistan in a total shambles, I think it's time for the young people to have a general settling of accounts with society, which is, you sat on your hands while the money that should have supported us got spend on these fruitless, useless wars. And by the way, now we have the absolute hard proof that those wars were fruitless and useless, because you've left the war's over, and what have you accomplished? I think now is the time for young people to start really seriously forcing the point. And again, in the UK, particularly on the Labour Party, right, because the Conservative Party doesn't care and you're not going to convince them. But the Labour Party is vulnerable to reform in the Labour Party, of course, gave us that great winning champion Tony Blair. And when we start talking about this, as Blair made the decision that we were going to participate in this farce and as a result, the young people are impoverished and the country is bankrupt and the Western powers as a whole have completely lost

control of their futures. I think that settling those scores will seriously discourage the next generation of politicians from doing that crap. And that means a very serious renegotiation by the young inside of things like the Labour Party to make very, very, very, very sure that the future of leadership never repeats the Blair betrayal.

Zoe Varenne 1:14:38

Thank you very much. That was very insightful, very helpful.

Vinay Gupta 1:14:44

When talking to me insightful and helpful are often two very separate things. But you know, it's time to start drawing up a list of names, right? And saying, we're never going to let anybody like that be in power again, and you have to nip them in the bud. You have to catch someone new. You're young, and you have to kick them out of politics before they begin to establish these kinds of faults. The world cannot afford another Tony Blair, if the UK had not backed America in Iraq and Afghanistan, if we'd just been like, Look, there are 2 million people in the streets protesting saying this must not happen. I'm very sorry, I have to go with my constituents, sod all of you, we're not coming to your war, bugger off. The entire trajectory would have changed for the past 20 years. Right? We have an enormous role to play as the UK, we were very, very powerful at ratifying the madness of the Americans. And if we had refused to participate, the world would have been a dramatically better place. And now is the time for accountability inside of the Labour Party to settle those scores and put it to rights.

Tom Pegram 1:15:48

Of course, many young people who may be listening to this weren't actually born before 911. So they'd never known a world that wasn't informed by the consequences, the repercussions of that, of that critical juncture.

Vinay Gupta 1:16:04

Never known a world in which the Americans weren't the bad guys. It's hard to be young these days, I would not easily have wished it on people. You know, the 90s. Looking back, like the 90s was pretty rough and scrappy in its way. But you know compared to the present world, it was a cakewalk.

Tom Pegram 1:16:27

I'm not gonna argue with you on that one. Yeah.

Vinay Gupta 1:16:31

And on this, you know, the notion that we've got a generation of people who are, let's say, below 25, maybe it's a little older, maybe it's below 30. But, you know, they've been born into a world wrecked by stupid political decision making in the three years after 911. You know, between kind of, you know, 2001 and 2003, maybe 2004, the entire trajectory of the next 20 years was set by a bunch of people. But with hindsight, I think we could clearly agree that these people were morons, nothing that they said was true, and nothing that they promised happened. And the threats that they were afraid of, were the wrong threats. And simply, you know, for young people to understand, like, your lives were ruined by a bunch of morons that threw the world off a cliff in 2001, and then doubled down on it in 2002, 2003. And that's why you got served this, you know, absolute nonsense, you know, in terms of state support and

state intervention. You know, like, okay, right, so politics does matter. Yeah, politics does matter. Right. And that notion of like, you know, our lives were destroyed by political decision making that happened shortly or, you know, right around when we were born. And if we are not going to have the rest of our lives determined by that we have to get involved in politics and we have to take a never again, policy to all of this nonsense. I think that there is an enormous amount of room for the total takeover of the political parties by the young. They just have to believe that they can get in there. And by sheer force of numbers, eradicate the kind of people that will ruin their futures, if they're allowed to rule. And the way that you win, that fight is not in the general elections, it's by controlling who isn't good. So run in the general elections. Control of the parliamentary apparatus happens with control of the political parties. And if the young don't join the political parties in enormous numbers and start participating, they're going to get a bunch of candidates which are selected by old people whose interests are completely divergent from the interests of young people now. So even within the existing crappy apparatus, that are still a whole bunch of strategic places to make that fight. And you know, the Labour Party is only going to be able to exile and disenfranchise the young for so long. You know, they're not going to be able to expel all the young people to join the political parties, because otherwise they have no future. And if there is a critical fight to be won, it's probably the fight for the control of the Labour Party, because you know, that the Tories have lashed themselves to the mast and a large scale popular, you know, youth rebellion where people join the Labour Party and then start pushing it towards green agendas. I think there is an enormous opportunity for blackmailing the Labour Party into a better agenda. Because the threat is if you don't give us these green points, we're all going to quit and join the Green Party. And that's a point where it's possible to blackmail better behaviour out of one of the political parties because they're in a terrifyingly weak position right now. And that's the time to get in there and do Greta Thunberg's work up close with a hammer.

Tom Pegram 1:19:46

Well, I know we have some UCL alumni who are indeed actively engaged in trying to galvanise some of those processes. So we will see and I think this you know, probably could be the topic for another podcast episode with some of those students perhaps, or alumni.

Vinay Gupta 1:20:02

You know, I'm pretty apolitical generally speaking, like I don't generally believe in political parties. But we are at a point right now in the UK's particular national destiny where the Labour Party could be, you know, taken over by the young turned into their party and forced to do its goddamn job. And I think that's worth fighting for. I mean, one of my ancestors was very nearly deported to Australia for union organising, there is definitely a red thread in the Gupta consciousness, albeit mostly on the Henderson side. And, you know, what else is there in the UK that has the possibility of reorganising the state to do its job properly? Right, it kind of is going to be you know, won or lost inside of the Labour Party. And, for example, their decision to kick Ken Loach out, what kind of Labour Party kicks out Ken Loach. You know, it's like the Himalayas deciding they're going to kick out Mount Everest and just can't do that. So yeah, I think, you know, if people are looking for a concrete thing to do, I think the Reconquista of the Labour Party, by the young is... It's an achievable goal. And I think it's worthy and worth working towards.

Sam Coleman 1:21:10

We're often told now about work life balance, and then the idea of doom and gloom and not the whole existential risk and future risks, I think you've talked about that before about the kind of the depression of the futurist, you know, how do you commit yourself fully to saving the world while also having? Or do you need to kind of work life balance to still be able to watch Love Island? Can you go too far into the black hole, where it's? Are you supposed to have some kind of critical distance from it? Or is it good to just dive right in.

Vinay Gupta 1:21:47

So I think this depends very much on personality type. You know, for some people, peak performance is 32 hours a week of actual work, and a huge, complex, rich social family life. And that's their peak level performance, they're incredibly good at that balance point, everything works for them. Other people out there are at their best when they spend 70 hours a week, you know, locked in the laboratory left alone to do their thing. And everything else in their life is kind of a distraction. You have to figure out for you where your point of peak traction is, right. Because if you take people that should have a 32 hour work week, put them in a 70 hour lab environment where they're left alone with their research, their productivity drops to zero. And likewise, if you try and force people that want to work 70 hour weeks, and be left alone with their research into a 32 hour work week, where they're expected to socialise with people and think they're mentally ill, you're gonna have a bad time with those people as well. Right? I think this is almost entirely about figuring out where peak traction is for you. So for me, peak traction is about five hours a day of actually talking to people about things and doing meetings and this kind of stuff. Three or four hours a day of, you know, reading, thinking answering emails, generally doing stuff, which is non interactive, and then about three or four hours a day of the worst science fiction I can find on Netflix. And you know, that as a balance point, you know, if I take out the trash sci-fi, what happens is that my mind just begins to clog up with relevant things that are irrelevant in that context. You know, if I don't basically flush the system with garbage, you know, it's like, Ah, look, there are spaceships. Ah, okay. If I don't do that, there isn't enough time for my unconscious to really just process things out. Right. And, you know, like, that just turns out to be peak efficiency. For me right now, six months ago, it was a little different a year from now it will be a little different again. But you know, I think you need to keep a sort of sensitivity to what works for you, rather than, like, everybody should do this, or everybody should do that. Like, we need to have people targeted on making this thing work. But within that, you have to find your own working style in your own lifestyle that makes you efficient. And there's an enormous human variability in what that is.

Sam Coleman 1:24:17

That's really reassuring to hear. Because I think in in trying to find that peak traction point, you can have times where even you know, sitting down to read a book for a bit or watch a half an hour TV show, you feel like you're kind of... The climate change clock is ticking and, you know, you're kind of you need to be 100% on all the time and 100% trying to tackle the problem. And so it's really reassuring to hear that, that downtime or that time away cognitively from the issue means that when you come back to it, you can work on it a bit better you know.

Vinay Gupta 1:24:53

Do you know any doctors?

Sam Coleman 1:24:56

Yeah.

Vinay Gupta 1:24:58

So you know, we train doctors by having them do 120 hour weeks on no sleep, to try and basically force the medicine down to the brainstem. So that even if the doctor is fully overwhelmed and a total zombie they're still capable of doing medicine. I don't know whether training people that way is the best way to train them or not but that's what we do. Right? Flip side of that is, once they're through medical training, we don't work doctors that way. Because if you do you get terrible doctors, you know, GPs, one block to the surgery, do their thing at the surgery, then they go home, then they do something else. Right, you know, the medicine 24 hours a day thing is a training practice. But, you know, if you try and work your surgeons that way, pretty soon they're making mistakes. So medical personnel, that's, that's a pretty good model for how climate people ought to think about themselves. You know, it doesn't matter what you're doing on climate change. At the end of the day, if you work yourself harder than doctors work, you're probably degrading your performance over time. And not in three years of training. But in the long 20, 30, 40, 50 year medical career, you know, the doctors are doing lifesaving work every single damn day. And if they don't pace themselves, they don't have medical careers. And that's how it has to be for climate people.

Tom Pegram 1:26:24

Well, there is a very concrete note to end on, we really appreciate your time Vinay. Thank you for cutting through some of these really tough questions and joining us in this exploration. Perhaps you could just tell people where they can stay up to date, can learn more about your work?

Vinay Gupta 1:26:42

And so there's a really good potted summary at myhopeforthe.world. So you know, my hope for the world with a dot before the world, not the best domain name, but there we are, for now. I'm on Twitter @leashless, and I run this company called Mattereum, which is really taking a look at what it would look like to run the world on a genuinely sustainable basis. So we're talking about basically building a kind of highly instrumented version of capitalism, where we can calculate the environmental impacts of our actions. And, you know, do the kind of collective bargaining necessary to get ultra-low carbon versions of everything that we need manufactured.

Tom Pegram 1:27:29

Brilliant, okay, yeah, do go and take a look. Thank you Vinay. Thanks so much again.

Vinay Gupta 1:27:35

Oh, I forgot to mention the book, 'The Future of Stuff'. I wrote a book. It's called 'The Future of Stuff'. It's only 15,000 words and I'm only just getting remembering that I have to plug it. Read my book.

Tom Pegram 1:27:45

It's done. We'll put it in the show notes too.

Vinay Gupta 1:27:49

Fabulous thank you. I really enjoyed talking to you all. And yeah, hang in there. It's tough times.

Tom Pegram 1:27:59

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