# Ten Global Trends Every Smart Person Should Know

hello if you have found the ideas i discussed interesting and useful perhaps you might consider purchasing my recently released book beyond order 12 more rules for life available from penguin random house in print or audio format you could use the links we provide below or buy through amazon or at your local bookstore this new book beyond order provides what i hope is a productive and interesting walk through ideas that are both philosophically and sometimes spiritually meaningful as well as being immediately implementable and practical beyond order can be read and understood on its own but also builds on the concepts that i developed in my previous books 12 rules for life and before that maps of meaning thanks for listening and enjoy the podcast

hello everyone i'm pleased to have with me today dr marion l toopy who is the editor of humanprogress.org a senior fellow at the center for global liberty and prosperity and co-author of the simon project he specializes in globalization and the study of global well-being as well as the politics and economics of europe and southern africa his work has been published or featured in major print and non-print media outlets all throughout the english-speaking world dr toopy received his ba in international relations and classics from the university of the wits waters rand in johannesburg south africa and his phd in international relations from the university of saint andrews in great britain he is the co-author of a recent book 10 global trends that every smart person needs to know and many other trends you will find interesting it's a beautiful book uh and so that's an accomplishment in and of itself it's also an extremely interesting book wide ranging and necessary in my estimation partly because most of what we consume in relationship to global occurrences economic and otherwise is negative and that's part of the reason that i wanted to talk to dr toopey today because his work is in the same vein as bjorn lomberg's work and matt ridley's work among other people putting forward stephen pinker putting forward a narrative of continued and rapid progress that seems at odds uh in terms of content and psychologically with virtually everything that seems to make up the major media trend story zeitgeist so welcome dr toopey marion it's really good to see you thanks for agreeing to talk to me today i'm delighted to be with you and uh welcome back it's great to have you back in the fight so to speak thank you i i was really struck to begin with by your introduction you talked about why you and ronald bailey wrote this book and so let's start with that what were you motivate what did you want to accomplish with this book and what do you think it does accomplish well fundamentally the reality of the world the reality of human existence is much better than people understand let alone appreciate

most people assume that the world is in a much worse shape than it really is but the data points in a different direction it points in the opposite direction when you look at long-term trends and we will talk about some of them most of them are pointing to gradual incremental long-term improvement now on top of that we live in a world where a lot of people find meaning and excitement in embracing a lot of movements to quote unquote improve the world but you cannot improve the world if you don't know what the real reality of the world is and so if you think the reality of human existence is different from what really is then your improvement can actually detract from human flourishing rather than contribute to it so the idea behind the book was to inform and it is not really an attempt to produce a polyanish all optimistic view on the world clearly there are problems that remain and there will be new problems that will arise but we believe there is some value in in in people knowing the facts factfulness than that hans rosling used to talk about and the book is largely free of theory it is only facts that we have gotten from third parties with one exception of a trend on natural resources that we will discuss everything else comes from uh third sources which are the world bank the imf eurostat oecd or well-established independent and creditable academics so um and and of course there are footnotes so that people can check that we are not trying to deceive them into anything and the reason why we structured the book we did the reason why we introduced a lot of nice illustrations is because we wanted to be a coffee table book of facts so in addition to all the architecture books and books about dogs and cooking that people put on their on their dining room tables or living room tables uh we are hoping that they will include this book and so whilst people are fixing food or drinks maybe their guests are going to open the book and look at something interesting or counter-intuitive and maybe that will lead to a conversation well it's a book you can sit and read which is what i did but it's also clearly a book that you can leave through and it it is as i mentioned uh earlier beautiful so that's an additional advantage it's a very high quality book and that's a nice uh accompaniment to its essentially optimistic message um i found it it interesting overall and also bit by bit um you said 10 glo it's it's laid out in sort of increasing resolution so you start with a narrative that there are reasons to be radically optimistic about the future especially when you compare that future to the past rather than some hypothetical ideal um globe at the lowest possible level of resolution the most general level of resolution there's reasons to be optimistic you lay out 10 reasons that are really profound but then you differentiate into a more detailed analysis and i found that the details as interesting as the global trends and it's really something to be uh confronted by something like an unending stream of positive information and one thing that that's that's that i guess two questions sort of naturally arise out of that is um why should people believe this positive narrative that you're putting forward given the the undeniable negativity that seems to be part of our current view of the world are speaking broadly and and also seems to be something that's constantly pushed in front of us or consumed by us or demanded by us why should we believe that that's wrong well partly because i think that uh the most obvious reason is that people shouldn't believe lies and they shouldn't believe wrong stuff people should be well informed about all sorts of things they should be aware of risks and benefits of individual actions of what different politicians are offering in other words people should seek facts regardless of the negativity biases which which we have in our brains so you know as you well know being a psychologist a lot of research has been done on these negativity biases why do people prefer to believe the bad news and one of the reasons is that the bed is stronger than good uh it has more emotional impact it's more memorable as well precisely the way i like to think about it is that when i have my annual review with my boss you know he can spend 90 of the time telling me about the things that i've done right uh which is always appreciated and then also mention some of the things that i have done wrong and there are always many and when i walk out of the interview or the review the only thing that's in my mind is always the criticism and never the praise and i think that this is sort of this applies to to to a lot of people is that they focus on the slights the criticisms rather than the praise i think you see that with people's use of social media too if i scan comments on any given youtube discussion like this one it's definitely the case that the negative comments stick out and are memorable compared to the positive comments i mean i think there is an impact of proportion so if i see that the vast majority are positive and a small minority or negative i can discount the negative to some degree but it still has a disproportionate impact i've thought often that's because you can be in extreme pain and dead which is pretty damn final and so negative news carries this walloping potential impact given our susceptibility to threat but you can only be so happy you know there it's not like there's an infinite amount of happiness that you can be but there's certainly a a fine a final amount of death and pain that you can experience and so that that is there any other reasons you think that that um like is it is it is it easy rationale for cynicism and nihilism for throwing your hands up in the air and giving up i mean are there other reasons that were we seem so hungry to believe the worst yes uh before going there let me just confirm what you said about social media people who like something that you have posted tend to simply click on the love button or the heart button it's people who disagree with you that usually leave the comments saying what a what a horrible person you are and how bad your ideas are so that exacerbates the feeling that um that that the feedback is negative yeah there could be places like twitter too and we don't know this is that people are having a bad day and who are angry are much more likely to actually leave a comment or use twitter for that matter than the same person even who's having a good day we just don't know anything about how these communication technologies how our emotions affect our use of these communication technologies and how that's going to play out in the future we usually have a certain time that we need in order to uh accumulate to new technologies and you know we'll see how this one plays out but we certainly discovered in use of other technologies that it took some time before we got mastery of them cars are a typical example people used to have many more accidents used to speed much more they used to drink before driving and it took a while before before the safety culture set in and who knows maybe over time people will leave facebook or twitter and switch to something else i'm proud to be facebook free since 2012 and i don't have a personal twitter uh for for processor reason well you do see the emotional tenor of of different social media platforms does differ i mean i found that instagram seems to be a much more positive place all things considered than twitter it's a little more complex to use but it it seems to be less corrosive i'm not exactly sure why maybe it's because it's more image heavy i i don't know exactly possibly um the the other negativity bias is that psychologists have identified is for example the availability heuristic as you all know more dramatic and traumatic events tend to be revisited in our memory with greater frequency uh than the positive memories and so we get a sense that they are much more numerous and much more frequent than they really are also positive positive things happen over much longer periods of time than than negative things you know it takes years to build a skyscraper but it takes hours to pull it down in a terrorist attack it takes years to acquire a lot of human capital through education but it takes only a second for you to die in a car crash so a typical example when it comes to global well-being would be something like poverty reduction as max rosa from oxford university pointed out every day over the last goodness knows how many decades 175 000 people have been raised out of poverty every day out of absolute poverty but those are not the kinds of headlines that will make it into the newspapers yeah well right that's actually it's a threshold issue too i think they defined absolute poverty as a dollar ninety a day in two thousand eleven dollars is that is that correct dollar ninety two dollars two oh five uh people have different one yeah but around two dollars per person people slide by that threshold it's also not a dramatic decrease in their poverty per person right because they just move over that threshold nonetheless the numbers are very impressive and actually the speed is also really impressive i mean we've decreased our poverty has decreased absolute poverty has decreased in the world at an ever increasing rate that's accelerated dramatically over the last 15 years and so it also might be that we just don't know this yet it's it's it's slow compared to how fast things can go bad but it's still really quite rapid um on on in historical scale yeah i know that you want to talk about uh the different trends and one of them is absolute poverty so maybe we can return to it in in a moment sure well let's let's do this then let's go um tell me just one thing before we get into this the specific 10 trends um tell me about human progress.org and how it is that you come to specialize in like global well-being i i can't imagine that there are many people in the world who have that as a special as a specialization so tell me about humanprogress.org and about your specialization and how that came about well my personal story sort of will explain that i'm i'm much more interested in westerners who have lived a life of relative abundance good education safety that they are interested in recognizing these trends but in my personal case um the the path to being interested in well-being is much more straightforward i was born behind the iron curtain in what was what used to be communist czechoslovakia and whilst life wasn't horrible it was pretty dreadful we can talk about it some other time then because my parents are medical doctors so we moved to south africa in the early 1990s where they started practicing and so i got to travel through a lot of africa and there i saw a much worse poverty and uh and deprivation um and i was educated in britain and and i've worked in the united states so obviously when you live in four different cultures um you if you are at all curious you have to start asking yourself how come some countries are prosperous and some countries are poor what are the institutional settings for the for the production of of riches after all at some point in time everybody was everybody was dirt poor but now we have large sections of the world which are escaping from poverty at a very fast click whilst others are not doing so well so that is obviously something that i was wondering about as i was moving from one culture to another from one country to another and then um at in 2010 i read a wonderful book which is still worth reading by one of your previous guests met ridley it's called rational optimist and matt ridley's book was filled with some very interesting statistics that i didn't know about i should have known about but i didn't and i thought to myself well if i don't know about them and it is my job to know them what about the larger public i mean the general public is surely to be as ignorant if not more than i am and so i thought let me put it up on the website and since then we have grown to about 1200 different data sets and that's really the the story so that's humanprogress.org that's humanprogress.org and so is that that's something you started yourself yeah i i am i am an employee of a think tank uh called uh the the cato institute but uh uh the human progress is an autonomous part of of cato but it runs runs pretty much autonomously i have a lot of freedom to do with it what i want and but most crucially um the the information that we provide the the data itself is completely uh it comes from third parties we write articles we write exclusive articles where we try to frame the data in the historical context we try to get into the reasons why some countries are rich and why some countries are poor we can talk about it as well um but we don't so we we so we do have an editorial position when writing articles and studies we we do not play around with the data and anyone who comes to the website will see the original data taken from third sources footnoted sourced and so on okay so let me hassle you for a couple of minutes because i've been you know i've talked to matt and ridley and and to bjorn and so there's a group of people that are and and stephen pinker for that matter who are rational optimists let's say are intelligent optimists or informed optimists i got interested in this i worked for the un for u.n committee for a couple years and i was reviewing books by the dozen on ecology and economics and i was shocked and what shocked me was things were way better than i thought they were and they were getting better at a rate that was stunning and i didn't know any of that and it was overwhelming pouring through the data because i had been so wrong in my implicit presumptions and so that's what got me interested in all of this and of course i was also extremely happy about it to see what was actually happening how many good things were happening so but but here's the criticism that that that so i posted these talks with with bjorn for example and you know people have responded often young people and they say well that's they say something like this that's all very well and good for you dr peterson or or bjorn you're 50 years old you have a uh secure position you grew up when the job market was stellar um it's much much harder for young people to make their way in in the western world now than it was 20 years ago that sort of security long-term security isn't there and so you can look at these global trends and extract out some positive information from them but that just gives you license to ignore the on the ground problems that so many people so many young people are either facing or feel that they're facing in the west and so what do you think about that what's the right response to that i think that young people have had terrible 20 years in in western countries we have gone through uh the 9 11 crisis then followed by the financial meltdown we had the iraq war then we had the covet pandemic and data shows that young people specifically seem to be disproportionately affected and very unhappy and anxious and so forth so i would divide it my answer into two parts the first part is that it is always good to uh there's a there's an economist richard lyman i think his name is who said always compare yourself downwards not upwards um in other words um that that's the cause or rather let's say the way to happiness is to compare yourself downwards rather than upwards um by that what i gather he meant is that even though things are very tough for young people young people still have access to the best health care in the history of the world they have access to more security than any other people who have come uh before them they have access to uh education um that uh in many cases is free um and um and plentiful um and um and so it's important to realize that while some things have not been doing well um there is a lot in terms of life in in western advanced societies which is still worth appreciating and being aware of the second part please please continue and the second part of my answer would be to say that it is all the more important for young people to understand the economic and political reasons why the west grew at faster rates before why it had more political and social stability before uh than than it is than it has today young people are very blase on average about uh about politics they don't generally vote they tend to embrace all sorts of causes which are inimical to progress and to growth such as for example socialism they tend to be much more open to it than people who are older and turn to turn more conservative and so delving deeper into why the 1980s and the 1980s in the 1990s had higher rates of economic growth um it is not a bad idea from the perspective of young people well it's also it it it's also not exactly clear what baseline is being used when the claim is made that things aren't as good or as easy as they once were i mean they're certainly a lot better now than they were in 1820. they're certainly a lot better than they were in 1930 or 1940 probably 1950 then there was a period of incredible growth in the 60s in particular the post-war period where employment was a relatively straightforward matter for many people people and there was plentiful long-term secure jobs now how difficult it was in the 60s to obtain one of those is still an open question many people were much less educated than they are now um it isn't clear it isn't absolutely clear to me that things were any easier any time in the past and it's certainly the case that for most of the past things were immeasurably worse yeah when i said that they had terrible 20 years what i meant is that the last 20 years almost seemed like a state of constant crisis but let's disaggregate this this experience that young people have if you are a black person in the united states for example um you have never lived in a safer more tolerant and more accepting society if you are a gay person in the world again uh sorry in western societies you have never lived in a more tolerant or a more accepting society if you are a woman the same goes for you so that's already well over 50 of the population also let's not forget that whilst the wages of certain people in the united states certain sections of the labor force have been stagnating overall the media the median household income in the united states prior to covet was at a record high which is to say that compared to the earnings of a median household in the 1970s or 1980s american earning power prior to covet was at an all-time high so it's not true that people were poorer now let me make one last point about this um when it comes to cost of living in america which is what a lot of people are talking about very much depends on what you are looking at cars are cheaper by 70 percent than what relative to wages than what they were 20 years ago toys tvs food all of those are much cheaper than what they were 20 years ago relative to wages even housing most people don't know this but it happens to be true housing in the united states is 10 cheaper than it was 20 years ago relative to wages now that would exclude that would exclude high demand cities i would imagine right that this is this because well more and more people want to go to more and more exclusive and wealthy places or fewer and fewer exclusive and wealthy places so that's a complicating like in toronto the real estate market housing prices are just skyrocketing constantly and my sense of and a lot and my sense of that is that there's 20 cities in the world that are optimal places to live so they're they're scarce and this is one of them and and people are quite mobile and there's quite a lot of money and so that drives real estate prices here continually upward and you see that in new york you see that in the major european cities that are highly desirable you see that in san francisco but there aren't many places like that so that's part of the reason for that that's absolutely right both things happen to be true at the same time the 10 percent decline in the prices of housing is average across the united states whereas in the high demand areas it has also skyrocketed now now in some places like for example uh manhattan where a lot of young people want to live there is only so much that you can do in order to provide additional housing because it's an island however in many other places in the united states um housing is artificially restricted the building of new housing is artificially restricted through nimbism through zoning rules and and so forth yeah i see it we don't allow you to be poor here you can't afford it it's against the law because of the zoning laws and that's a real problem in places like san francisco and and the two areas which have seen a massive appreciation in price well above inflation well above um well above wages is health care and education so right now right right and education is a particular burden for young people right and now would it be crazy of me to suggest that young people instead of blaming the market or asking for you know free education looked at the reasons why education is so expensive could it be that because governments push so much money out of the door through pell grants and other heavily subsidized loans the universities know they can charge much more money than would otherwise be the case could that be the reason why education is is um increasing the price could it be though i also think the universities in some sense have conspired to rob their students of their future income well look imagine that you come to a car store and there's just one car left and you say to the salesman i really really really have to have this particular car this would be yale harvard whatever and by the way i have a million dollars in my pocket how much is the car salesman going to ask you the million dollars and it's a very similar situation when it comes to higher education the universities know exactly how much the parents are making they know exactly how much money you can get out of government in in loans so of course they're going to jack up the prices and in healthcare what's happening of course is that only 10 out of every 90 cents spent on health care in the united states is spent by people themselves by the patients themselves the rest is spent by governments at different levels of governance it's spent by third parties by insurance companies so when you walk into a uh you know into a doctor's office and he asks you or you know do you want to have 10 or 20 blood tests you said 20 i'm not paying for it anyway and that's part of the reason again why uh healthcare has exploded in but between those two i can see why americans would be quite dissatisfied with their standards of living and i'm afraid that a third reason why americans are going to be dissatisfied with their standards of living is coming down the pipeline and i think that is going to be a massive increase in energy costs in the united states just as it happened in europe in europe now they have they have a term called energy poverty so even in places which are the height of economic development like britain and germany people are not heating their homes in the middle of winter people are washing themselves in lukewarm water because prices of energy have been artificially by government fear jacked up to prices where even the richest people in the world i mean as a population not as a share of population cannot afford things which are the essence of what life should be like in a western civilization and what worries me is that some of those proposals that i've taken taken on in europe and which are making europeans so miserable are going to come down to the united states and perhaps even to canada okay so let's let's draw some quick conclusions and then we'll go talk about the 10 major trends and so correct me if i if i've got any of this wrong um it's very difficult to make an informed case that things are worse now in almost every way than they were at any other time in the past at any time in the past including the last two decades but certainly going back before that things are better on almost every possible measure people don't know that partly because we have a negativity bias we're attracted by negative information and that's what put that's what is put forth by a media hell-bent on attracting our attention at any cost we're also deluded to some degree by our historical ignorance and also by anomalies in the economic scheme exceptionally high prices of housing in high high demand high quality areas high and the same thing happening say with university education despite the fact that maybe state university education is still quite cheap or community college that kind of thing um and and and and then there's this there's also this because because of this pervasive negative uh message that's being put forward constantly that also encourages us to exaggerate the degree to which the current condition is uh bad and getting worse we don't know and we assume that and that makes us more miserable than we have any reason to be the danger in that is that we're going to fail to appreciate and work to undermine all sorts of things that are actually working very well if we only could see the the the facts on the ground that's exactly right and if there is one message that i would like to pass on to your young followers who who are having a tougher time than would be expected for young people to have um things could get much worse if uh the the the basic underpinnings of what made western society rich and prosperous which is to say liberal the liberal democracy and some form of free market capitals and free enterprise if those two are eroded uh or destroyed we are in for a much tougher time if you want to see how young people how a society can deteriorate go to venezuela you know it's not that far away it's a couple of hours from miami and see how young people live there now venezuela was a country where in the early 1950s gdp per capita was higher than in the united states higher than in the united states today people are eating cats and dogs and slaughtering animals in zoo for meat um young women have no other option but to prostitute themselves to slay to to prostitute themselves men have gone into crime it is basically a failed society not long ago some of the leading lights of american of american progressivism such as aoc have been uh in canada have been singing the praises of 21st century venezuela socialism so um so things could get much worse and they will if uh if if if we forget the lessons of history and if we don't understand that the the political stability to the effect to the extent we still have it is a result of liberal democracy limited government and the the outcome and the reason for economic growth and the reason why we have all the nice things that people in venezuela don't is because we have free markets free enterprise um and um and free trade okay okay let's let's uh well you'd also think it's kind of strange that given our proclivity let's say to devour bad news you'd think that the story of venezuela would get a lot more coverage than it actually gets so that's kind of weak maybe we can return to that let's go through the trends here so the first one so the book is structured so that on the right hand page there's a graphic graph showing progress across time time or change across time a variety of different trends let's say the first one the first trend is the great enrichment and uh tell us what that means and and what it signifies so the chart which you may be able to show at some point in the future looks like a hockey stick which is to say that for all of our recorded history let's say going back 4000 bc but we can estimate even even further back in time there it is the hockey stick of human prosperity um the the line has flatlined uh it is estimated that prior to the industrial revolution in the uh late 17 and early 1800s um global economy grew by about 0.1 per year which is to say that to double your prosperity would have taken thousands of years um as late as 1900 which is to say the presidency of theodore roosevelt queen victoria was on the throne the the globe produced roughly three trillion dollars in output um i i i this is all inflation-adjusted so three trillion dollars in output the entire globe in 2018 it was 121 trillion dollars so from 3 trillion to 121 trillion dollars in a scope of 100 years adjusted for inflation and if the growth that we have experienced the growth rate that we have experienced over the last 100 years continues into 2100 the world will produce 600 trillion dollars in output real inflation-adjusted output over the next 80 years the globe could produce six times more value than it is currently producing if we maintain the current economic growth rate and do you think that's an optimistic projection or a conservative projection that's what leads us back to the original point that we discussed it very much depends on economic policies and political stability um if you don't have civil wars around the world then and and government change hand in a peaceful and predictable way um then we should be okay when it comes to political stability when it comes to economics we are seeing as surprising and uh to be quite frank well to be frank surprising and almost inexplicable um renewed interest in uh more restrictive economic policies uh from socialism on the left to hardcore protectionism on the right and and if our economic growth rate falls from 1.82 that we have experienced over the last year to zero point one percent which we have experienced over the previous ten thousand years then it will take us six thousand years to get from one 100 trillion dollars to 200 trillion dollars so the so the most remarkable thing about this is is is exactly the hockey stick shape it's as you pointed out nothing at all happened until eight the mid-1800s essentially and then all of a sudden things improved so rapidly that it's virtually incomprehensible it's it's it's a miracle it is the most important question in economics um what happens in the late 1700s early 1800s that produces that hockey stick effect and just to clarify there have been in human history periods of economic ef fluorescence flourishing but they were usually restricted to small parts of the world and they were usually they usually petered out so for example song china has produced some remarkable um technological discoveries and it appeared to be at a time of relative plenty compared to other countries in the world but that petered out when song song dynasty was replaced by the ming dynasty similarly the roman empire appears to have been a place that was largely at peace internally and quite prosperous but that came to an end in uh 467 or whenever that happened uh when when when rome fell so there are these periods uh that you can have prosperity also let's stay with europe i mean europe has experienced the greatest century of peace and prosperity between 1814 the end of napoleonic wars and 1914 the breakout of the first world war which slaughtered tens of millions and destroyed a lot of wealth so you know economic progress can certainly take a knock and it can take a time to to recover but in order for it to recover you have to rediscover the reasons why you had high economic growth rates in the first place so okay so the first lesson is that something happened in the last 150 years that propelled human productive capacity and distribution globally into the stratosphere and there's no sign that that's slowing um although we could disrupt it and we could disrupt it because we don't exactly understand why it happened and we're not appreciative enough of the its miraculous nature and the perhaps fragile preconditions for its continued existence well when i said that it's the biggest question in economics i i'm not suggesting that there aren't theories of why it happened in theory the theory that i espoused and the theory that has convinced me is that over hundreds of years in western europe and in north america and then later in other parts of the world our economic and political institutions have grown more inclusive open or to use a political word liberal now i'm using liberal in its european sense not liberal in the current american sense and what that meant was that you no longer needed a permission from the king in order to open a shop or import a bag of wool from another country so there's an autonomy there's an element of autonomy but there's also an element of generosity that that autonomy leads to increased productivity but the product the consequences of the production are also being shared and rather than hoarded they're being distributed reasonably well um yes but the key here was i think that monarchies uh governments have become uh have become more responsible to their people more accountable to their people and they started allowing a much greater level of economic freedom now the reason why that happened is a very interesting one once again i'm going to tell you a theory that i espouse and theory that convinced me other people may have other ideas but basically what has happened is that unlike in other parts of the world such as the ottoman empire and such as china europe never had an an internal empire one dynasty was never able to conquer um different european states into the creation of one european mega empire and because governing elites of different states france uh germany spain portugal holland belgium whatever because they wanted to survive because they didn't want to be vassals of another monarch because they wanted to remain independent they realized that they needed to generate a lot of economic growth internally and they realized that the only way that they could generate economic growth was through technological innovation and technological innovation you can only get into in societies which allow people a greater degree a relatively great degree of intellectual freedom and so countries which felt at most threatened such as holland because the french were always trying to take them over would welcome into their cities and into their uh into the country um thinkers from all over the world free thinkers from all over europe who establish themselves there produce new ideas produce new technologies and holland could defend itself against the predation of other countries england was another example of of how this happened so it is through geopolitical competition in other words the dismemberment of european countries um that that you get greater appreciation of the need for freedom which then leads to innovation which then leads to generation of more money which then can keep your country independent and from being swallowed by a foreign by a foreign conqueror but if you want to reduce it to one sentence it would be political and economic institutions became more open inclusive and liberal whether you were a jew or whether you were a muslim or a christian or a catholic you could function within the amsterdam stock exchange and nobody uh and you were free from prosecution all right let's go to the next trend the end of poverty and that's this graph before the industrial revolution or rather let's start 12 000 years ago when humanity discovers agriculture between two 12 000 years ago and roughly 200 years ago pretty much everybody in the world was a farmer or a farm laborer as late as 1800 roughly 9 out of 10 people around the world were involved in agriculture they were farmers and they were very poor and then the other 10 percent were basically the nobility the clergy and the military but but 90 of humanity were either remained hunter-gatherers or they were farmers or farm laborers and then with the industrial revolution you start factoring opening up all over the western world and people realize that they can make more money in the cities working in factories so they start leaving leaving the rural areas and moving into urban areas earning more money and eventually the agricultural population in the united states for example declines from forty percent in nineteen hundred well from ninety percent in eighteen hundred to forty percent in uh nineteen hundred to two percent today today only two percent of american workers work in agriculture the rest of them works in uh in uh in you know services industry tourism computing and whatever but this is a process through which americans stopped being very poor and became very rich and this process is repeating all around the world the world is industrializing the world is becoming more service oriented and fewer and fewer people around the world work in agriculture even though our agricultural output is higher than ever before and we'll get to that trend too so just to just just to highlight the meaning of this graph so in 1830 95 of the global population was in absolute poverty that was a much smaller number of people as well and by the year 2015 roughly speaking we're down to 10 percent it's stunning and the change from 1990 to 2010 is approximately 40 to approximately to approximately 10. so that's right and you see what partly i think what happened you tell me if you think this is right or wrong but this there's been a real acceleration in the decline of absolute poverty let's say since 1990 and not coincidentally it was at approximately that time that the soviet union collapsed and so one of the major competitive systems whose advantages were touted in the developing countries for example was no longer a major player and it was a little bit after that that china started to liberalize at least economically even though it really hasn't done it politically and and so i think that's at least partly responsible for the acceleration in the reduction of absolute poverty the decline in uh socialism communism the basically the disappearance of socialism at least for a little bit of time as an alternative and widely accepted way to riches meant that developing countries changed their developing strategies beginning in the 1980s they started opening up more instead of seeing multinational corporations as parasites and enemies they started welcoming them into their own countries instead of rejecting foreign direct investment they started opening up to foreign direct investment so at a time when globalization starts really in 1980 or so at the time of when ronald reagan becomes president of the united states 40 of the world live in absolute poverty that declines to about 30 by the new millennium and from the new millennium to today 20 years it declines from 30 to less than 10 percent so you're absolutely right the decline in poverty has accelerated over the last 20 years from 30 percent to uh less than 10 percent it's stunning it's absolutely stunning it's absolutely unbelievable that that can be the case it is the fastest reduction in in global poverty primarily because uh many poor and previously socialist countries have changed their understanding of economics and way to prosperity i wanted i want to harass you again about something so you were talking about socialism and its decline um so canada's has many democratic socialist policies norway which in your book uh ranks highest in terms of the human development index i believe that's that's the case um the scandinavian countries of course are famous for functional democratic socialism and so what do you think what what do you have to say about that forget about communism and the hardcore communist soviet-pushed maoist doctrines that anyone with any sense is going to regard in the light of what happened historically as absolutely counterproductive anyone who supports maoist doctrines or soviet doctrines is reprehensible in my they're so ignorant or malevolent in some sense that it's reprehensible it gets more complicated i would say when you're talking about um the range of redistributive policies that that characterize northern europe and central europe and canada and the united states there's a wide range of of of theories preferences for government intervention and for socialist democratic socialist policies and so how much of how much of a range do you think there is where where where the left and the right are equally functional but but emphasize different things that that might be the way of thinking about it right you are certainly correct on china which is abandoned which is abandoned hardcore communism in the late 1970s but india was never communist but even they reformed in the early 1990s and embraced a much freer economic model and that's 1.2 billion people so that also explains why the global poverty rate uh has declined now you're raising a very important point and that there is a difference between uh socialism which is uh government ownership of the means of production factories and whatever and social democracy in europe in places like denmark norway sweden and even perhaps canada but here's the interesting thing all of these countries come at the very top of the economic freedom of the world report which is published by the fraser institute in in canada you may be familiar with them so it is actually possible to measure economic freedom in different countries and fraser has been doing so since the early 1970s and all of these countries um all these social democratic countries actually scored very well here is the reason why first of all they have very flexible labor markets second they have very described define that define that so everyone understands meaning uh the ability of firing and hiring people is lightly regulated so that people can move from industries and occupations which are maybe unproductive or

which are unproductive into into wherever uh the there is a new uh company that's opening uh you you don't suffer consequences so things are allowed to die and be born precisely the second reason why they are scoring very high on the economic freedom of the world report is because they are open to foreign trade they are actually more open to foreign trade than the united states which is supposed to be a paragon of capitals and although obviously the united states isn't but they are very free trade oriented and also if you look at their tax structure what you realize that they actually have very low corporate tax rates so as opposed to say the united states which is one of the highest corporate tax rates in the world so what the scandinavians and the social democrats have discovered is roughly speaking the following let's keep the economy free let's try to generate as much revenue through economic growth and then tax that do not tax the productivity of the worker and of the company in terms of uh corporate tax rates uh or rather let's let's try to um let's try to have an open economy and generate economic growth by by by producing and by being a welcoming area for for new businesses to open okay okay well we'll return to that are we running out of resources trend three that's this graph so just remember that green orange and blue line because i will describe them one by one so this is the only datum or set of data which i produced myself together with a co-author gail pulley from hawaii and what it shows is the average price of 50 most important natural resources between 1980 and 2018 and what we found as you would expect is they increased in nominal price nominal price is unadjusted for inflation as everybody know or should know currency becomes less valuable every year because more of it is printed so in terms of nominal dollars the 50 commodities have become more expensive over the last 40 years once you adjust the cost of commodities and i'm talking about oil gas chicken beef lumber shrimp oranges whatever once you account for inflation that was the orange line what you see is actually the natural resources are much cheaper today than they were in 1980. the final line is the blue line the blue line is what i call the time price time price is really uh it's a better price than than than real or inflation adjusted price because it also takes into account wages as you know wages tend to increase above inflation because people become more productive so if if inflation in the united states is two percent a typical increase will be maybe about three percent because people have become more productive over the course of the year so when you once you start comparing prices of resources relative to relative to wages what you see that they have fallen even more and why is this counter-intuitive they felt by about 70 in terms of in terms of uh time prices all the while and that's from 1980 to 2016. or 16 or 18 uh one over 18. okay so despite despite more people despite more urbanization despite the hypothetically decreasing prevalence of resources despite all of those hypothetical problems there's been a 70 decline in basic global commodity prices adjusted for wages from 1980 till 2018. stunning right not what anyone was predicting in the 1960s by any stretch of the imagination yes that's absolutely correct so even though the population of the world has increased by something like 70 percent uh the prices of natural resources have declined by 70 which means that every additional person born on the planet has made things cheaper for us by about one percent and nobody saw that coming um right that should be said 50 times right because it's so it's so not what anyone thinks more people means more wealth that's exactly right and you know i've also seen that more people means more ecological preservation and so does more wealth because richer people care more about the environment and and so you see that perverse uh occurrence too that as g once gdp gets to the point where people aren't scrabbling around trying to stay alive so maybe five thousand dollars per capita all of a sudden environmental concerns start to manifest themselves and so it looks like we could have more people and make them richer faster and that would be better for the planet no that's absolutely right the cleanest environment in the world is in uh advanced countries uh in in western uh capital societies when you when you see tremendous attack on on the environment is in poor countries uh you know when the venezuelan economy collapsed they started eating animals in zoo in zimbabwe when their economy collapsed they started slaughtering the wildlife you know if it's a choice between killing a giraffe or having my baby die i know what i have to do right um but so so for the longest time um people thought that if if population grows we are going to run out out of resources and this is not what has happened we have more resources resources are cheaper but that in itself is an indication that they are more abundant than than before because of course human beings are not just consumers of resources we're not just destroyers of resources we also creators of resources human beings are producers of ideas yes and on average we produce more than we consume otherwise we would die well that's exactly right and that's what people like thomas maltos or poor auric paul ehrlich at stanford university were worried about they freaked out two generation of two generations of people our league's population and we still haven't we still haven't recovered from that but we still haven't recovered from that apocalyptic narrative no one believes if i tell my students we're going to peak at 9 billion and we can handle that and then the population is going to decline no one believes that if if you say that well we've got richer as more people have been born rather than poor because brain power exceeds uh consumption essentially especially as people have got healthier and and their iq has increased which is something we could talk about as well um none of this is part of the general uh apocalyptic narrative no not only can we get access to new resources but also we can replace resources which which are becoming scarce so for example um humans used to make candles out of spermachetti which is this weird sort of stuff in in the brains of oils the oil in fat in in the brains of the whales so we used to murder them um by the thousands and we used to scrape out that spermachetti and build it into into nice candles and then we realized that we didn't have to do that that it was actually quite expensive and quite stupid because we could produce electricity by burning coal and then we decided that we can switch from coal from coal to gas and maybe eventually to to to nuclear whatever and and and and so that's how humanity manages to uh constantly produce more it's through innovation and in fact in western countries today we are we have reached peak stuff this is a book very important book which i recommend to your readers by andrew mcafee uh and that is uh making uh more from less or more from less um now what it means really is that even though the american economy and the british economy continue to grow and produce more gdp per capita in absolute terms the amount of resources that go into it be it a bit aluminum or or whatever that has actually peeked off about 10 or 20 years ago and it's now declining so we have become so incredibly productive that we can now use much less resources in order to produce more wealth more gdp and four peak population peak population so right now there are 7.8 billion people in the world it looks like we are going to peak at 9.8 in the 2060s or the 80s and then it will decline to about 8.8 by the end of this century lancet um had a study a couple of months ago which showed again remember 7.8 billion people in the world today landsat thinks that there will be either 6.8 or 8.8 billion people in the world in 2100 but uh but every every demographer uh that i know of expects that human population will peak and then it will start declining that's because um a total fertility rate which is to say the number of babies born to a woman uh have been on a downward trajectory currently in the united states in much of western europe women are having fewer than two babies per woman per lifetime and in order to have a replacement rate you need 2.1 babies because some of them die so uh population uh without immigration in western europe will continue to decline um uh our numbers are still going up because obviously we have a huge uh huge immigration but but but women are not having that many babies now is this going to be a blessing or is it going to be a a potential problem well it could be a potential problem because because uh human beings are the producers of ideas and ideas lead to innovation and uh if a genius is one out of a billion or one out of a million then the fewer millions of people you have born the fewer geniuses are going to be born and that in itself and and that that to me is a is a major concern but of course in western countries we have promised so much to the future generations that are supposed to that are supposed to be paid for by uh by by children who are born in the future that if those children are not being born who is going to pay off that debt in the future who's going to pay for all those retirees those questions should also be answered yes it's quite surprising to note that one of the more pressing social problems in 100 years might be that there aren't enough people rather than too many could easily be the case right so by by then perhaps we'll have robotics uh to help us a lot um you know take yes and who knows right we can't even think about problems 100 years in the future because it's going to be so different 100 years from now that nothing we could possibly talk about right now is going to be relevant god only knows we can't we can't we don't have a five-year horizon or a 10-year horizon given the rate of technological change let alone 100 years so but that the moral of this story is um it doesn't look like we're going to overpopulate the planet to the point where we're going to destroy all our natural resources the planet and everyone's going to starve that doesn't seem to be in the cards so unless we make catastrophic and likely avoidable errors that's correct all right next this is a great headline the end of famine so um i think it was in ridley's book i found uh his last one or maybe in the rational optimist famine was quite widespread in europe in the 20th century far more than people generally remember realize i mean holland went through terrible famines the scandinavian countries and uh of course in great britain in the late 1800s the the irish famine haunted was a specter that haunted the entire world's population until extraordinarily recently and the news on that front is astoundingly positive no one starves anymore except for political reasons essentially so forced starving planned starvation but not accidental so that's correct so in the late 1800s we started understanding um agriculture and agricultural productivity much more than before not only did we introduce new technologies uh better plows and so forth but we also discovered that guano which is just bird pooping uh bird poop from south america uh contain so many nutrients especially phosphorus that when it was sprinkled all over um the the late night the late 19th century um agricultural land it could actually increase yields tremendously uh and then when we started running out of guano yet another example of human ingenuity we started producing synthetic fertilizers full of i believe it's nitrogen and phosphorus and so forth now that wasn't the last when it came to human ingenuity we started also toying with the genes of different plants which led to a new sturdier and more productive wheat varieties in the 70s by a man called john burlock john burleigh right who saved more people than any other person who ever lived in all likelihood that's exactly right so instead it's quite interesting that just as people were starting to be really worried about this population growth especially in china and india uh people immediately started working on uh the ways to to solve use to solve the problem and so you know the population bomb comes out in 1968 and right about that time into the early 70s you have borlaug introducing these new varieties wheat varieties into bangladesh and india and china and elsewhere and of course food production rockets skyrockets india today is a major exporter of food now these people who are starving by tens of millions when i was growing up in the 1980s i remember being terrified by the images of starving people starving children in in east africa in in in the horn of africa um and now you see this is so um unbelievable the world's poorest region sub-saharan africa now enjoys access to food in volumes that are equivalent to portugal in the 1960s so now it's in that's a very a very small amount of time from the 1960s to now well within living memory of many people the one of the richest countries in the world had the same amount of food per capita as the poorest part of the world does now stunning stunning absolutely remarkable and so positive so good yeah so today um access to calories in africa is roughly 2 400 calories per person per day uh now obviously not everybody gets it there are serious problems in africa still you do still have conflict and so forth and people do get to starve but the widespread starvation because you couldn't produce enough food that doesn't happen anymore and that's obviously a tremendously positive uh step forward in fact uh many african problems uh many african countries are beginning to experience the problem of obesity especially in urban centers now if somebody told you that 50 years ago you would have you would have said you know you're high right so the problem in a hundred years is that um we're going to have nothing but fat people and there'll be far too few of them [Laughter] yeah okay next one this is also stunning shocking completely unexpected more more land for nature who would have possibly guessed that i read something the other day too and we could comment on this the sahara desert has shrunk by eight percent since the millen turn of the millennium we we've greened an additional ten percent of the earth's surface as a consequence that's part of the same development and that's only over the last 20 years 20 years and it looks like it's a consequence of increased carbon dioxide perversely enough the sahara has actually shrunk so i don't want to get into the carbon dioxide argument but this is this is a whole different issue here tree cover loss gain from 1982 to 2016. so comment on that yes i mean one of the things is that one of one of the benefits of getting a little bit older uh perhaps on the only benefit of getting it all is that one gets wiser and one one remembers all the stuff that we used to believe and take for granted which have never happened and which were false uh one of them was the the the expansion of sahara in the 1980s i remember being absolutely terrified that sahara was going to expand and swallow the globe we you know as kids we were taught that as gospel um but sahara is shrinking it is also true that there is more foliage which is more greenery plants are producing more foliage because of the co2 in the atmosphere co2 is for another discussion but but the fact is that it's the basic fact of living on earth that plants like more co2 in the atmosphere it's their food which is why norway grows uh you know tomatoes in hot houses that are filled with co2 precisely because they want them to grow and and so so plants like co2 and foliage is increasing but also the tree coverage of the world is increasing between i wrote this statistic down or thinking that we might talk about it between 1982 and 2016 we have added trees uh tree area the size of alaska and montana combined to the world now that's a pretty big chunk of the world uh the united states has 35 percent more trees than when ronald reagan become president of the united states china 35 no china is 15 yeah okay so now i've read critiques of this too when i've tweeted this for example people say yes but we've lost a tremendous amount of biodiversity that many of the much of the much of the new growth is monoculture in contrast to the previous growth and um i suspect that's not true in some situations and is true in others i don't think that's true of the reforestation of of the united states but but i don't know do you know well first of all compared to what at the time when industrial revolution started in great britain which is which was responsible for many of the great things that happened since then at that time one of the reasons why they had to switch to coal is because there was no tree left in britain i'm exaggerating but i am not far off um the the tree coverage in britain was just completely deluded of of forests over millennia of forest destruction remember trees were not only needed to keep you warm but to cook your food to make your furniture to make your carriages to make your weaponry everything prior to the modern era was based on trees i'm exaggerating but not too much trees now so compared to what we have destroyed a lot of we have destroyed a lot of the natural forest with its original biomass a long time before the industrial revolution which by the way used up uh called no trees um but but today most of our tree usage comes from the new forests the forests that are planted for the specific purpose of being cut down for lumber which then builds american and canadian houses it is very rare that uh the the sort of wood that you see in the shops or that goes into productive activity actually has originated in the brazilian rainforest right so i guess the the objection would be those aren't forests they're crops they just happen to be crops of trees and i suppose and you know biodiversity loss is obviously problematic and even potentially catastrophic but i don't think that means that you can't take heart about the fact that much more of the planet is green and there's a certain amount of reversion to a more natural habitat certainly indicator that we're much more efficient users of resources we don't have to take up so much space and the agricultural revolution also contributed to that to a great degree that's human engineered again because we can grow more on less land and i don't see that stopping i think we're going to get more and more and more efficient at food production why would that stop the market certainly drives us in that direction and there's no indication of that slowing as far as i can tell so three points i hope i can remember them uh one is uh yes because of increased agricultural productivity we are already returning land to nature and when we can do so in the future at an increased pace which means that we are land we are we are returning land not just to the animals but we are returning it to nature where the biomass can uh can grow again and where it can reconstitute itself um the second point is that we are also living in a world that has record acreage and mileage and square mileage of globe's territory which is protected from any kind of interference from humankind so we have we have record square mileage of oceans which are now protected and which cannot be fished in and we have square mileage of land which

which is protected in national parks or is otherwise uh excluded from economic activity the third point that i want and and that comes with wealth the wealthy countries they are and stability and political stability because you you don't need much catastrophe and social breakdown before those national parks and all their animals are going to have everything eaten out of them typical example would be zimbabwe yes and the last point i want to make is that we have a problem in brazil brazil has obviously vast rainforests and very ancient forests which are filled with all sorts of things that we may discover are helpful to us in the future we you know um as well as dangerous but nonetheless uh very few people would say that that it's a good thing to get rid of the brazilian rainforest my understanding is and i'm i'm willing to be proven wrong on this is that most of it has to do with farming especially of poor people in in brazil who burn forests in order to clear the land for agricultural activity now i realize that this point will may not necessarily be appreciated by wealthy people in the west but poverty in developing countries can be very very bad in brazil there are some pockets of real wealth but there are also pockets of tremendous poverty and the more inland you get and the more into the amazon you get the poorer the people become these people from their perspective and the perspective of their government should be allowed to earn a living the way you protect amazon is is to have higher grade rates of economic growth in brazil so that those people start moving away from the amazon they start moving to cities like sao paulo and rio de janeiro and others and they start working there in the factories in the service industry and they no longer have to burn forests in order to plant food so they don't starve number seven trend seven planet city urbanization which you also regard and describe as a net positive well you certainly get the synergistic effect of bringing people together right i mean look at san francisco the silicon valley the urbanization of a genius population that produces an incredible amount of innovation so urbanization everyone's moving to the cities um yeah i think that right now we have about 55 of humanity living in the cities already so again all those people are obviously not living on land which is which is a good thing you remember paul pott right cities are parasites on the countryside and should be eradicated well that turned out to be spectacularly wrong in every possible way as well as murderous so it's a good thing for people to leave their rural environments and move to the city good thing all things concerned so sorry continue at least no no no i i think uh paul pott yeah i mean didn't he also shoot all people with spectacles because they were intellectuals oh yeah he was trained after sorbonne well okay right say no more that's great i i think he still holds the record for uh most people killed as a share of the population i think he managed to kill what one third or one quarter of the population in four years i don't think anybody has done that even even marvel uh it's a hell of a record to hold and it's quite appalling that he was trained in the west it's stunningly appalling so okay back to organization i i i feel that we have bashed the french enough here maybe not enough but anyway the um so yes there are the network and synergetic effects of people living close together and exchanging ideas and and similar companies existing next to each other communicating and so forth uh generates more economic growth and look the historical record is absolutely clear cities have been the drivers of progress whether it is amsterdam in the 17th century or london sorry 18th century or london in 19th century new york in the 20th century um that's where stuff happened not just in terms of economic growth but also in terms of culture um and and and things like that so and the final point uh cities also um consume less energy than urban areas per capita because we have public transport people don't have to drive their jeeps and and four by fours wherever they go with long distances um so uh people consume less energy in in cities per capita and that said that's a that's again a good thing i think and is that controlling for agricultural productivity even do you know um i don't know i think uh co2 i think co2 emissions and energy consumption is smaller in the cities than it is in the rural areas but but i i that's all i remember from that particular passage okay okay trend eight democracy on the march that's a graph of autocracies versus democracies so this uh particular chart um is controversial one you know partly because it keeps on changing in in directions which me we may not necessarily appreciate um it is undeniable that the world is most democratic than the last decade in the world has been most democratic in that than than at any time before in the last few years we have seen weakening of democracy we have seen some countries which have turned away from democracy to dictatorship such as for example uh russia um you know there are some authoritarian tendencies even in europe in places like in places like hungary nonetheless nonetheless greater share of humanity lives in under a democratic regime than say in uh 30 years ago 60 years ago 100 years ago and so forth and and the big wave of democratization really happens after the collapse of the soviet union in 1991 and of course the collapse of the berlin wall in 1989 after that you see basically before then there were more autocracies than democracies in the world and after the fall of soviet union you had all of these newly independent countries uh turned democratic there was some slight back in in in in some of them but by and large democracy has held in central europe in eastern europe even in some parts of southern europe so um there is more democracy around and uh you know the future of democracy is by no means assured we are seeing some very troubling signs on the horizon but but democracies are not in full flight just because you know russia stopped being a uh moderate democracy i would say you know and even the russians know this despite their autocratic uh system there isn't an intellectual or moral contender of any import i mean democracies might degenerate into dictatorships but there isn't a ethos of authoritarianism there isn't an ethos that's well developed intellectually philosophically or practically to um what to compete with democracy so i mean the chinese can claim that their system is more efficient it's like well maybe for short periods of time now and then but seems highly unlikely when as the ch as china became more free economically it became richer they say well we can get along we can get away with not being free across the board but i suspect that that's probably just wrong is that it we're going to see that that as a as a comparatively fatal flaw over the next 30 or 40 years so but i mean what do you argue if you're if you're not a liberal democrat you know in the whole broad sense ranging from democratic socialist to ultra conservative let's say but within the democratic spectrum well what's outside of that that's credible intellectually an alternative system i don't see anything russia has a peculiar combination of nationalism and russian orthodoxy now that cannot be obviously uh exported to other countries in the world it has no purchase on africa for example latin america china is an interesting example they certainly do argue that their system is superior but i think that the shine has been coming off the chinese model recently with the well it got a lot more superior when it got a lot more capitalist it got a lot more superior they obviously are able to generate a lot of wealth they also have a lot more people um but they are still on average and average chinese is much poorer than an average american it's just that they are dealing with 1.4 billion people uh but but by letting them be freer not perhaps politically but economically the the the the the chinese economic institutions stopped being super extractive and they became more inclusive and people could function within them and produce wealth and keep it and nobody was coming to take it away from them at least not with the typical regularity of a totalitarian regime they were able to build a a very prosperous country but the shine is coming off not only because of the way that the chinese have lied about corona but also because the chinese are involved in tremendous human rights abuses in in in against the eagers weakers and and places like that it's very difficult for any aspiring dictator uh in africa latin america or europe for that matter to say you know china is the model if the the immediate retort is aside from those concentration camps how about that explain that you well there is their support for north korea too which we should never forget and and and that which is a regime so rotten that it beggars the imagination so appalling inexcusable in every possible way and the final point i want to make about china is that really it is now that china will have to show the merit of its own system because it is one thing to replicate um to to to replicate uh say railways the building of railways and bridges and and things like that it is one thing when you have the benefit of the technology that's already developed and what you're doing is picking low-hanging fruit that's exactly right whereas now china has to prove that it can not only mimic but it can actually produce new ideas that it can innovate and you don't have innovation in country which doesn't have freedom of speech which doesn't have free exchange of ideas and the ability to criticize now now there are specific sectors where freedom of speech can be allowed so for example the soviet nuclear and rocket sciences were allowed a great deal of experimentation and internal discussions because obviously the soviet union was trying to build as many nuclear rockets as it possibly could but if you want to produce better products um uh better production processes um new innovations on them on a mass sort of societal scale you have to have freedom of speech freedom of expression freedom of communication and china doesn't have it because of course the colorady of the of the of the freedom of innovation is that people would be talking about ideas that the chinese government doesn't want them to talk about yeah well and if if you're going to have a bunch of people who are talking about ideas and they're going to be really good at it they're pretty much nothing can be off limits if you get a bunch of creative people together and they're really being creative they have to be able to talk about anything otherwise their creativity gets squelched and it's easy to squelch the creativity in some sense so and also i think that creative types are usually people who are

on a broad spectrum of autism and disagreeability and uh and you you very s often see it in in silicon valley but some research seems to be showing that and these are the sorts of people who are going to not hold back these are the sorts of people who are going to tell whatever springs to their mind now if you're going to put people who are disagreeable and who speak their minds because of the particular traits of their of their of their psychology if you're going to put all of them to jail because they call chairman she an idiot then you're going to run out of of innovative uh people very soon yeah i'm not so much sure that the disagreeable element there is is useful for creativity there's not a lot of evidence for that but it might be useful for implementation of creative ideas so when i mentioned this this is very interesting i would like to hear your view on that when i when i mean disagreeability isn't it the ability to say screw you all i know i'm i'm i'm right in my ideas and i'm going to pursue my research wherever it's going to lead me well isn't that important well that's what i mean by implementation though like if you look at it from a personality perspective openness the trait is the one that governs creativity and it isn't associated with agreeableness to any great degree they're pretty orthogonal but the issue of to what degree you need to be disagreeable to implement effectively that's that's a different story and i don't think that data are in on that yet anyways let's go on let's go on to the next one let's go on to the long piece because that's also extraordinarily important so long piece basically means is that is that there are fewer conflicts um in sin since the end of the second world war the long-term trends seems to be toward greater peace we certainly no longer have countries declaring war on each other sending armies across borders to slaughter that seems to have almost disappeared completely that idea if i remember correctly the last country to declare war was the united states on north korea i could be wrong on that but but i think i i would love for that to be checked and maybe you can put a disclaimer on your video that i got it completely wrong but i actually think that happened anyway the so that no longer happens now countries still invade other countries like for example russia invaded ukraine the little green men who uh who took uh uh crimea but i think it says something that even governments that uh that still still do this sort of these sorts of things uh do not declare war publicly because they are afraid of how humanity would react to that kind of uh that kind of uh that kind of activity and so most of the conflicts today in fact all conflicts usually tend to be ethnic and and civil wars but they are not really conflicts between between countries uh wars have become more uh less deadly less deadly they are smaller and less deadly but please remember this doesn't mean that you know the past performance suggests future success i mean the world is still filled with nuclear weapons and so uh but it also seems even on that front like it seems like certainly people are much less convinced that nuclear weapons will be used purposefully especially in a mass annihilation than throughout the 60s 70s and 80s so the nuclear weapons are still there there's there's far fewer of them but imminent war between russia and the united states certainly doesn't seem probable in the same manner that it did for that entire cold war period up till the demise of the soviet union that's right i mean we are down from 40 000 nuclear warheads per superpower down to about 3 000. i'm more worried about nuclear uh about sorry about uh accidental yes terrorism that sort of thing so that's uh what's what really worries me much more um but that's a better worry in some sense than all-out mass annihilation i mean well ideally i mean you have a lot of smart people who are watching your your podcast and ideally uh you know it could be calculated how many nukes would have to go off of what strength in order for there not to be the end of humanity in other words what is the maximum and if we could convince the international powers to bring the total maximum number of warheads and their strength below that level while still being distributed amongst nuclear powers you know that then we could decrease that that danger even even more i wonder if that would decrease the uh i mean one of the things i've thought reasonably frequently although i'm not convinced of it is that nuclear war is so terrifying that it's actually made us more peaceful like that terrible threats like the fist of god there's some places we just can't go any more and more and people so far thank god have being seemed unwilling to go there so the terrible threat may have had benefits yeah there's a whole branch of international relations uh study of international relations which argues precisely for that you're not alone uh there are other people support supporting your view um but unfortunately nuclear power uh nuclear nuclear weapons cannot be unlearned and so i'm afraid we are stuck with them uh and the best that we can do is to bring the number down to a minimal level where superpowers will feel safe without without destroying the world but that's just for another for another day the last one trend 10 a safer world and this is death from natural disasters right so this particular subject can be looked at uh from a number of angles one is that we are in this time of panic about existential threat to humanity from climate change and from the environment and yet in the last 100 years the number of people who have died due to natural disasters has shrunk by 99 the two are incompatible if we are moving to a world where millions of people are going to be destroyed by you know uh oceans rising or uh crop failure whatever uh or tsunamis or earthquakes and whatever why is it that due to natural disasters uh that natural disasters have seen 99 decrease in in human mortality and um the answer seems to be that partly we are richer and therefore we are able to build uh more sturdy dwellings um but we are also more technologically savvy so that we can uh predict where a hurricane going to strike and exactly when so that people can escape from the path of destruction and we can also detect earthquakes underneath the ocean floor uh giving people on land more time to move to higher ground from a tsunami wave and things like that so and we're going to get better and better at all and we are going to get better and better at it yeah so we're richer by far um in terms of productivity and quality of products and absolute poverty has declined precipitously commodity prices have fallen we're not going to overpopulate the world in any cataclysmic sense everyone has increasingly more than enough to eat there's more land for nature and that trend seems upward more people are moving to urban areas and that's advantageous rather than disadvantageous there are more democracies and so we're better governed we're more peaceful and we're less likely to die from catastrophes and i should point out to everyone who's listening that really only scrapes the surface of the topics that are covered in this remarkable book as i mentioned at the beginning of this podcast the authors delve into comparatively micro trends in detail discussing such things which i would love to discuss and perhaps we should continue this at some point in the not too distant future such things as the precipitous decline in computational power and that's in its infancy um access to electricity uh you mean uh computational price of computation yeah yes yes well and and and pure power and and accessibility and mobile technology and right lighting costs and uh decline in the cost of renewable resources and clean drinking water and better sanitation and um i'm just leafing through the book internet access and so that's education and that will get better and better um but other than that yeah so so let's close out with this

i've done two three podcasts i think in the last couple of months that were aimed at bringing this information to to a broader audience um there seems to some degree to be a saleability issue or maybe it's just too soon and like all this good news in some sense is relatively recent and the word may just not have spread um any ideas about what could be done to counter the pessimistic and apocalyptic narratives that seem to dominate the public landscape well you are doing it right now by interviewing me i am doing it by having this website which is made all the more useful by the fact that we didn't come up with this data it's freely available on many different platforms uh around the world if you think that i'm full of it go to our world in data go to the world bank go to the imf go to eurostat that if if you are interested in that in the state of the world there's plenty of data out there that can show you that the state of the world is much better than than it is secondly um and i'm i'm wondering if uh if this is even possible but secondly what if people start understanding more about their biases about how they perceive the world you know that this is obviously done in colleges and universities in psychology courses as well as in biology courses and things like that but you know it's not as though human beings are incapable of changing their world view based on evidence we no longer believe that a sacrifice of a little child will produce better harvest so we've learned that lesson we no longer believe that throwing a virgin into a into a volcano is going to uh give us military success um

we no longer believe in in all sorts of things that we have taken for granted in other words we have we have shown that we are capable of learning and learning from evidence we have internalized um that focusing on irrigation and and fertilization is a better way to to to produce food than prayer and that gives me hope that as we move forward we'll be able to learn more about um about the rest of the world internalize not just that information but also why we are being pessimistic and negative what do you think about that well i'm i'm listening and i'm thinking it through i'm also wondering i would say that learning this material has made me has lifted some of the existential weight from me things aren't as bad as they're trumpeted to be in fact they're quite a bit better and they're getting better and so we're doing a better job than we thought there's more to us than we thought we're adopting our responsibilities as stewards of the planet rapidly we are moving towards improving everyone's life it i lived under an apocalyptic shadow my whole life i mean i don't want to complain about that too much because i lived in a very rich place and i had all sorts of advantages and all of that but the apocalyptic narrative was still extraordinarily powerful and demoralizing and it looks to me that there are reasons to doubt its validity on all sorts of dimensions and i'm not sure what that will do to people but hopefully it'll make us more optimistic and and positive and less paranoid and afraid and happier with who we are and but still willing to participate in improving the future and to lift some of the weight off young people who are constantly being told that the planet is going to burn to a cinder in the next 20 years and and and well that's not happening that's not happening and and people who push that agenda in the newspapers and elsewhere are completely irresponsible and cruel but that leads to that leads to perhaps the the final point from from my end like you i have become much more optimistic uh not much more happy in my own personal life once i realized that so much around me i didn't have a right to complain about and i should be grateful for i should be grateful for that i'm not that i'm not a peasant in 17th century or you know or a and appreciative of what's brought us here and that's the key is that people who do not understand the crucial role that political and economic liberalization opening inclusion has played in launching the industrial revolution uh showing us the path the rest of the world a path to to prosperity if they don't understand that everything we have is underpinned by a certain economic and political system both of them terribly imperfect terribly imperfect but look at the alternative look at the difference between chile the extraordinary success of that country after it embraced free markets and the collapse of venezuela where people eat cats and dogs look at the difference between botswana which is a relatively free economy and its neighbor zimbabwe where people have experienced hyperinflation of 96 tillion percent look at the difference between east and west germany between um between the united states and the ussr look at the difference between north and south korea if you really you just called it the worst possible regime in the world i think you're right on that i'm pretty sure you're right on that and uh that regime is still out there if you have a problem with liberal democracy and and competitive enterprise fix those problems incrementally one by one don't burn down the system because the alternatives as you can see in the world are much worse that is a great place to end thank you very much and i'm there's so many more things we could talk about and hopefully we'll get an opportunity to do exactly that some of the micro analysis because there are comparative micro analysis because there's so much data in this book that's fascinating it's an endless source of optimistic revelation that's also realistic and so i hope many people buy it and put it on their coffee table and share it with their friends and and lift some of the unnecessary burden of human shame and guilt from their shoulders well i'm grateful for that uh for those kind words about my book i'm deeply grateful to you for having me on your show and i'm delighted that you're doing well and hopefully we'll be doing it even better in the future

you