DarkHorse Podcast with Jamie Wheal & Bret Weinstein (192kbit...

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**SPEAKERS**

Jamie Wheal, Bret

**Bret** 00:04

Hey folks, welcome to the Dark Horse Podcast. I am sitting today with Jamie Weil, who is the founder of the flow Genome Project. He is the author of stealing fire and his newest book recapture the Rapture. Jamie, welcome my friend, how are you?

**Jamie Wheal** 00:20

antastic man, and as you said is as good as we can be all things considered

**Bret** 00:24

as good as we can be all things considered, which in light of the topic of your most recent book is a heavily qualified statement, but we will, we will get there. I should probably say upfront a couple things. I have not fully read your book, I haven't had it long enough to do that. I have however, use the time with your book as well as I can I have perused all the way across it. And I am blown away by what you appear to have done, I am looking forward to delving into it completely. And I am also looking forward to discussing the content of the book with you today, even though there will be things that I have I have missed in my perusing. In general, I have a kind of arm's length relationship with books that I'm often kind of reluctant to talk about, because intellectuals tend to have a kind of reverence for books that causes them to cast suspicion on anyone who expresses doubt. But my sense is that as much as there's a lot of positivity, obviously conveyed through books, there is also a downside to them, which is that when you have read a book, you take in the author's perspective, and it is often hard to restore your mind to the configuration it had before you did that. And so there's a downside. With your book, I'm not worried about this, because you do such a fantastic job of effectively document in your own mindset and leading people through the things you want them to discover. So my sense is, it is a very different kind of book. And although I haven't fully read it, I highly recommend that others do. And I'm sure I will be returning to it after I have read it.

**Jamie Wheal** 02:20

Thank you. And you know, I think you and I share I mean, we come up as educators. And you know, one of the sort of sacrosanct ethical commitments is, you know, is the somewhat cliche teaching people how to think not what to think. And so not only is that, you know, a stake in the ground, which is, the intention is to increase the quality of our discourse, and our reflections on our decisions. But then there's also just what's going on right now, and you know, and pretty much any buddy that I look up to, and turn to in the fields of neuroscience, psychology, sociology, politics, climate biology, the closer they are to experts, the less certain they are of anything you do, in general, just as an epistemological stance, based on the humility of deep exposure to the complexities, nuances and contradictions. And then we, you know, obviously, I wouldn't say obviously, we are perhaps, and arguably in a world of increasing intersecting compounding and conflicting exponential curves. So the mapping and modeling can only ever be provisional. Yeah, all certainty is probably our biggest pain right now.

**Bret** 03:34

I would agree a false certainty is a huge problem. And if I can see if I understand what you just said, because of the number of, let's say, dyadic relationships between concepts, which seems to be growing at an exponential rate, we are effectively rescuing what we think we know with the equivalent of epicycles. And we are in some sense, like Tomek, like the little loops and the loops. Right? Exactly. And we are in effect, waiting for what will certainly be a radical simplification of what we understand that in effect, what we understand is becoming more complex, because we are having to integrate more things with it. And when we can figure out where to stand to look at it, it will probably not be massively complex, it will be simpler and more intuitive. But having not found that place yet. We have to deal with skepticism with the complexity that we're forced to deal with which as you point out results in people who, who see this problem being more cautious rather than more certain.

**Jamie Wheal** 04:43

Yeah, I mean, and I have no idea. I mean, to your point about kind of the synthesis on the other side, right. I'd love to test this with you. But it seems to me that, you know, we are hard coded for binaries for either ORS, you know, at the root level of you know, electron spin up down to a single cell organisms late life death or food foe, you know, black, white, you know, good bad, you name it. And you know it's what Aristotle called the law of excluded middle it's literally the foundation of the scientific method which is which is force binaries and an obviously anybody who's you know, remotely thoughtful from philosophers or theologians to physicists have been like, well actually it's it's actually less and less about I mean, obviously, contrast either Ours is a very effective way of sorting the world sorting the universe, but it does hollow out the shades of grey, if you're just going for black and white. And so that move from contrast, either or friend foe to context. It is situational, it is dependent, it is nuanced, like that feels like a potential lens that we could apply to good effect because, right, I mean, it's just, it's, it's Hegel, when I want it's like all dialectics all the time. You know, whether it's Progressive Conservative, whether, you know, whether it's, you know, technological utopianism, or ecological collapse, like it's all happening, and it all depends. So context and really being willing and able to be much more precise in our locations, and our epistemic locations and our interest objective, relating all of these things, it feels like we could just do with a healthy dose of more provisional contextualism.

**Bret** 06:27

So, yeah, I would, I would alter that slightly, I think, which is to say that these dichotomies are tools, and there is a degree to which they are illuminating. And for each of them, there is a point at which they are more confusing than helpful. And, you know, the ideal mind figures out how to use the tool to its degree of constructiveness. And then to abandon it at the inflection point. And obviously, you can't do a perfect job because it takes some time to discover that the tool has become unhelpful, but nonetheless, that's that's the the objective of the exercise is to figure out not whether some, some phenomenon is binary or isn't. But it is to say, to the extent that we look at it as binary, what do we learn? And then at what point, are we blinding ourselves with that very same? insight? You know, some things are binary, the closer you get to the fundamentals, the more things you know, it's either an electron or it isn't right. It's hard to be nuanced about it. Actually, maybe I've picked a bad example, because of the sum over histories, understanding that even an electron is, in some sense, a cloud of probabilities. But, but nonetheless, an electron isn't a proton, right? It's a it's a fair binary. But when you get into complex systems, each, each phenomenon is impacted by so many other things that there's always cause for nuance, even when a binary may tell the bulk of the story.

**Jamie Wheal** 08:11

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, it's waves and particles, and which is the, which is the helpful lens for the task at hand.

**Bret** 08:18

Right. Okay, so how to bring the audience into a discussion of your book. Let me first say, I would say that your book is in a genre that is new and growing. It is part of an older tradition. There's obviously as you point out in the initial part of your book, a long tradition of people being concerned about the direction we are headed, and what its implication is for the the immediate future, much of that thinking not being very productive, but your book and you feel free to correct me if I'm Miss portraying, but your book, diagnosis a, a dangerous trajectory that humanity is on at the present attempts to dissect the nature of the problem, yet describes tools that might be productively wielded, and then proposes a direction that you believe we should head and so in some sense, it is in the genre that I would say his books about potential game be solutions to the failures of of game a. Is that fair? Or do you feel that I'm dragging you into a mill you that isn't isn't yours?

**Jamie Wheal** 09:52

Well, I mean, you know, on a pure branding thing, I would have thought that you know, the existing meme of bringing your age Game, we would have wanted the good thing we were trying to get to to be gaming. But aside from that, my sense is that and this is my my academic background, I mean I went into I thought I was going to be an elbow patched wood paneled professor, I was all done in my PhD coursework by the age of 22. And it was in historical anthropology. And so and then just kept learning kept growing realized that you know, the tempering of academia, I was like, oh, whoa, maybe that's not that happy. I thought I just had like one more year to get it out. And then it was just, you know, smoking a pipe and thinking thinking thoughts, and then I got disabused of that. But for me, the area of inquiry is is kind of Janice facing, you know, sort of it looks backwards and forwards. And looking backwards, is a kind of hybrid discipline of neuro anthropology. He's like, you look at humans you like what are these curious customs? We, you know, we hominid seem to deploy and what is happening today? And are there precedents to that? Can we look back through the ethnographic to the historical record and see, where else have we done things similar. And the kind of neat hybrid these days is that we also have neuroscientific information. We have st, you know, psychology and study, we have biology, we have all of these things that we can then bring to bear of, why do the things we do socially and culturally, as tribal primates? Why do they work, and then once you can understand the Lego blocks of that, then you can look forward into culture architecture. So now we understand we've got we've got case studies, we've got evidence, and we've got basically kind of a pattern language, we see how these things tend to go together and how they tend to work. And then we can say, Now if we're going to build or innovate, or architect new versions of how we gather, then might we do that with a little bit more skill, because we know the pieces and their functionality. So to me, it's neuroanthropology looking backwards, culture architecture, looking forwards. And if you wanted to kind of distill this book into its essence, it's it's an attempt to create an open source operating system for transformational and anti fragile consciousness and culture. So what's the Linux for the future? You know, and really standing by that, which is it's not like that any top down solutions, no matter how idealistic or noble, tend to degrade to fascism over time. And we really, I mean, I just take it as an article of faith. But I think there's lots of case studies to support this, that we are actually smarter, better and more resilient. The closer we are to our own unique conditions, so localized and adaptive responses, honoring specific cultures, lifeways, value systems, etc. Like we're better bottoms up than we are taught to down. But everybody building a spaceship in their driveway, it doesn't work either as a complex hard thing. So can we share like Linux, here's here's source code, it shoots straight, it tends to spit out answers that are more or less congruent with the original conditions. And then you can modify it, you can adapt it, you can mutate it. And then if your modification works better, great, because other people will, you know, other people will then adopt it, it'll propagate like we don't know we need it, we need a million solutions and 999,000 are probably going to go tits up. But But if we can accelerate and harness and sort of scaffold and support, heightened human innovation in the realm of architecting, functional civilization and society, then maybe we have a chance, maybe we have a way forward.

**Bret** 13:39

All right. I still, I want to drill down on this a little farther, though, because when I say game B, I am unfortunately, invoking an entity and organization of people who met and I don't mean to, what I mean to say is that game B has become a label for a category of thought. If you take all of those of us who are part of the living cohort of humanity, some small number of us have recognized that actually, you don't need to understand with precision where we are headed to recognize that the trajectory itself will be fatal, short term, and that that requires some architecture to find our way out. I would add evolutionarily that we're very good. Humans are at figuring out what to do in circumstances where our ancestral wisdom has come apart. But that our modern version of this puzzle is unlike any past version in the sense that the tools we would typically bring to bear to figure out what to do next won't work. We cannot evolve our way out of the situation by having certain groups go extinct in the attempt to discover a way And just figuring, you know, working from whatever subset functions in some sense humanity is all in it together this time. And so your book I read is a very deliberate attempt to describe what I would say, you tell me if you differ, but to describe a crisis that we have found ourselves in, and to map as you say, an open source architecture for basically bootstrapping our way out. And yeah, is that fair?

**Jamie Wheal** 15:33

Yeah, I mean, you know, and to be very clear, right? There's, there's 1000 things wrong, screwy, scary, consequential that are happening. So, and I just chose to focus on what felt like an under discussed and an underdeveloped, missing link in that discussion of our meta crisis, which was, you know, that everything is going exponential, for good and bad, except for meaning, except for our ability to make sense and then decide what to do about it. And that, you know, to your game, a game be notion, I mean, if we take everything that's kind of, we've been living in is in the historic record, as game a, I think you could actually tease that apart even and say that, you know, meaning 1.0, which is almost all of human civilization in history, up until really even sort of the last century, you can, you know, you can timestamp it back to the French enlightenment, whatever, but like, up until super, super recently, meaning one point was almost always analogous or synonymous with organized religion, and communities of practice. And obviously, we have seen the erosion of that, and that starts with things like the rational empirical scientific revolution, French enlightenment niches, God is dead, but also more recently, you know, Pew Research Foundation, finding the collapse of allegiance and affiliation, less than 50% of Americans now, for the first time ever, don't align or orient, to any kind of institutional community of practice or faith. The nuns, the N, O, N, E's are the fastest and largest growing, you know, denomination. In America, you're like, wow, okay, that's novel, and then throw in Catholic Church scandals, the erosion of trust, you know, everything. So you could just say, that edifice is collapsing. And at the same time, meaning 2.0, which you could make the case is sort of modern liberalism. Right? Again, the sort of, you know, democracy, inalienable rights of citizens, civil rights, market based economics, that whole bundled package that's, you know, tacked lately, sometimes called sort of late stage capitalism, Well, clearly, the last year, the last four or five years has really been eroding our trust and faith in those institutions as well. And meaning 1.0 was it offered the promise of salvation, but at the cost of exclusion, like if you believed you were saved, if you didn't, you were damned, more or less kind of around the world, right? If you were among the elect, you got in to the good life, and modern liberalism, you know, coming out of the, you know, the religious wars of Europe, you know, through the middle ages to, you know, to the Enlightenment was like, Whoa, okay, we need to that that way, lies, ruin and bloodshed. So we're going to offer it, we're going to try something else, we're offered inclusion, right? All men and women are created, you know, are entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, regardless of race, color or creed. Right, wonderful notion, you know, partial execution. But that was that was the reverse promises, instead of offering salvation at the price of inclusion and inclusion, at the price of salvation, separation of church and state, God is dead, no one's gonna tell you what it means. So the question for kind of the game beam is what does meaning 3.0 look like? Because we're clearly in a meaningful crisis. And the absence of those two pillars has created this hollowed out vacuum and the middle. And rather than us all, sort of doing what Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins and young Sam Harris might have said is the new atheist you know, like God is dead, get rid of superstitious straw men and angry sky god stand on our own two feet and become rational materialist, and do the secular humanist thing better. We're not seeing that, right? We're seeing this you know, in that vacuum, we're seeing people getting shunted to extremes of fundamentalism, and that can be doubling down on traditional fixed religious beliefs but it can also be scientific fundamentalism it can it can be ideologies, it can be anything of what like with extreme certainties of worldview and sort of Manichaean good and Bad's or if you're not bought into one of those then nihilism. You know, none of this matters, burn it all down. diseases of despair, addiction, depression, suicide. So the question is, is how do we rebuild you know, how do we pop the long pole back in the tent that can shelter us and provide community and protect Whether the storm with meaning 3.0, which would be, can we do both? Can we take the best of both? Can we create inclusive salvation? Is that actually a thing we can even hope for? And then how would we do that in a decentralized, open source way, so that we're not just replacing one ism with the next one?

**Bret** 20:21

Yeah. In a sense, I'm wondering if it's fair to say that we are in a meaning recession, I mean, almost, that if in effect, we had achieved a kind of, meaning the scientific materialism has been marvelously productive in describing a great many things that are true and useful enough to build with. But it has actually created the crisis as well. And that what I'm seeing and what you describe, I think you memorably say, early in your book, that it's a moment at which you would expect us to be at our best, but we are at our worst, I'm sure I'm just paraphrasing there. But yeah, I see this as well. And I, I, I'm almost stunned by the degree, to which every counter intuitive thing of value is being uninvented. Right? We are. We are losing confidence in many of the most important innovations that we've made. And it's resulting in a kind of, it's like the worst of both worlds. Not only is it faith based and metaphorical, right, meaning that you cannot infer from it directly, but it also has not stood the test of time. And so what we are getting are beliefs that sound good, are very frequently wrong, and are unfalsifiable by virtue of the fact that we have thrown out the good part of the scientific materialism, which was the robustness of our ability to test what's true.

**Jamie Wheal** 22:19

Yeah, and, you know, to your point about sort of, right, when we should be at our best and this happened, you know, this time last year, right, with the dawning realization of a global pandemic, there was a number of everyone was kind of looking for reference points. And certainly FDR, Churchill, World War Two, like became a familiar theme, like okay, it's one of those is it really one of those, I think it might be, the only thing we have to fear is fear itself. And Churchill's, you know, never, ever, ever give up and victory gardens and keep calm and carry on, we kind of got ready to do that. And I think people were ready for some leadership to potentially ring that bell and get us in line. And we were kind of digging back into our cultural memory of like, Okay, I think it's one of these times, and instead, we ended up with the most batshit, upside down, factionalism, skits, soy denialism, and just just, we walked and, I mean, if this was our dry run, we just failed badly. You know, and, and my, my senses is that you and yours and Heather's work, directly informed and inspired my thinking on this, which is where you you had made the case probably a couple of years ago now.

**Jamie Wheal** 23:28

of Hey, folks, be careful, like, you know, if we either are required to step into a global perspective, or we're going to regress under stress, and we're gonna go back to tribalism of any stripe, it could be ethno tribalism. But it could be ideological tribalism, you know, and especially the internet, you can find your corner in your pocket and your people no matter how wacky, right, and, and you made the case of like, Hey, be really careful, friends and neighbors, if you play the tribal identity card, because it's so deeply ingrained in our biological, social, tribal primate structuring. And, you know, you look at the neuro chemistry of belonging and Molly Crockett, who was at Oxford, and she's now at Yale, you know, has done some really neat work on she's studied everything from positive versions of tribalism, like the Burning Man experience to negative versions, like political rallies, and those kind of things, you know, and it's when we experienced an erosion of certainty, trust and status, you know, our dopamine and serotonin levels plummet, we start becoming less altruistic, more prone to being edgy, or to lash out. When we get together in groups, our dopamine levels spike, but that actually creates a decline in hyper altruism. So we basically, you know, it's like somebody being coked up at a party, you basically just become self absorbed, but also, you know, and then the super spooky and sometimes counterintuitive one for people is you know, the role of oxytocin and that in pop culture, it always gets that moniker of like the, the cuddle drug or the trust. tormentor love hormone and you're like well it's also the curb stomp your neighbor it's the ethnocentric tribal like yes it bombs mother to child and lover lover and, and owner to pet, you know to dog and then like all those groovy things, but it also massively increases the likelihood of you being willing and wanting to other the other with extreme prejudice. And and so you know this sort of like tribalism is destiny and humanism is optional. And to me that that's a conversation that I'm not sure we're having with enough urgency because we see the extremes on both the left and the right. And they would swear that they are enemies of each other. But if you pop up a level and you're like, well, what's actually going on? What are their truth claims? What are they trying to bring about? In most instances, it is a dismantling of the current system, which holds again, however idealistic, however, partially delivered upon it has nonetheless been the ideals we've rallied around in times of crisis from the getting into the battlefield of Gettysburg to, you know, and Lincoln to the rubble of 911. And George Bush to Obama, and that Charlottesville shootings, you know, like, time and again, we've been like, okay, to to Martin Luther King, you know, in Washington and 63. We've been like, hey, there's this beautiful thought experiment, the infinite game, right? Let's include everybody in it. And let's have this humanistic project. And, and at the times of crisis, we've dusted it off. And we've recommitted to it but there's been a shift, there's been a seismic shift in the last decade and intensifying in the last five and then again, in this last one of Norfolk, it, we're breaking that treaty, we're not even pretending that we're trying to get everybody on the bus, we're blowing up the bus. And I'm sure you've come across this study, I just found it. So singularly representative of this, but it was a it was a university in Australia that studied 500 Americans and across the political spectrum, including outright identitarian, radical social justice activists and then somewhat sort of centrist moderates, and they assess them against dark triad personality so that you know, sociopathy. Machiavellianism, narcissism, and then also authoritarianism and the moderates in the middle who had their own belief systems, but also extended the right for other people to hold those. So it kind of just pluralism, they didn't score on any of those four qualities, but both sides of the political spectrum did. So they basically were like, you know, bad actors, regardless of what flag they're flying, increasing the factionalism and so you know, if you use that James cost notion of finite and infinite games, which most folks are familiar with, like finite games, win, lose up down tribalism, one on one, an infinite game, when when bring as many people into the game and play the game for as long as you possibly can. Right? we're actually seeing, you know, the fact that these sworn enemies are actually on the same team. They're on Team finite game. And what's at stake, is that versus the infinite game. And, and this is, I'm curious as to your thoughts on it. But

**Jamie Wheal** 28:29

my sense is, is that in our grief, and our frustration and our rage, dissatisfaction, anger at the bill of goods that we have collectively been sold, right there that temptation to burn down our society, our civilization, our value sets, risks, destroying this tender, fragile, incredibly precious human experiment of the infinite game. And and, you know, the ropes be I think, like rosebud cod carrying, you know, one of the originators of sociopaths hijacking liberty, equality and brotherhood that was the French Revolution was pretty bad as to start with you. Nobody said if you want to make an omelet, you gotta break a few eggs, and the finite game as to your evolutionary thesis. All they've got to do is poke prod and provoke other people to other each other including themselves, and they win. They win. It's like Darth Vader being like, strike me down, just strike me down and anger and I've won. Versus the infinite game which is like trying to put Humpty together again. It's like magnifying glasses and superglue and tweezers. It is. It is asymmetric meme warfare. Because all the finite game bad actors have any and all stripes have the second law of thermodynamics on it right and humanists don't. And I don't feel like in the in the, in the discussion in the public sphere. We almost think like maybe the That's mean when this is a contest of equal ideas, and it's not as lopsided as all data.

**Bret** 30:06

Yeah, it couldn't be more lopsided, I was gonna bring up entropy myself. But yes, and this, I think goes exactly to the the point I was trying to make about the space of the small number of people who have clearly seen that some game B is necessary because game B is about to blow up. Among the reasons that it's about to blow up, has to do with the asymmetry in power of those who wish to take apart past gains, how the failure of recognition of how fragile, what we've accomplished is, right? So to me as an evolutionist, there is no conflict whatsoever between the observation that our society is very powerful, and generates a tremendous amount of wealth and the observation that it is almost impossibly fragile, right, those two things are completely compatible. And so

**Jamie Wheal** 31:02

yes, that's all of our confirmation biases and heuristics that that make it hard for us to wrap our head around

**Bret** 31:07

hard for us to wrap our head around. And as you point out in your book, the Pax Americana has now dominated enough generations that there's the sort of sense that things just go on this way. And that's really the exception rather than the rule. But people don't Intuit it, because they have no personal experience with it coming apart. I also quite resonate with your point about the last year having been a test that we have failed spectacularly. And that that is an indication of just how urgent it is that we start thinking differently about solution making. All of it does however, make me want to address something which I know is there because the last time I saw you in person, which I guess would have been in Austin, where you live my right? Yeah. Yeah, Austin in 2018, would have been? Well could have been Yeah. In any case, we had that nice lunch. Yes, we had that nice lunch. And I it began to dawn on me that you and I are on parallel missions, because of exactly the recognition that we were just talking about. I think we're built a very compatible, but very different stuff in some ways. And it, it occurred to me in talking to you, how, how can I put this how deeply troubled you are? By humanity's predicament? Right. And I felt that looking at your book as well, right? I think, you know, I, there's a part of me, and you tell me if I'm projecting something onto you that isn't there. But there is a story that people need to understand in order to figure out what it is we have to do and what sorts of tools would have to be brought to bear for it to work. And then there's also this watching the clock run out, right? And these two things are in conflict can can people be brought up to speed? Or can enough people be brought up to speed fast enough that the clock doesn't write out on us? And I see you being very patient about that and very thorough, but you also acknowledge right up front, that many things in the book really under circumstances where there was more time would need of further exploration but just in order to sketch the bare bones you're forced to, to just get right to it. So in any case, if I if I described you at all in terms of your sense of the urgency and how you feel

**Jamie Wheal** 33:53

oh my gosh, yeah, I mean, like, you know, as I said, I mean, I mean, one of the subfields that I concentrated in in historical anthropology was just kind of guns germs and steel, meats, Sapiens. So it was fundamentally clash of civilizations. What a vibrant, resilient cultures especially I was fascinated with proto contact, like I like the notion of like, and then the cavalry came and then all the Indians were removed reservations, like the tragic end game, interested in the less than dialing back the clock to when it was still a fair fight. And you could really more hopefully more accurately read viability and resilience of given different cultures radically different cultures. So like 300 years of the Iroquois Confederacy, totally, you know, leading the French and English into Chicago blind territory and gaming them brilliantly, you know, or anything like that, right. But at the same time was also an assessment lane of environmental history. And so you know, Donald Wurster, who famously wrote rivers of Empire was like here's hydraulic societies right from Egypt to the Mormons. You You know, to the Anasazi, like this is what happens when you irrigate for your food folks. And here's the case studies. And so you know, and then you know, you're looking at the Ogallala Aquifer and the great plains and how we're siphoning that to pump water or the fact that 40% of the irrigation, you know that they're, they've built tunnels from the Eastern Sierra to feed LA, and that by the time someone in Beverly Hills gets a drink out of their faucet, it's been peed x greeted and purified and recycled nine times from the snowmelt, you know, and that 40% of the water that gets shipped in open air aqueducts till Vegas evaporates, and you're like, Oh, shit, friends, this doesn't pencil out. It may not be this year, it may not be next decade, but it sure is shit is not a sustainable run. So so that like staring into that particular abyss was something that happened to me in my early 20s. And it just made me a lousy cocktail party guests. You know, well, then, yeah,

**Bret** 36:00

no, no. Well, I don't know, maybe I didn't know you in that phase. Maybe you were allows you to cocktail party guests. I rather doubt it. My guess is the party changed. At the point that you deployed this kind of understanding, but I didn't mean to interrupt you. But I do want to parse this out a little bit further, in the what you're describing this doesn't pencil out was the the phrase you ended on, right, I have my own version of this right? I call it needs a better term. But it's the theory of close calls, that basically you can deduce where you are with respect to hazards by figuring out how many close calls you've encountered, right? They describe a curve, and part of that curve is unsurvivable. And so you know, if you're, if you've had three near misses for a serious traffic accident in the last year, probably there's something wrong with your driving. It's not guaranteed. But but you can tell. And so when I look at just the list of serious disasters that we've faced in the last decade, for example, if we go back a little bit further, you know, we've had the financial collapse of 2008, we've had the triple meltdown at Fukushima, we've had the Aliso Canyon leak of natural gas. We've had the Deepwater Horizon, leak in the Gulf, etc. In other words, we've got this list of close calls, all of which were survivable, but they tell us something about the magnitude of hazards that we're playing with. And we can infer the rest of the curve, you know, we can infer from Fukushima, that a much worse accident could have happened, orders of magnitude worse. Why didn't it? We got lucky. None of the full fuel pools cracked right during these explosions, but they could have there was it wasn't like being clever prevented it from happening. We just got lucky, right? So you don't want to be dependent on luck for your survival. Right? You never want that to happen to the extent you can avoid it. And we're there.

**Jamie Wheal** 38:14

But yeah, we're so there. And I think I just read an article in the last few weeks, that was just basically talking about that, like, we actually may have been sailing way closer to the wind than we ever imagined. Because we've just got perpetual, accumulated survivor bias. Like, right, we've like the largest meteor crater we've ever mapped is like a mile across, because if there'd been one that's three miles across, we wouldn't be here to map it. You know, and like, all of those kinds of things. Like everybody in the NBA, you know, playing basketball must make you tall. The correlation causation things, but the idea that like, how many tight spots have we just ducked to even be here in the first place? And is that a sign of our brilliance or success? Or is it just utterly random statistics, right, that have delivered us to this point.

**Bret** 39:05

And you know, it's a little bit of a combination, right, like we do get clever, but too late, and we far too often end up persisting out of out of luck. I will say that the upshot of the theory of close calls when one deploys it personally is that when you detect that something you're doing is resulting in luck being the reason that you made it through you should treat each instance as if it had gone the other way, right? If you step off the curb, and you are not struck by a car. The the inference you should take is not well, I must be doing something right because I wasn't hit the inferences Actually, I did everything necessary to be hit by a car. And the fact that I wasn't hit by a car is in material that was the luck part. So I should alter my behavior radically, rather than very little in The consequences of this observation. But if I can head back to the question of what, what drives you. And actually, I did want to contrast that what I suspect is distinct is that you are driven by the emotional horror of allowing what is happening to humanity to unfold without doing everything in your power to prevent it. And I must say, I think everybody in this sort of game B space has to have some mechanism for dealing with the recognition of where we're headed because it really is so up Pauling really the needless pneus of it, right? as you point out the, the vulnerability of the infinite game and the likelihood that fools will be allowed to drive us into the reinvention of a finite human game is so is so tragic. In my case, I think I, I proceed from the recognition. In fact, I say sometimes that I know of no reason that we are too late to save ourselves, I believe saving ourselves is still possible. But I bet against us. I'll do everything in my power to make sure we don't screw this up. But if I had to guess what happens next, we missed the opportunity, right? Now, why do I say that? Right? For one thing that tends to demotivate a certain number of people. Right? On the other hand, there is something necessary in order to play around in the space of solution making one has to or maybe one doesn't have to maybe maybe the point I'm getting at is that I find one of the things that's most fascinating about you is how close to that emotional motivation you are right I have to find distance from it in order to think about these things and it's it's a natural way for me to approach it and I see you as almost doing the opposite the opposite trick which is staring directly into the abyss and kind of keeping an eye on it in order to keep you going. Am I often left field here

**Jamie Wheal** 42:45

Well, I mean, you know, I'm only like whatever I'm a mutant that doesn't have perspective on what is you know totally boring or unique about my own lived experience I think I just worked under the naive assumption that everybody kind of thought and thought things and saw things the way I did but my my life was always split between academic study like fascinated about the deep cuts and the research but then also direct experience and you know, the most raw alive living I could possibly do you know, you and Heather do have done amazing stuff down in the rain forest like experiential learning was a thing I've always passionate about so like mountaineering guiding and so by both professional training but also by disposition I probably sought this out I feel like I'm always scouting scouting ahead of the group to figure out what's next what's around the bend where's the next Crux like the hard thing we have to prepare for where's the next resource water campsite whatever it would be and shuttle running into the future to try and try and map and spot that so that the rest of the party the rest of the group has a chance of making it to the to that place and and you know, I mean I even ended up like on the one hand this was I mean a This was completely and it still might just blow up and destroy my career writing this book. It's the most ridiculous grab every single like tap dance through the minefield you know God sex death and rapture ideologies in a world that's lost its mind let's bundle them all together talk about them all and hope it goes well

**Bret** 44:27

forgot about you forgot about the psychedelics

**Jamie Wheal** 44:29

Yeah, yes drugs sex God death and the end of the world What could possibly go wrong? And you know, and there goes my court You know, my corporate speaking career if I ever had one, right so but on the other hand, I feel I felt like I could not and the the inspiration I took was something along the lines of like this falls bud seed bank, you know, up in Scandinavia, like, Hey, what are all these heirloom seeds? Can we put them in a vault, because we might need them later. Or even like the Irish monasteries that you know, they had pound sets like the riskin parchments. But they're right and then overwrite because it was so precious for their illumine manuscripts. And then they ended up randomly being this hidden treasure trove of some of the ancient Greek writings that then got rediscovered and kind of kicked off the Italian Renaissance. And that whole neoplatonic revival, which kind of gave us the seeds of, you know, the enlightenment and us today. So, in the writing of the book, and the attempting to make it an open source toolkit. I was like, I have no idea how this is going to land. I could go over like a ton of bricks in 2021. But is this potentially a little manual, where somebody someplace could use to reboot? vibrant, thriving healthy, pro social culture, and that's kind of what I had. That was my commitment. It was sort of Bhagavad Gita. You know, like, you're not going to get what you want. But you got to do it anyway. Back up and make up, you know, yeah,

**Bret** 45:57

well, alright, that's interesting. In my darker moments, I have wondered if I mean, I, I'm not a believer in fate or anything like it. But if my obligation isn't to try to document what happened here, because it would be too hard to stop it. Now. It's a it's a thought I keep control of and I shunted away to keep myself going on

**Jamie Wheal** 46:25

the test. So sweet. So say that say that again? I want to go,

**Bret** 46:29

you know, to me, it looks like this. I don't. I know that we are, I think I know that we could save ourselves. And actually what we produce now could be, we could deliver on the promise of the civilization that hasn't quite worked, that we are presently participants in. But I don't expect us to do it. Because as you point out, I see us getting dumber rather than smarter, which you know, that could be the adaptive Valley, it could be the darkness before the dawn, but there's a really good chance it's not, which means that well, either what happened here will be invisible to everyone else in the universe permanently. Right? Maybe we just joined the silent majority of the Fermi paradox. Or somebody happens by and they'd look at the ruins of planet Earth. And they say what happened here, and I don't think there's a good description for them to find. And that's sad, because the lesson of it might be for them to be able to save their civilization, right? A spacefaring creature would have a lot to lose, maybe they wouldn't be spacefaring at this level if they hadn't figured it out already. So maybe there's nothing for them to learn from us. But I do wonder if the obligation isn't in some sense to just create something that says, alright, let's describe in game theoretic terms, what happened here and why something that didn't have to end came crashing down. Right? And then where do you leave it? Right? What do you write it into you write it in Bakelite? That's a very durable substance, where do you leave it But anyway, this is this is, this is my dark side. And I, I keep it at bay. By basically imagining that we're, we're one headed for a waterfall. And we're one to have a very low chance of being able to paddle fast enough to get out of the pole of the waterfall, there's still no point at which your chance is so low that it makes sense to stop paddling. Right? So you know, basically my sense is that let's paddle a cat let's see if we can do something surprising here. And that is not it is not an emotional thought for me, right? It's just like well logically speaking, what else you can do, right? Let's see if we can turn this around. So you know, that's how I get there. And what I'm trying to tease apart here is that I have the sense that this looks very different from inside your skull and yes, I recognize the problem of it being very hard to regard oneself because our experience is so dominated by our own consciousness and it's very hard to step outside it but what is it like for you to confront the peril of all of humanity and everything that has ever been simultaneously as you clearly do?

**Jamie Wheal** 49:31

All that you touch and all that you see and all that you lie beg borrow and steal and everything under the sun is in tune right? Yeah, that

**Bret** 49:38

but the sun is eclipsed by the moon. Yeah,

**Jamie Wheal** 49:40

yes. There's no dark side of the moon maybe it's all dark. Right? So yeah, like, right so so I mean, I tracked you right. And and I think that you know, you mentioned game theory, and certainly we have lots of friends that are deep in that world and map Model many of those permutations and outcomes and generally when I speak to them I end up soul crushed and in the fetal position for several days afterwards like literally like very rarely do I have a actual visceral reaction to conversations and there's times where I feel queasy. I feel like puking I feel like literally running away. And, and and it occurred to me and I mean, this this is this is you know, this is a helpful fiction I'm willing to sign on for myself, I'm not asserting but in the same way that you know, like, hooked like the whole fate field of behavioral economics that you know, Kahneman Taylor, who live at the Freakonomics guys like popularized, which was, hey, whoa, whoa, economics is the idea of a rational individual, making trade offs and always making the best self interested decision. That's a total fiction. That's bullshit. We are freaky, contradictory, you know, moody refrigerator, we're just fickle people and that isn't that more interesting? And in the realm of game theoretics It feels like we've almost got homo Machiavellian. What is the self interested cynical son of a bitch who's always going to do this shitty thing multipolar traps you name it right? And and to me, there is something I do you know, to your point about how many near misses that we had and all that kind of stuff. You could look at the Cold War like we should have blown each other up 1000 times and there's that Russian dude in the sub who just didn't push the button there was so many near misses that were computer glitches somehow. We didn't. And I feel like even if it's just an article of faith, we don't we don't hold it up as a law of nature or physics, right? We just say Hey, leave space for grace. leave space for grace, like do any does any of this stuff pen pencil out actuarially? Nope. But shy of just slitting our wrist now and being done with it? Can we leave space for grace? And to me? Like Yes, it rhymes. And it's kind of a neat concept. But like if you look at history, that's what has always happened. Like the moments that history has turned right? Those cusps have been when someone unleashes this asymmetric force multiplier of humanity. And you know, Gandhi called it satyagrah. He called it truth force. Right? Howard Thurman, the African American mystic, brought it back to the states rebranded at Seoul forces his mentee. MLK, then socialize that in 63. And is I Have a Dream speech where we can meet the majestic heights of physical force with sole force. Right. Nancy Kean at Harvard Business School, you know, wrote that book forged in crisis it was Dietrich von Bonhoeffer the Lutheran pastor who tried to assassinate Hitler, it was Rachel Carson, Silent Spring, Abe Lincoln, Frederick Douglass and one other and it was basically but I found so badass about her book was it wasn't hagiographies It wasn't like these retrospective like look at these heroes that did this thing. She went into their letters and their correspondence and what was actually going through their heads at these moments, these cusps, and it was no idea what we're doing. We just have to try something we're gonna just law the Hail Mary and fingers crossed this works out like the Emancipation Proclamation like every kid gets that in grade school in high school, college, ad infinitum. He Lincoln was at his wit's end, he had zero he was despondent and had no confidence like to your point I wouldn't bet against us like he was he he wasn't that this was going to change the civil war or win for the union or live you know, or create a multicultural post racial slurs like nothing. He was he was out of bullets. This was his last one. And so that to me is the premise of this whole book which is not just a plea for courage and curiosity and connection, but hopefully a toolkit like don't it's absolutely an adequate to just kind of scrunch up our you know, eyes and wish for it. Like we actually have to go do it. And and if we can, then can we unlock that force multiplier that space for grace is us is not UFOs is not baby Jesus, you know, it's us showing up and doing the impossible, because there's nothing there's no other option. Oh, boy, well,

**Bret** 54:24

this is great. It does effectively establish the the point I was searching for here, that you are sometimes reduced to what you describe as a fetal position by discussion with others who have looked into the abyss is effectively the thing I was wondering about. I will say, I this I don't know why I'm obsessed with this, but I do think figuring out what the various motivational structures are that cause people to show up for this kind of work is key, because in effect, you're looking for the others. And I will say, I never end up well, I've been in a fetal position, but only as a fetus, you know, only what I had to write every day, just not a lot of space. But anyway, I mean, I just I don't recall it that well. But in any case, my senses Look, I guess I just want you to look through my eyes for a second. And then I want to look through yours and figure out what we can learn through this. Eye know, with, I believe, near perfect certainty, that nothing I do, could possibly matter in the long term. Right? And I could just keep pushing this out right chances that anybody remembers me 500 years after my death, pretty low. Chances if I beat that one, that humanity survives another 1000 years, pretty low, right? Chances if we figure our way through the peril that we survive, to have to figure out what to do when our galaxy collides with the Andromeda Galaxy pretty low. Even if we defeat all the puzzles, ultimately, there's something at the end of the universe heat death or whatever, right? This is all going. every species that has ever been, will go extinct, including mine, no matter which way you calculate it. It is impossible for anything, ultimately to matter. Right? So that's a terrible

**Jamie Wheal** 56:39

that there's the

**Bret** 56:39

screaming abyss. Yeah. But it's not actually no, no, no, no, no, it to me, it is the opposite. Right? The fact is, I believe in things, even though I know those facts to be true.

**Jamie Wheal** 56:52

Right? Yes, well, yeah. And I would call that a transcendental existentialism. Like, let's not dress this up, you know, lipstick on the pig was a pasta graveyard, take your pick, like, let's just acknowledge the bare fact. And yet, there are still things we choose,

**Bret** 57:08

but not even and yet, right. This is the this is the part I'm having trouble articulating. Once you recognize that there ultimately is no mechanism to save ourselves, then there's a question about, well, what should we do? And one response, I suppose would be hedonism, right? I find that abhorrent, but I can imagine somebody getting there from from that conclusion. But to me, my sense is okay, we now have to scale back what it is we're trying to accomplish, right? If we can't escape the heat death of the universe, or whatever stands in its place, then what can we do? And one thing that I think we can do, which strikes me as a practical scale of goal is to recognize that even though I'm aware of the futility, I'm glad to be alive, right? I like it. I'm glad my children are alive, and my wife, and I'm glad to be talking to you. And this is all very nice. And the question is, doesn't that result in a moral obligation to deliver the possibility of having such a life to as many human beings as we can possibly arrange? Which does not mean living simultaneously? It means how many generations? Can we make the human experiment, continue? And how can we make those humans who live as liberated as possible to pursue? Meaning that seems to me, like the moral obligation of what we currently understand about our predicament in the universe? And I like that project, even though I know it's not terrible. I know I'm not

**Jamie Wheal** 58:48

it's a it's a, it's a parsimonious ontology. Right, you're like, Hey, we don't need to Gussy this up. Just the idea of holy shit were alive. I mean, that there's that there was a great postcard, I saw, you know, it's become an Instagram meme. But it was basically just had a little, a little kid sitting on a crescent moon, you know, dangling his feet kind of thing. And it's said, we're in space. No one knows what's going on. I love you.

**Bret** 59:19

There it is. Right. Here it is. It's, you know, I used to think something like this thought, as a child, which was, you know, imagine that what we were wasn't capable of recognizing that there were others. Right? Imagine that you were a kind of being that just didn't have the sensory apparatus to even know that you know, that there were others, right. And what a profoundly lonely thought that is the very fact that we have the ability to like, not only know that there are others, but to exchange abstract ideas, to talk about values to come to agreement on things. This is such a marvelous kind of creature to be We take it for granted and we ignore it and we treat it badly. You know, it's like somebody has given us a marvelous car and we go, you know, do doughnuts in the parking lot rather than honor the gift or something.

**Bret** 1:00:15

So, yeah, I guess the point would be this, let's say that we

**Bret** 1:00:20

take the argument I've made for the futility of everything we will do. And we scale it back to the human dimension, right? So that's humanity, ultimately, will be a temporary and futile exercise. We can say the same thing about each of us as individuals right? Now I could react fascism, right? But I could react to the fact that I know that I'm going to die and everything I, my whole mental apparatus is going to come apart, I could respond to that by staying inside and trying to purge every hazard, right? and preserve it as long as I can. Or I could say, screw it. All right, I know I'm going to die done. I'm going to use I'm going to actually gamble with that recognition, I'm going to take it as as liberating rather than stifling and you know, I hear I hear this in your writing and what you say when you speak very differently, you know, you have a kind of it rather than just embracing the futility of it and taking license you have an elaborate schema for categorizing the values of life and anyway, it's, it's fascinating to me because I think it ends up in the same place through an entirely different route.

**Jamie Wheal** 1:01:48

It feels like that and you know, my long term partner and good friend Julie will, she'll often just laugh at me because like, I will like map things out to infinity and back and I'll be like, would be good idea to shoulder now of your friend and apply physical touches, like really, you you could adjust loved me. And I've had to, like solve differential equations to the back and beyond. So yeah, there's some just part of me that just kind of sees things in zeros and ones and schematics and ways forward. But ultimately, it's super simple. It's the Oliver Wendell Holmes thing. You know, I don't give a damn for the simplicity on this side of complexity. But I give my life for the simplicity on the other side. And and I actually I think that there's a there's quite a bit in the existential risk game be clever people bucket, you know, where there's an awful lot of wallowing and thrashing around the complexity. And the idea that the solution to that complexity is even more scintillating and brilliant complexity. But I think I think right I think at some point, just fuck it like like physics, Trump's metaphysics, friends, like it doesn't matter whether you're a libertarian, whether you're a doom and gloom, or whether you're a seasteading, whether you're a psychedelic Renaissance or a blockchain if you'd like we're just going to be running smack dab into physics, increasingly, and, and the best laid plans Of Mice and Men and the meanest thought leaders are just going to their theories are just going to be running onto the rocks of reality. So let's just keep our eyes peeled. But to your point, I mean, I think that just unpack that Bhagavad Gita thing like that, like, like that idea of how do we maintain being passionately committed to our partner to play without being attached to our cherished outcomes? Right, and in some respects, it's, you know, Admiral Jim Stockdale, that famous Stockdale paradox he was the highest ranking POW in Vietnam. He found out he was in there for like nine years in the north, you know, in a Vietcong prison, not friendly. And he noticed that all the pessimists who became POW has died no surprise, but he also notice that the optimist did too. And that was because they would be like, Oh, the boys will be home for Christmas, or Easter, or July the fourth and when those milestones came in, when they collapsed, and gave literally gave up the ghost so that the Stockdale paradox kind of got encoded as be ruthlessly realistic about short term reality and in infinitely optimistic about possible outcomes. And it to me and so, so And in fact, our buddy Zach Stein, right, you know, overtrained theorist, educator, psychologist, you know, generally, I think open hearted wise dude. He helped me to a model that I you know, I haven't been able to get out of my head since he shared it, but it's the you may be familiar with this. It's a qabalistic notion of three phases of basically human maturity or installment and it's the pre tragic, the tragic and the post tragic. And the pre tragic is, you know, I, anybody who grew up to be president or an astronaut, I'm gonna find my prince charming or my sleeping beauty right? My my life Well, and that could be as brief as literally what you said the fetal position in the womb, and then I get spat out of the birth canal into a hole, harsh, cold life. And it's scary and I didn't opt for this. Or it can be all the way through chasing all the brass rings of academic success internships professional thing, I'm a partner at McKinsey or my law firm or I'm a tenured professor, I got all the rings, you know, and I stay pre tragic. But invariably, life will drop us to our knees, and disease, illness, despair, relational heartbreak, bankruptcy, you name it, like the fifth vicissitudes of life happen, and we enter the tragic, and most folks gets trapped there or crushed. But there is that far a rare and precious move to the post tragic. And if we can do that, right, and if we can do that, then we have a chance that's kind of where soul force that's that's where Satyagraha lives. It's not in the denial, or the solving or the transcending of the tragic nature of this human experience, but it's in the deep embrace. And then the getting back up anyway.

**Bret** 1:06:05

Yeah, all right. Sweet, because so there's this, I haven't deployed it in a way that it has had any impact in my field other than to generate a small amount of mockery. But the, my field misses a fact about evolution that is so transformative, that, in some sense, I think we're just waiting to grapple with it. And the idea is, that effectively, lineage is a selectable evolutionary target. That selection cares about something that I would call lineage, and all evolutionists know this at small enough scale, we all understand kin selection. But the fact that this scales up arbitrarily,

**Jamie Wheal** 1:07:07

what do you mean, when you say that the arbitrary scaling,

**Bret** 1:07:10

what I mean is kin selection doesn't stop at some degree of unrelated pneus. That is to say, there is a calculation of kin selection calculation that we are not capable of doing on paper, but that we could discover the calculus for and having done so we would understand a lot about human history that we are so far scratching our heads over with respect to evolution. And in short, you know, you don't need the calculus to infer the meaning of lineage lineage is very simple. Which is to say, you and I, and every other individual is wired to see and care about things at a certain distance, not because that's the limit of what matters. But because that is the limit of our likely influence, or at least would have been for our ancestors, right? an ancestor who cared about things 100 generations later would have been wasting their time because they had no influence on what would happen 100 generations later, right? Seven might be the limit or something like that. But it doesn't mean that what happens 100 generations later, isn't material, it just means it's an accessible. So, in essence, what you are suggesting the embrace of the futility is a, I think a tighter, more metaphorical encapsulation of a truth that is hard for us to speak a truth that exists in the physics actually, but that we don't yet have the language say, right, which is to say that the ephemeral ness of our life is actually immaterial to what we are built for. We are built for linear we are built to the extent that our actions have an implication on where our genes are 100 generations from now, we should care very deeply about it, even if we're not wired to care. We have to, we have to hack the architecture in order to correct for our vast power because we now do have tremendous power over whether there are any people on this planet 100 years from now or not, right? We have that influence. So yeah. So in In any case, it is always it ought to be true, that deep belief systems speak metaphorically about things that should we care to we can recover analytically, right, that we can do the math and discover that something that we say, actually maps onto some real thing in some way that auto shapes our belief systems and our values and our behavior. And I think that's what I think That's what you're describing in effect.

**Jamie Wheal** 1:10:02

Well, I mean, you know, because I agree I mean, I often say especially if you notice it, at least I've noticed it's especially in the kind of progressive left side, with a touch of New Age, spirituality and that kind of stuff, there will be people who, when faced with the current meta crisis, will then go all kind of fuzzy and dissociated into indefinite timeframes. And they'll be like, Oh, well, maybe this is the Kali Yuga. Or maybe, you know, like forest burned down to create new shoots, and you're like, Yeah, they do. And it's gonna suck for us, you know. And basically, if it's outside my lifetime, in the lifetime of my children, it's effectively academic. Like, it doesn't impact my short term survival planning, which is, which is what I need. But the opposite thing you were saying, which is kind of expanding our frame of past present future, ancestors and descendants, right? There's a lot of fascinating research that actually shows that we become more resilient when doing that. So like children, who are aware of intergenerational family stories, they do better on test scores, they're less susceptible to depression and suicide, they are literally more resilient, it's almost like having a little short wheelbase Jeep, going down the road with stiff suspension bouncing along with just me atomized, rational individual and every success or failure or setback is mine and mine alone, and I feel it fully, versus the long stretch limo of you know, my grandparents and my children and their children. And and it smooths out the ride. And right and we are literally more resourceful. And another just beautiful piece that from from some of that research was that and actually the Euro part of our family and our families the best, actually inoculated less well, it was it was a poor buffer, then we're a family. We've been at this for a while we've had our shares of ups and downs, and we're still here. And so right, that kind of just blended reality, and I haven't This is not a fully baked thought, but I'd love to run it past you which is my sense is is that, you know, obviously back in indigenous times and even into traditional agrarian times with high fixity of place, you know, most people never ventured further than 50 miles from their birthplace. What your you know, I'm millage son, the son of Miller sons and Miller son, what do we do we run the mill, you know, and like, what is our faith, that's the faith that we grew up in, and there's that synagogue, church or mosque and this is just who we are, where we are doing what we do. And so even then identity with somewhat smeared, intergenerationally right and deeply bound to place and then we end up with hyper atomized, rational individual consumer consciousness, especially, you know, into the 20th and 21st century, and that can't take the hits. Because if I don't get mine for me, now, I'm bent. I collapse and actually, I I end the book funnily enough with like, okay, most of the book is my best effort at fixing this and then the the end which my editor did not want me to write, but I couldn't be conscious not I was like, Hey, guys, here's the deal. We might do, we might get we might do everything we possibly can, and still not make it. And back to the Stockdale paradox The boys are going to be home for Christmas, right? We actually if we really want to talk about what is a, an anti fragile, a durable perspective on what's going on, and what do we do now? It has to be able to survive crushing disappointment and setback otherwise it's not a durable philosophy or a way forward and Jonathan leer at the University of Chicago wrote a book called radical hope and it was actually a study of late 19th century Plains Indians removal to reservations and he said he said the ability inability of a civilization to conceive of its own demise is the blind spot of most societies right he said but radical hope isn't isn't waiting for the ship to write itself is not Oh, we're in a peace You know, when we're in a spot we're not wearing rough seas, but then there's, you know, there's going to be palm trees, you know, and weight and beaches. It's, it's an abandoning of hope of bargaining hope. And but but the maintenance, right of a belief that at some indefinite point in the future in a way we cannot conceive of from here, there is resolution and it is worth us putting our back into it

**Jamie Wheal** 1:14:34

now. Right And to me, that one feels about right. And if you look at communities, from the Roma to the Kurds, to the Tibetans, to the Ashkenazi take any perpetually dispossessed peoples, right, they've always had that it's it's the Moses to Canaan it's 40 fucking years in the desert friends, and I might not even get there. I mean, you know MLK said that on the night. Before he was shot, you know, I may not get there with you. Right, but we're going to keep on striving. And I feel like there's not an a retro romantic way. But I feel like there's absolutely some vital re extension and connection of our self sense of our identity of what's in it for me, is actually what's in it for us. Everyone, everywhere, every win, not just me now, because the just me now is, is probably going to get increasingly gritty.

**Bret** 1:15:34

For a while. This is this is perfect, actually. And I have sometimes said that I'm very troubled by the idea of the Jews being God's chosen people. But I do like the idea that we're God's anti fragile people, and that the, you know, a perpetually dispossessed minority population, it's improbable that such a thing would survive as long as we have. And so there's some kind of wisdom in the recognition of how one even thinks about the puzzle. And it does not involve a obsessive focus on self, and whether I'm getting mine, right, it has to do there is this more inclusive, lineage phenomenon? And, you know, I think almost anyone, almost any decent person can find the, the basis for this kind of thinking, because this, this will be the easiest of exercises for you. But if you consider the question about how you feel about your family's well being, should something happen to you tomorrow, right? Doesn't change your sense that all of the importance of what happens to them your presence, or you know, yes, you'd like to be there. And frankly, if I put it in the context of my own, my own life, if something happens to me, it will be a terrible setback to my family, but it doesn't change the degree to which I care about them. And one can imagine a narcissistic person thinking, Well, yeah, I'd like my family to be happy for lots of reasons while I'm here, and then as soon as I'm gone, it's not my problem, right? That's a terrible person. So the recognition that whatever life is, can't possibly be about the individual, right? The individual comes to an end and is ephemeral life is clearly when it is done right about something more durable than that. And the point I'm trying to make is that the degree to which we lose sight of the importance, generations down the road, is an accident of evolutionary history. That should have programmed us to see very, you know, it should have programmed a Buddhist approach. Rather than one that was so heavily based in the practical that we have the myopia of our ancestors who had no influence over things a century down the road.

**Jamie Wheal** 1:18:11

Yeah, I mean, yeah, we could have done the Bodhisattva commitment. Everyone, everywhere, everyone, and instead, we all got our own personal Jesus, you know, and you know, Tim Wu, the Columbia Law, Professor net neutrality, you know, that, that that's he wrote a fascinating book called The attention merchants. And it's all about the history of marketing, basically, and how like, I think four of the foundation of the seminal, early 20th century marketers, we're all failed preachers. And you end up with this absolute porting over of like, Original Sin kicked out of the garden, you've got chronic halitosis or acne, or an embarrassingly dirty kitchen floor, whatever it would be. And here is your hockey stick redemption promise if you and now redemption is via purchase and consumption. Right? And the more we fragment and atomized and valorize and, and sort of steroids really boost your rational, fragmented egoic identity as the source of all salvation and possibility, the more the more we've created, we've created like, hyper kinetic little marbles pinballing around but we haven't created coherence and cultural resilience and buffering. Right? That is arguably a key piece of what we need going forward.

**Bret** 1:19:31

Yeah, that's very good. And it also explains in some sense, why we seem to be accelerating in our vulnerability to these game theoretic failures where the, the conflict between well being at the individual level and well being at the collective level, increasingly defaults to the individual and sabotages Collective, which at one level makes sense because the individual is in a position to betray the collective and at another level doesn't make sense because we all come from lineages that managed not to do this, right. And so the extent to which, as we become more modern, we become more vulnerable to errors that our ancestors, even if they did not analytically know how they were avoiding them did manage to avoid is impressive. So I take from your your point about the increasing kinetics of the individual marbles, driving the fate of the collective set of marbles, I think it's a it's a point we should be paying very close attention to.

**Jamie Wheal** 1:20:48

Yeah, I mean, and that, in some respects, that almost gets us into like the tragedy of the commons, as well as game theoretic, right, because the idea is, if I am homo Machiavelli is that I am just that individual choice maker, based on his, you know, basically, instant gratification seeking point, you know, seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, I'm going to do shitty things all the time. And the notion of routing and lineage routing and culture that has some pro social buffers. There was there was a fascinating book I actually came across in grad school is called enchantment and exploitation. And it was a study like this multi century study of northern New Mexico mountain villages, right? so harsh, limited resources, right? How did people get along here and it was a contrast between Mexican sheep herding societies and then the range wars, right the basically Eastern capitalised ranchers coming in. And in the Hispanic communities there were built in shame structures from excess accumulation. Right? So So if one guy decided I'm going to be the, I'm going to be the sheep Baron, then his mother, his grandparents, his uncles, they would start razzing him like, Hey, is that what you're doing? You know, like, you just drain the pond, or you just trampled the river, or you just over graze the pasture that like the rest of us were planning on using next week. And there were there were checks and balances and buffers against asymmetric resource accumulation and concentration. And then the range war dudes come in again, Eastern capital, let's go 5000 head of steers. Let's fence this, you know, instead of usufruct, land rights of like, which was the origins of the term Indian giver, was the idea that, you know, Westerners would like sign on a piece of paper, and the next spec total, and exclusive access to the land. And then most Indian trees were like, No, we'll let you hunt here as well. And we won't kill you. Like that was what we thought the exchange was, no one can own land, what are you talking about, right? And right, versus like barbed wire and shotguns to protect and and then seeing the ecological impacts when you have cultures that are broken, from local buffering of resource allocation and distribution into just pure extraction, smashing grabs. So like, how do we do that in a postmodern way? Right, that says, hey, don't be an asshat. We all live here. Yeah,

**Bret** 1:23:09

that's exactly it. And my favorite example of this is a sailor prohibitions against fishing, more salmon, then you can use right, but you'll find it in in, you know, every ancient culture that was local to resources that were prone to over exploitation. You know, this is in large measure what Elinor Ostrom famously discovered about how, basically, we do avoid tragedies of the commons races to the bottom, and every other form of collective action problem. You know, of course, in the ancient traditions, it's all written in metaphorically and you know, it invokes metaphysical forces that are not real, but they stand in for real things. I have argued it, it's in the book that Heather and I will, it's going to emerge next fall.

**Jamie Wheal** 1:24:07

What is it called? What is it called

**Bret** 1:24:09

a hunter gatherers guide to the 21st century? Yeah, but we, we have a chapter in there on what I call the fourth frontier. And we talk about the the Maya and other temple building societies and whether these temples actually are a buffering structure of exactly the sort you're describing that an obligation to bit you know, I don't know how much you know about Mayan temples, probably a lot but the Mayan temples are actually onion like in the sense that it's not like somebody drew them out on a piece of paper and, or whatever they would have drawn them on and then built the thing but they actually grow right so that, you know, the temple starts out small and it keeps getting larger. And that effectively the investment in these temples and the roads, the sock bays that go between These little city states, that is an investment that did not turn into more Maya that needed to be fed, right. So in other words, by modulating the investment in these physical structures, our argument is they would take the pressure off of the civilization so that it was not constantly at the edge, you know, a good year would produce a higher population and a bad year would cause conflict. The investment in these structures would allow modulation of the resource and protect it, which of course would then be partially explanatory and how the mine lasted so long on fragile tropical soils.

**Jamie Wheal** 1:25:39

Hmm. Okay, so this is a total tangent, but you're, you're the guy can ask so much, so I'm going to ask it right. Are you familiar with David Reich's work at Harvard or genetics, right? So so you know, fascinating studies of everything from Neanderthals to homosapiens to population of the Americas and all this kind of stuff? And you know, and it just, it just is what it is, right? You do the YouTube the DNA analysis, it tends not to lie and you can have goofs and measurement and decoding but like that story Trumps anybody's philosophical or theoretical explanations. So it's up ending, you know, a century of anthropology and history. Right. But so, so talk to me, because like, I mean, Yuval Harare, right, among many others. And sex at dawn, Chris Ryan, I was just talking with him last week, like, like, like, there's a number of folks that are these days, it's become newly fashionable to put a pin in the map at the beginning of the agrarian revolution and say, that was the beginning of the fall. That was where we ended up with access work, social inequities, poor nutrition, etc, etc, etc, patriarchy, you name it, ownership property, that was the fall hunting and gathering was just awesome. And that's where it went tits up, right? And yet, you know, you look at the genetic records, and whether it's that, you know, the the tribes from the Siberian steppes, that the indo area and basically that swept into Europe, like, mathematically they were fed or something happened, like we ended up with what we ended up with through a series of evolutionary and adaptive challenges. So what's your take what's yours? And Heather's take on kind of reconciling a retro romantic look back of saying that, you know, that's the that was the fork in the road, we should have gone back to vs. Well, it seems like it kind of worked or they wouldn't have replaced those populations or the memes and the norms wouldn't have perpetuated. What, what how do you pass that?

**Bret** 1:27:39

Yeah, unfortunately, we don't have enough time to go deeply here. Maybe we should revisit it. But in some sense, this is simple. And the problem comes from trying to infer a moral lesson from these transitions. I mean, obviously, the agrarian revolution allowed many more people to exist on the same pieces of territory added involved surrendering a great deal of autonomy, and we can talk about the the trade and whether it was worth it, and whether you'd prefer to be a hunter gatherer. But I think there's no question that at the level of effectiveness, there's a reason that the agrarians replaced the hunter gatherers overwhelmingly across almost every landscape. And that's because it worked. But the problem is worked doesn't mean what we would like it to me. Right. And in essence, the, the argument that we make at the end of our book, and on argument that I will elaborate in the future, is that we are wired for something that is so mind numbingly stupid, that no rational person could possibly honor it. Our purpose, the human purpose is the same as every other species that has ever evolved, and it's just barely worthy of comment. On the other hand,

**Jamie Wheal** 1:29:08

the machiner, but bottom line is it just fornicating

**Bret** 1:29:12

not even fornicate. It's just get your genes as far into the future as you can, right. One way to do that is to produce lots of offspring, right? It's not the only way, but it's one contributing factor. But the point is, you don't want to have the same purpose as a liver fluke, right, or as Coronavirus, or any other creature out there. That can't be much of a purpose if we all share it, right. On the other hand, the tools that human beings have been granted by evolution in order to pursue that purpose, are absolutely marvelous and capable of staggering accomplishment, insight, compassion, beauty, all of the best things about us. So it is time for our conscious minds to sideline evolutions purpose, and to replace it with one that's worthy of us, that's readily doable, the hard part is doing so in a way that does not give an evolutionary advantage to those who refuse to come along. Right? That's the question. Can we do that, and we may have to leave it there. But I think there's, there's a lot to be said for recognizing that our purpose is unworthy of us, and that we are finally capable of articulating a purpose that wouldn't be unworthy of us. It's time.

**Jamie Wheal** 1:30:34

Well, if I could just try tying this up, because in the end of the book, I mentioned the Jesuit theologian Tila de shuddha. Right and and he was both a paleontologist and and theologian, he was banished by the church off to China, all of his books were suppressed until after he died. But he articulated this, and I think he wrote this back in the 20s, or the 30s, for the first time, but he said, hey, there's gonna be three intersecting curves. As we get as we get to the end times, right? He's the He's like, there's going to be the carrying capacity of the planet, there's going to be the people that are drawn towards effectively the infinite game, right? Everyone everywhere. And there's going to be people like you just said, refusing to play that game. And committing to smashing grab tribalism. He goes, and at the intersection of the criss cross crash of those three curves is the Omega point. And he said, he said at the same time giving the whole event its significance in meaning as we don't know which way this is going to play out. But if we can get there, and we can get to the tipping point, then he says, we willing like that, we will engage in the process of Krista Genesis, like literally, the body of Christ at the end of time isn't going to be a second coming, it's going to be an umpteenth coming, it's going to be all of us, or none of us to get to the Omega point. And that feels like I mean, as far as a ripping yarn, right? Like that feels like a decent story to try and live into.

**Bret** 1:31:55

That's a beauty of a point. And the interesting, I didn't know that point. And interesting, omega is a, an important term to Heather and me, we have used omega to signify something very closely related to that, which I assume is pure happenstance here. But anyway, I look forward to a conversation in which we can explore that question further. Because I feel like this is a pause and not an end of this conversation.

**Jamie Wheal** 1:32:28

Absolutely,

**Bret** 1:32:29

I have a commitment that I have to go to. So Jamie Weil, it has been an absolute pleasure. I highly you don't have a copy of your book there that you could hold up

**Jamie Wheal** 1:32:42

somewhere in 20 seconds I wrote.

**Bret** 1:32:47

The book is recapture the rapture, I highly recommend that people get a copy and read it carefully. It's a pleasure to read. It's beautifully written. In addition today, oh there it is. Look at that beautiful

**Jamie Wheal** 1:32:59

outside Nebula and everything and and recapture the rapture calm. This is where anybody can go. There's a whole open source toolkit, PDFs, all the models, all the infographics that kind of, you know, lots of useful resources that folks are interested in.

**Bret** 1:33:14

Wonderful. All right, Jamie. I look forward to our next conversation. And always Alright, thanks for joining us, everybody tuning in to the Dark Horse podcast. We'll see you next time.