## **Upstream Podcast**

## **How to be a good ancestor with Roman Krznaric**

## Published 3rd December 2024

## Transcribed by Flourish Economics

### **Speaker 1 -** 00:00

Collaboration with eco Gather. A collapse responsive Co-learning network that hosts free online weekly eco gatherings that foster conversation and build community around heterodox economics. Collective action and belonging in an enlivened world.

### **Speaker 1 -** 00:18

In this collaboration, eco Gather will be hosting gatherings to bring some upstream episodes to life. This is one of those episodes. Find out more, including the date and time for this eco gathering in the show. Notes or by going to Eco gatherings.

### **Speaker 1 -** 00:39

Hub Hub.

### **Speaker 2 -** 00:58

On our obsession with the present moment has been developing for more than 500 years in the Western world. You know, it goes back to the invention of the mechanical clock in the 14th 15th century, when time started being sliced up into hours.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:14

Then by 1700, most clocks had minute hands by 1800, they had second hands. You know, the clock became the key machine of the Industrial Revolution, speeding everything up, diminishing the future. Forcing people into the present moment. And not in a sort of an expansive Buddhist sense of interbeing or anything like that.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:33

But a sense of like, right here, right now. I'm going to you're going to work faster. I'm going to sell you more. You have to consume, you know, we have to produce all of that kind of obsessiveness with the seconds, with the nanosecond speed algorithms of the share markets as well.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:50

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### **Speaker 3 -** 01:52

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### **Speaker 4 -** 01:54

Upstream. A podcast of documentaries and conversations that invites you to unlearn.

### **Speaker 1 -** 01:59

Everything you thought you knew about economics. I'm Robert Raymond, and I'm Della Duncan.

### **Speaker 5 -** 02:05

It's been said that the shortest path to the future is always one.

### **Speaker 1 -** 02:10

Through the deepening of the past

### **Speaker 6 -** 02:12

But how do we balance the past, present and future when all three weigh so heavily on our consciousness and our social existence?

### **Speaker 1 -** 02:19

Perhaps one way to find a balance, or at least to distil these various webbed threads of temporality, might be to pose them as questions what can we learn from the past to help us in the present? And how can I be a good ancestor for the people of tomorrow?

### **Speaker 1 -** 02:36

These are the questions that inform and guide the recent work of our guest on today's episode. Roman Krznaric is a social philosopher. A research fellow at the centre for eudaimonia and Human Flourishing and the author of several books, including, most recently, history for tomorrow inspiration from the past for the Future of Humanity and The Good Ancestor.

### **Speaker 1 -** 03:01

How to Think Long Term in a Short Term World. In this episode, we explore. Lessons from the past and what it means to be a good ancestor. Today. We look at how our conceptions of time can expand or limit the way that we answer these questions.

### **Speaker 1 -** 03:18

We explore what it means to be on the radical fringes of a society. How to build and strengthen solidarity, and how to find meaning and community in a world that has grown increasingly isolating and alienating.

### **Speaker 1 -** 03:33

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### **Speaker 1 -** 03:54

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### **Speaker 1 -** 04:09

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### **Speaker 1 -** 04:27

And now here's Stella in conversation with Roman Krznaric All right, welcome

### **Speaker 5 -** 04:46

We love to start by having our guest introduce themselves. So would you mind introducing yourself our listeners

### **Speaker 2 -** 04:52

Sure. My name is Roman Krznaric. I'm a social philosopher. I write books about how ideas can change society, about their extraordinary power to reshape and transform. And I am a research fellow at Oxford University in a place called the centre for eudaimonia and Human Flourishing, and what else matters?

### **Speaker 2 -** 05:14

I founded a museum called the Empathy Museum on the Art of stepping into other people's Shoes, and I've recently written a new book as well. Called history for tomorrow inspiration from the past for the Future of Humanity.

### **Speaker 5 -** 05:25

Yes, thank you and yes indeed you are doing many different things and you are a prolific author and I'm curious what threads, themes or inquiries tie your books together and if you just to uplift so you mentioned history for tomorrow.

### **Speaker 5 -** 05:40

You're most recent book. You also have the good Ancestor. Um, carpe diem reimagined and a book called empathy. So what what weaves your work together? What are the common threads or inquiries and also what inquiry is most alive for you?

### **Speaker 5 -** 05:56

Right now? So if you take my last three books.

### **Speaker 2 -** 06:01

They are part of a loose trilogy. On humanity's relationship with time. I think we've got a problem with time and the way I think about it is that, you know. Back in the 1990s, the psychologist Goleman spoke about the need for emotional intelligence.

### **Speaker 2 -** 06:20

He wrote a book of that title, a sort of big bestselling book. And while I think emotional intelligence is important, it's something I've explored in a book of mine called empathy, I think now what we really need to cultivate, particularly, is temporal intelligence. In other words, the capacity to think or multiple time horizons forward and backwards long term, short term, linear, cyclical.

### **Speaker 2 -** 06:41

And so my last three books have been a kind of exploration of temporal intelligence. So the book called Carpe Diem, is about humanity's relationship with the present moment. And then my previous book, The Good Ancestor, is about long term thinking. It's about our relationship with the future.

### **Speaker 2 -** 06:57

And the new book history for tomorrow, is about relationship with the past. And so through those three books, I've been trying to unravel in a way, the kind of inheritance of time we have from, you know, the past a kind of inheritance that binds us to the tyranny of the present moment in many ways.

### **Speaker 2 -** 07:17

And so that I think, is a thread which runs through some of my work in terms of what's most alive for me right now. That is such a difficult topic. You know, when I finish writing a book, sometimes people say to me, so what are you going to write?

### **Speaker 2 -** 07:34

Next? Well, actually, I feel I have nothing more to say to be really honest. You know, I spend sort of 3 or 4 years working on each book normally, and I feel kind of spent in that sense. I don't feel hugely alive to new ideas.

### **Speaker 2 -** 07:50

What I do feel I think you know, particularly because we're talking here in the context of a recent US election is the sense of turbulence in the world. You know, in physics, they talk about the idea of turbulence as the last great question of classical physics.

### **Speaker 2 -** 08:07

You know, the way that the smoke from a candle will go up in a straight line, then suddenly it will become chaotic or water flows down a stream and it hits a rock and becomes turbulent, or an aeroplane suddenly hits an eddy, a pocket of air and boom, it drops and I kind of feel that's where we are now politically, socially, ecologically, you know, we've got the turbulence of the rise of far right populism.

### **Speaker 2 -** 08:34

You know, across Europe in the US. The destabilising aspects of that. We've got an ecological crisis which is here now, but is only set to get worse with its slow violence. Often it's fast violence. Looking at the floods in Valencia and Spain, just a week ago.

### **Speaker 2 -** 08:51

Risks from I and bioweapons rising food and energy prices. I mean, people often talk about this. Of course, in terms of some kind of poly crisis or meta crisis, depending on your your terminology. But that concept of turbulence really seems to come to my mind.

### **Speaker 2 -** 09:08

And in fact, that's kind of where I'm situated now. How about you? How are you? What's alive for you now? Where are you feeling? And thinking now

### **Speaker 5 -** 09:16

Yeah, well, certainly that turbulence that you're mentioning is very alive and yeah, I really also hear this. This interest or this focus on time and you're reminding me of two conversations we've had on time one with Jenni. Odell on Saving Time, her book on saving time, as well as Oliver Burkeman 4000 weeks.

### **Speaker 5 -** 09:38

So I really do. Find this reflection on time and how we view time and how we can invite other ways of seeing time to be helpful for this moment. So I do appreciate this focus on both lessons from the past for tomorrow, but also how to be a good ancestor and cultivating this sense of long term thinking.

### **Speaker 5 -** 09:58

So yeah, thank you for those and you know, in in history for tomorrow. You know, one, one way that I love u. Describe that book is that it is applied history or it's a, it's a invitation for looking at applied history and there's so many insights from that book like each chapter is really a different insight for us to weave into tomorrow.

### **Speaker 5 -** 10:22

But one of the ones that stood out to me was this idea of the radical flank and I think maybe that's alive. Because I feel that many of us view ourselves as being part of a radical flank, particularly in light of the US election.

### **Speaker 5 -** 10:37

And so, you know, what have been some of the radical flanks in the past, what are their uses or their importance throughout history and what could be their role in the future? Going forward? Particularly in light of, you know, systems change that is so needed?

### **Speaker 5 -** 10:52

Yeah. So that idea of applied history, I think is so important today when our politicians and policymakers seem so trapped in the tyranny of the present moment, or they cross their fingers and hope that new technologies will come to our civilisation.

### **Speaker 2 -** 11:06

Rescue. And I think, you know, you wouldn't drive a car without looking in the rear view mirror. There's something important about learning from history. But you know, typically when we think about learning lessons from history, we think about the warnings from the past captured in that famous aphorism that those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

### **Speaker 2 -** 11:25

And while I think it's important to learn from the cautionary tales of history, the colonialism, the interwar fascism, the totalitarianism of the 20th century, I think it's just as important to look at what's gone right as well as what's gone wrong. Moments where we have managed to act collectively to rise up to overcome crises and tackle injustices and one of the patterns you can see in history and by the way, I don't think there are any iron laws of history in a kind of a Marxist sense.

### **Speaker 2 -** 11:54

I don't think there are any universal principles which hold across space and time, but there are certain kinds of patterns which hold for certain periods of time or across certain geographies, and one of them is the idea that you mentioned there of the radical flank or radical flank theory, which was, you know, something that first emerged in the 1980s, really amongst social movement analysts when they started noticing a certain kind of pattern where often some of the most successful social movements.

### **Speaker 2 -** 12:23

Really had two parts to them. They had a moderate mainstream movement and then a radical movement alongside it. Whose role was really to help make function, to make the moderate movement look more acceptable or palatable to those in power. Pushing forward change.

### **Speaker 2 -** 12:38

And so the classic example was often given was from the US civil rights movement in the 1960s, where you had a kind of mainstream movement around Martin Luther King Jr. In the NAACP. And the sit ins and things like that. And then you had the Black Power movement, the radical flank.

### **Speaker 2 -** 12:53

The Malcolm X's, the Nation of Islam. The Black Panthers. Whose role really ended up as if you of doing a historical analysis. One of the key roles they played was to make that moderate movement more acceptable to those in power.

### **Speaker 2 -** 13:09

And Martin Luther King Jr very much. Recognised that himself. And again, of course, that's not an isolated example. You can go back to other moments in history which I do in my new book. In fact, the first chapter I go straight in there with the idea of the radical flank, and I look particularly, I think, a really important historical episode, which has to do with a uprising of enslaved people in Jamaica in 1831 on British owned sugar plantations.

### **Speaker 2 -** 13:36

Now, at that time, or say in the 1820s. Over 700,000 enslaved people were working on British owned sugar plantations in the Caribbean, and during that period many plantation owners and financiers made remarkably similar arguments to today's fossil fuel executives.

### **Speaker 2 -** 13:54

To defend their actions. So they admitted that slavery, like oil and gas production, was morally questionable. But they claimed that ending it too rapidly could lead to economic collapse, so they typically argued that slavery should be phased out. Gradually over many decades, which, of course is precisely the same kind of argument we hear today from the fossil energy industry.

### **Speaker 2 -** 14:15

And at that time, you know, the British abolition movement was organised in something called the society for Mitigating and gradually abolishing the State of Slavery. I mean, in the name, said, it's all it's gradualist nature was all about lobbying politicians and publishing pamphlets.

### **Speaker 2 -** 14:32

And it was making little headway. But the turning point came in 1831, in an act of disruption, which sent shock waves through Britain, was which was the Jamaica slave Revolt. When over 20,000 enslaved workers rose up in rebellion in Jamaica. They set fire to more than 200 plantations.

### **Speaker 2 -** 14:48

Now the revolt was brutally crushed, but it sent a wave of panic. Through the British establishment, who concluded that if they didn't grant emancipation, then the whole colony. Might be lost and there are many, many studies which show how the revolt. Tipped the scales in favour of abolition, leading to the slavery Abolition Act of 1833, which was by no means perfect.

### **Speaker 2 -** 15:09

It included huge reparations for the plantation owners, for example, or a system of apprenticeship, which meant that enslaved people still had to keep working. Basically, for free. For many years. But it was a significant shift, and that revolt. Really tipped the scales.

### **Speaker 2 -** 15:25

You know, without that radical flank movement, it could have taken decades longer for abolition to enter the statute books. And I think that kind of disruptive radical flank movement can help us think today about, for example, the global ecological movements, the movements like extinction Rebellion, the Just Stop Oil, the direct action, radical movements which are often, of course, people are very, very quick to criticise them.

### **Speaker 2 -** 15:48

But you know. Historically they are part of long traditions of successful, disruptive movements. Going back to the Jamaica rebels, to the suffragettes, to Indian independence movement, to the US civil rights activists whose actions have helped amplify existing crises and catapulted them onto the political agenda.

### **Speaker 2 -** 16:06

And of course, the tragedy is that while disruptive figures from the past like Emmeline Pankhurst, the great British suffragette, and others. Are celebrated often in our children's school history. Textbooks, including the textbooks of my school kids who are just turned 16.

### **Speaker 2 -** 16:22

You know, their modern equivalent in today's you know, radical flank movements are demonised by the press and criminalised by the police in fact, I just sent a copy of my new book, history for tomorrow, to a guy called Roger Hallam who's one of the founders of Extinction Rebellion, who's been prison for five years for being on a zoom call for organising, planning to organise a just Stop Oil road protest or road blockage.

### **Speaker 2 -** 16:46

And so I think, you know, coming to where we are today. One might still say, are those radical flank movements? I hear people saying this all the time. Those radical flank movements. You know, they get a lot of press, but they're putting off more people than they're turning on to climate action. But in fact, if you look at the evidence and in fact, there's a recent paper that came out a couple of weeks ago in a journal called nature Sustainability, very kind of mainstream academic journal, which showed how during a Just Stop Oil series of direct action protests.

### **Speaker 2 -** 17:15

Although most people in the British population was a British study, most people were opposed to their actions of road blockages and things actually, it converted over a million people to put the environment. Higher up there. Agenda and to support mainstream organisations like friends of the Earth.

### **Speaker 2 -** 17:33

So it didn't convert people to becoming radical street protesters necessarily. But it shifted the discussion and people's priorities. And that's what the radical flank theory is all about. So it seems to be working

### **Speaker 5 -** 17:48

Yes. And you're reminding me we interviewed Sam Conniff on how to be pirate and how to be more pirate, and he also spoke to the statues. Right. The statues in just like you said about the people in history books are typically those of the radical flank, right?

### **Speaker 5 -** 18:03

Those who are celebrated later on and as well as when I was reading your book, it was like one of those moments where synchronicity, reading your book and then somewhere else, I first heard of the Overton Window like I had never heard of it, and then saw it twice within the span of a week. And so what that told me was not just is it that the radical flank kind of makes the more mainstream side of the movement more acceptable?

### **Speaker 5 -** 18:29

But it can also shift the political window. Even. And of course, after the US election. Like that is so needed right. For us to really shift. And I do also think about discourse on Palestine and radical flank, you know, articulation.

### **Speaker 5 -** 18:44

There too. And again. What that's doing hopefully for the Overton window. So yeah, thank you for for sharing about radical flank. Theory and another piece, another question that you wove in the new book around applied history was you ask, how was it that some nations have survived collapse and change and you alluded to this in you were sharing about your books, but I think that's such an important question right now, particularly as you mentioned, we are in a time of turbulence.

### **Speaker 5 -** 19:14

So what is it that you learned? Looking back in history about how is it that some nations survived other turbulent moments? That's the big question

### **Speaker 2 -** 19:24

That's why I put it at the end of the book. Um, you know, to me, when I think about that question, I think of a kind of phrasing that is raised by a systems analyst called Nate Hagens. He asked the question of what's going to make us bend rather than break as a civilisation, because I think the problems we face are so acute.

### **Speaker 2 -** 19:45

The turbulence is so great that the real question is, you know, how are we going to make our way through this century? At least? How are we going to bend? You know, ideally transform. But avoid the breakdown. The climate breakdown, the other societal breakdowns, more generally and, you know, standing back and looking at the historical picture, it seems to me that there are three fundamental elements required for a society or a civilisation to survive.

### **Speaker 2 -** 20:15

And maybe even thrive in the long term. One of them concerns a concept called asabiyyah. Now, asabiyyah is an Arabic term which I first came across in the Great 14th century. Islamic historian Ibn Khaldun's writings.

### **Speaker 2 -** 20:31

He wrote a book called The Muqaddimah, which was one of the first great treatises of history. He wrote it in a crumbling castle in today's West Algeria, in the 1370s, and in that book the word asabiyyah appears over 500 times, and it's meaning in Arabic is collective solidarity or group feeling.

### **Speaker 2 -** 20:50

And he believed that what makes civilisations. Develop and thrive is strong. Asabiyyah kind of social trust, a social glue and societies tend to decline when that asabiyyah is eroded for example by wealth inequalities, which might create conflicts or schisms within a society.

### **Speaker 2 -** 21:09

And so. Asabiyyah is very fundamental and you can see it's importance for example, you know, pick up, for example, a book like Rebecca Solnit's brilliant book called A Paradise Built in Hell. What happens in societies when things get bad? When a hurricane hits or a San Francisco earthquake comes?

### **Speaker 2 -** 21:26

Well, often it's people. Organising on the streets themselves. That asabiyyah in practice when they set up a soup kitchen on the streets of San Francisco in 1906, you know, that kind of idea. So I think that's one of the key elements for a society that survives and thrives building that asabiyya and that is a major task in an era of huge social and political polarisations, which, of course, have been, you know, get exacerbated by digital culture and the algorithms which split people into those camps of pro-immigrant, anti-immigrant, pro-Trump, anti-Trump climate change denier, climate change activists, pro-abortion, anti-abortion.

### **Speaker 2 -** 22:05

And so on. So that's one area that we need to think about. Asabiyya. It's a kind of pillar of civilizational survival. The second one is what I think of as biophilia, which is a term from the evolutionary biologist. E.O. Wilson, which is about, you know, literally means, you know, the love of nature.

### **Speaker 2 -** 22:23

But, you know, I think in more profound sense, it's about our deep interconnection with the living world. The fact that, as I speak to you now. Outside the window over the top of my screen, there are two big ash trees. I know those ash trees.

### **Speaker 2 -** 22:39

Provide enough oxygen for eight human beings. In other words, they are my external lungs. You know that my body in some profound sense, myself, does not end with my my outer skin and my bones.

### **Speaker 2 -** 22:54

It's kind of out there, but it's very hard to grasp that of course, it's something that's grasped very much in many indigenous cultures. You know, the idea that, you know, the Earth is not a resource, but a relative or captured in concepts like seventh generation decision making and things like that. Found, you know, around the world in indigenous communities.

### **Speaker 2 -** 23:11

So clearly that kind of interdependence with the living world is fundamental, which someone like Ibn Khaldun was not thinking about. You know, he was much more focussed on the social. He was more focussed on, let's say, intra species solidarity. Than interspecies solidarity.

### **Speaker 2 -** 23:27

So those are two pillars. And then the third thing, a society needs, I think, is a capacity to respond effectively to a crisis. In other words, you need that social glue. You need that sort of connection with the living world.

### **Speaker 2 -** 23:42

But when s\*\*\* happens, you know, when the hurricanes come, when the waters rise, when the you know, any kind of disruption happens, we need to be able to respond. A financial collapse and in my book, I talk about kind of a model of how change happens, which I call the disruption Nexus, which is a triangular model of change and just to say something very briefly about it.

### **Speaker 2 -** 24:03

Basically, you know, governments tend not to undertake rapid and transformative change unless there's something very extreme happens, like a war or a pandemic. You know, where they then might stop the planes flying or something like that, or the Second World War in the US, you know, they stopped the production of private cars and had had fuel rationing.

### **Speaker 2 -** 24:21

But outside those times, you know, what would it take to get governments to actually take the action we need? On the ecological crisis? Well, the disruption nexus offers a clue to that. You need three things to happen. One, you need some kind of crisis. Like a melting ice sheet or a financial collapse.

### **Speaker 2 -** 24:37

But that normally isn't by itself enough. The second thing you need are the disruptive movements, which we've spoken about a bit, about those movements which break the rules. Sometimes break the law to catapult the issues onto the political agenda, to shift the Overton Window and the third thing you need are the new ideas or visionary ideas to replace the old system.

### **Speaker 2 -** 25:00

You know, I don't quote Milton Friedman very often, but he did rather usefully, once say that a, you know, a crisis creates opportunities for change. And that the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. So we might think of the 2008 financial crash and say, right they had one corner of the disruption, triangle, the the crash itself.

### **Speaker 2 -** 25:18

You had the second corner, the movements, the occupy movement. But what was maybe missing were the models, the new economic models prevalent enough in society. So what we ended up getting was a bailing out the old system. You know None of the bankers ended up in jail.

### **Speaker 2 -** 25:34

You know, we've still got that financial system at that time, I don't think we had things like doughnut economics or De-growth or modern Monetary theory or some of the more alternative models, which are becoming increasingly talked about, ready at hand. So that would be my quick sketch of for civilizational survival.

### **Speaker 2 -** 25:52

And I let me add one other thing. I think, you know, the prepping mentality is not going to get us there. You know, human beings are social animals. You know, buckling up and hunkering down and pulling up the drawbridge and having your gun by your side is not going to solve ensure you know, multigenerational survival.

### **Speaker 2 -** 26:09

That's not how humans have operated. And survived. Through history. We are interdependent. Co-operators and yet, as I'm thinking, that's the the theme of so many movies, right?

### **Speaker 5 -** 26:20

The kind of lone person out in the in the wasteland kind of fending for themselves. So yeah, I definitely hear you and I love these. These points that you're making around how we survive civilizational turbulence and, you know, for the first one, I do think of this idea that we are not homo economicus, right?

### **Speaker 5 -** 26:40

As mainstream economics would have us believe we do have the capacity to be rational, self-interested beings. And often are socialised that way, including by mainstream economic thinking. But we also have the capacity to be kind, interconnected, solidaristic, cooperative and yeah, beautiful.

### **Speaker 5 -** 26:56

Example of how there are times in history where there is disaster capitalism. But there's also that disaster collectivism and it's very much present

### **Speaker 2 -** 27:04

That's a great way of putting it, actually a kind of disaster. Collectivism, you know. Fantastic. Yeah

### **Speaker 5 -** 27:09

And then the biophilia piece I really hear that to. Like, just speaks to. Yea. Being in relationship with the more than human world that care that that that sense of moving from the egoic isolated rugged individual self to more of an ecological self. Really speaks to that, that point.

### **Speaker 5 -** 27:26

And then I do love also this idea of the, the capacity to bend and not break and really speaks to the need for our prefigurative politics. Now, our mutual aid, our getting to know our neighbours for that time of collapse. That we are more resilient and more resourced when it does happen.

### **Speaker 5 -** 27:45

And I also love that idea of the power of visioning and use of the moral imagination, which I think for many authors and folks, it has become more alive, more recently to do this visioning and to cultivate these alternative worldviews and visions of systems that could be more equitable, sustainable and just so thank you so much for weaving all of that in.

### **Speaker 5 -** 28:08

And you know, one of the other ways that you speak about time when you move into the future is in your Ted talk, you shared the future has been colonised. The future is treated like a distant colonial outpost where we can freely dump Ecological damage and technological risk without any care or concern to the great Silent majority.

### **Speaker 5 -** 28:29

To that of future generations. So tell us more about this idea of the colonisation of the future, and what does it mean? Or what would it look like to decolonise the future? Yeah, so I thought a long time about that metaphor that idea of colonising the future, because of course, you know, the way we think about colonising and decolonising is very much connected with, with history and, you know, partly maybe because I come from I grew up in Australia.

### **Speaker 2 -** 28:59

You know, and Australia. You know, when it was colonised by Britain in the 18th and 19th century, the British invaders. Had a legal doctrine. Now known as terra nullius, which is the idea that there was nobody there in Australia when they arrived or the continent.

### **Speaker 2 -** 29:17

Now known as Australia. But of course, there was the indigenous population and the struggles of Australia's, you know, indigenous Australians goes on. Australia's First Nations people that land struggles for example. But as well as the continent, having been seen as a terra nullius, I think we are now also in an era of tempus nullius where the future is a kind of an empty time.

### **Speaker 2 -** 29:41

This sense that there's nobody there. Yet there are the millions, the billions of people who will inhabit the future and the way I think about this is that humankind. Particularly the wealthy countries of the global north, have a kind of colonial attitude to the future in in the sense that they this is where we dump much of our ecological degradation and our technological risks.

### **Speaker 2 -** 30:03

And I think the colonial metaphor works. Reasonably well as well, because the impacts of what we do. You know, disproportionately affect the global South, marginalised communities. Who gets hit first by the ecological crisis. But those who are.

### **Speaker 2 -** 30:20

Don't have access to water, you know, who are being hit by don't have the infrastructure to support themselves through the turbulence. So that then raises the question if we've colonised the future, what does it mean to decolonise the future? Partly, I think that's a kind of a mental shift.

### **Speaker 2 -** 30:37

It's about recognising that our moral responsibility extends not just across space, but through time. Right. And that the lives of future people and the world they live in are intimately connected with our own.

### **Speaker 2 -** 30:55

Of course, as we've already mentioned, you know, many indigenous cultures. Do have deep philosophies connecting the present to the future, like, you know, certain ideas of ecological stewardship or like seventh generation decision making, which I mentioned before, you know, when it comes to cultures of the global north, how do we make that that?

### **Speaker 2 -** 31:14

Leap or that shift towards decolonising? I mean, I think there are ways to do. Institutionally. So, you know, across the US, for example, there are, you know. Legal struggles to give rights to future people. You know, the organisation our children's Trust, a public interest law firm, has, you know, brought a series of cases at the state and federal level on behalf of young people who are campaigning for the right to a clean environment and healthy environment, safe climate for both current and future generations.

### **Speaker 2 -** 31:42

I think that's one way. That's the legal a legal way or another legal way of course, is giving rights to the living world itself. Like the Wanganui River in Aotearoa New Zealand has been giving the same rights as a person, just like corporations were given rights in the US and the late 19th century.

### **Speaker 2 -** 31:58

So there are those kind of roots. I think there are the kind of on the ground, on the street kind of roots as well. Like the radical flank. Movements, the ecological direct Action organisations. It's another way to decolonise fusion.

### **Speaker 2 -** 32:13

I think a third fundamental thing is, you know, something that, you know, you've worked on is challenging the economic paradigm at the deepest level. The kind of hyper short termism of neoliberal capitalism. How do we move to post-growth post-capitalist economies? How do we spread things like, you know, the idea of a doughnut?

### **Speaker 2 -** 32:32

Economy, which is about balance, rather than growth, about staying within a safe and just space for humanity, about not going outside the ecological ceiling while bringing people above a basic foundation of social justice and economic justice.

### **Speaker 2 -** 32:49

So I think there are many roles for many different kinds of people. I think in a decolonisation of the future, but it's so deep in us in a way, because our obsession with the present moment has been developing for more than 500 years in the Western world, you know, it goes back to the invention of the mechanical clock in the 14th, 15th century, when time started being sliced up into hours.

### **Speaker 2 -** 33:14

Then by 1700, most clocks had minute hands by 1800, they had second hands. You know, the clock became the key machine of the Industrial Revolution, speeding everything up, diminishing the future, forcing people into the present moment. And not in a of a expansive Buddhist sense of interbeing or anything like that.

### **Speaker 2 -** 33:32

But a sense of like right here, right now. I'm going to you're going to work faster. I'm going to sell you more. You have to consume, you know, we have to produce all of that kind of obsessiveness with the seconds, with the nanosecond speed algorithms of the share markets as well.

### **Speaker 2 -** 33:50

Yeah. And let's let's dive deeper into that hyper short termism and what you described as what's taken place over the last 500 years.

### **Speaker 5 -** 33:58

And you've also described it as the tyranny of the now. And also marshmallow. Thinking. So I'm wondering if you can share, you know, what is the problem with short termism and what are some examples for us to invite in. So that maybe we can start to notice when we are engaged with hyper short termism and also to see it in maybe our politicians or leaders.

### **Speaker 5 -** 34:22

How do we recognise it? Yeah.

### **Speaker 2 -** 34:24

So I mean that idea of the tyranny. The now I think we all kind of get it right. We know that our politicians can barely see. Beyond the next election or the latest tweet or opinion poll that businesses can't see past the quarterly report that nations sit around in conference table's.

### **Speaker 2 -** 34:40

Focussed on their near-term interests. While the planet burns and species disappear, and of course, as individuals, we're looking at our phone and clicking the Buy Now button and we're caught in so many short term systems, not just that inheritance of of the clock. But, you know, the way our representative democracy works, the kind of cycles that it works on the way our 24 over seven.

### **Speaker 2 -** 34:59

Media works the way digital culture works. I mean, the way markets work, you know, there's so many drivers bringing us towards the here and now. It's not just our phones. I think is the main, main point. I would make. Um, and this also relates to the way the human brain functions.

### **Speaker 2 -** 35:18

I think of us as having a both a marshmallow brain and an acorn brain. So the marshmallow brain is the part of our neuroanatomy which focuses on immediate rewards and instant gratification. And it's named after that famous marshmallow test from the 1960s, when kids were had a, you know, the psychology test when kids had a marshmallow put in front of them.

### **Speaker 2 -** 35:38

And if they could resist eating it for 15 minutes, they were rewarded with a second marshmallow. And lo and behold, majority of kids couldn't resist. And snatch the snack. But that's not the whole story of who we are. You know, as you were saying earlier about, you know, the challenges to the idea of rational economic man or self-interest or our short termism.

### **Speaker 2 -** 35:55

We are so much more. We are also acorn brain thinkers in our dorsolateral prefrontal cortex. You know, at the front of our front of our brains. We we've got a neural capacity for long term thinking and planning and strategizing. So you know, many creatures.

### **Speaker 2 -** 36:11

Are the animals. Do think ahead a little bit. So a chimpanzee might get a steak strip off the leaves and turn it into a stick to put into a termite hole. But they'll never make a dozen of those tools. And put them aside for next week. But thats what human beings do. We're actually pretty good at that. There's always a struggle between the marshmallow and the acorn.

### **Speaker 2 -** 36:29

You know? Do we party today or save for our pensions for tomorrow? Do we upgrade to the latest iPhone or plant a seed in the ground for posterity? Do we plant that Acorn so future generations can bask in the shade, but actually, if you look through human history, there are so many examples of a capacity for long term thinking and planning.

### **Speaker 2 -** 36:48

I mean, one idea is the concept of cathedral thinking, which obviously links to those medieval cathedral builders who had maybe be laying the foundation stones, knowing that building wouldn't be finished within their lifetimes. I don't think we need any more cathedrals, really, but we need to build the ecological cathedrals.

### **Speaker 2 -** 37:05

We need those long term projects. I mean, there's all sorts, you know, out there. Think of the Svalbard. Global Seed Vault collecting millions of seeds in an indestructible rock. Bunker. That's designed to last for a thousand years, a kind of botanical Noah's Ark.

### **Speaker 2 -** 37:20

You know, that's part of the kind of long term thinking that we need. You can see it in all sorts of other things as well, which don't necessarily look long term to start with. But actually have a long term aspect to them. So think of the rise of the citizens Assembly movement, particularly across Europe and in other parts of the world.

### **Speaker 2 -** 37:38

There's been a revival of an ancient idea of a form of direct democracy, where people are randomly chosen by lot like we do for jury service to discuss political issues. A famous one happened in Ireland in 2017.

### **Speaker 2 -** 37:53

A citizen's assembly where a hundred citizens were chosen by random, but controlling for geography and and age and ethnic background. And so on to discuss the issue of abortion. And they famously, after meeting for over several months and we on weekends and things they famously recommended that there should be a referendum to change the Constitution, to allow abortion, which past and, you know, in since 2017.

### **Speaker 2 -** 38:17

There have been hundreds of citizens assemblies across Europe, particularly on climate and many other issues. And one of the really interesting things about them is that they tend to take a longer view than your regular politicians. They are a kind of decolonising force.

### **Speaker 2 -** 38:34

I think the rise of the citizen Assembly movement is one of the most exciting shifts in the history of democracy since the extension of the franchise to women, a hundred years ago. Their not perfect by any means, but they're one of the political mechanisms we need because they think you know, often, I guess with a lot of the people I hang out with, you know, a lot of whom are in the kind of ecological justice world and the social justice.

### **Speaker 2 -** 38:58

World. I often feel that there's a lack of focus on the kind of political mechanisms or redesigns that we need, and maybe that's because my background I used to be a political scientist, so I used to teach, you know, in, in universities, Democratic. Theory and history and practice and stuff like this.

### **Speaker 2 -** 39:14

And so I always get a little bit frustrated when people are talking about the, you know, I don't know. Carbon emission target reductions. And things like that without thinking about, well, bloody hell, you need to sort out your political system as well.

### **Speaker 2 -** 39:29

You're listening to an upstream conversation with Roman Krznaric

### **Speaker 1 -** 39:34

We'll be right back. If we don't know better.

### **Speaker 6 -** 40:05

The we don't know. Better. Well, then my parents know. Better. No, but they tried Cause we all

### **Speaker 7 -** 40:31

The sense of law sometimes, like I

### **Speaker 6 -** 40:34

Need a silent mind. In a consumer flood. And if I'm lucky. Maybe a glass of wine. And if I'm lucky, maybe a hand next to my.

### **Speaker 6 -** 40:52

Nose. We don't Better. No. What? We try To Forget.

### **Speaker 6 -** 41:33

Lucky. Maybe you're simple life. If I get lucky. Maybe some free time. No. If we don't Better if we don't know Better.

### **Speaker 6 -** 42:00

But in my parents. Parents know better. Better. No, but they try That was seed of a seed by Hayley Hendrix.

### **Speaker 1 -** 42:21

Now back to our conversation with Roman Krznaric. You know, I want to go back to you mentioned marshmallow thinking and.

### **Speaker 5 -** 42:30

Acorn thinking, but I'm wondering if there's a third, which is that more enlightened? You called it expansive. You know, Buddhist sense of being in the present moment. And I say this because I when I was reading that part in your book, I thought of Ram Dass book Be Here Now.

### **Speaker 5 -** 42:48

I thought of this Buddhist phrase when one eye is on the goal, there is only one eye left to follow the path which I reflect on a lot as someone who can be actually very future oriented. And so I lose sight of the enjoyment and the kind of savouring the present moment.

### **Speaker 5 -** 43:06

And then I also thought of Satish Kumar, founder of Schumacher College, who said, you know, we should be 80% in the present 15% in the future. And 5% in the past. So I'm just curious if there's any maybe third invitation of this present that is more expansive and a be here now sense, or how do you negotiate or balance that with marshmallow thinking and acorn thinking?

### **Speaker 5 -** 43:30

Yeah.

### **Speaker 2 -** 43:31

So I'm very much interested in, for example, Buddhist concepts of the now, I was spent a week with my family, my my teenage kids at a Buddhist meditation retreat. A few months ago. A place called Plum Village in the south of France, and I was talking to one of the monks there about the concept of the present moment.

### **Speaker 2 -** 43:52

And one of the things I was saying was a kind of frustration. I often feel with a lot of not, not a lot. Let's say some people who talk about the importance of being in the present moment, where there's a kind of a dismissal of the future and the past.

### **Speaker 2 -** 44:11

This sort of sense actually, particularly in the writings of Eckhart Tolle for example, in the his book The Power of Now, a kind of almost a hatred of the future and the past, you know, the future is all creating anxiety and the past is just, you know, full of all our terrible inheritances and more anxieties back there.

### **Speaker 2 -** 44:28

So we have to be in the present moment and that's the only thing that matters. I kind of like Satish Kumar, who I, you know, I've met, I like the idea of let's be a bit more open about this. Let's be a bit in the future, a bit in the past. So actually when I was talking to this particular Buddhist monk, he was saying, well, you know, in or at least as he was explaining a certain concept of time out of the, the thinking of Han, the Vietnamese Zen monk.

### **Speaker 2 -** 44:52

Who they kind of follow it. Plum village. You know, being in the present moment and having a kind of an infinite sense of present, that kind of breaks down past and future doesn't mean you don't care about the past or future. You know, the Buddhist tradition itself or the people at Plum Village themselves are thinking about how they respond to the way the world is changing and might change in the future.

### **Speaker 2 -** 45:13

It's not like they're not thinking about the future. It's not like they're not thinking about the past, about the mistakes they may have made or their inheritances that they need to to honour. I think it's about having a kind of equanimity. A kind of capacity to step back from it a little bit and almost he take the view from the mountain and to see the present, past and future kind of flowing below you in some way.

### **Speaker 2 -** 45:37

I think maybe that's the third. Eye view or another way of of doing it. So I don't think that in a sense, a deep sense of being in the present isn't, of course, about clicking the buy Now button or swiping on your phone. It's about recognising that, you know, on some deep level that the whole past is contained in the present moment and you know, this moment will shape so many possible futures.

### **Speaker 2 -** 46:04

Yeah.

### **Speaker 5 -** 46:04

Thank you. And another maybe we could call it shadow side or question that came up as, as I was reading, was this tension between long term planning. But organising for the here and now at the same time and, you know, just this idea of there are a lot of people who are suffering currently and how do we not abandon them to then move towards future thinking and future planning?

### **Speaker 5 -** 46:30

So how do we balance the desire to think long term, while also developing kind of the concrete analysis and the forms of organisation and support and solidarity for those who are really suffering under concrete material conditions today. So I don't know what are what are the ways that you've found in your writing and your research that people have negotiated this balance

### **Speaker 2 -** 46:51

Yeah, I certainly am well aware and care about the suffering of people in the present moment, whether those who are subject to a genocide or in civil wars or facing droughts or imprisoned, tortured by authoritarian regimes.

### **Speaker 2 -** 47:10

All of these things are the there's the fierce urgency of the now. Of course, as Martin Luther King Jr. Spoke about, it, I don't necessarily think there's a tension or contradiction. Necessarily with recognising that. And thinking about the future.

### **Speaker 2 -** 47:28

In fact, actually, when I was writing my book, The Good Ancestor, I sent a copy of it. A draft to a friend of mine who, at the time was the chief executive of a very big development organisation called Save the Children, which works around the world and at first he said, oh, I don't like your book.

### **Speaker 2 -** 47:44

Roman, because it's all you know, you know, there is 150 million children dying of malnutrition right now and you're talking about the future and we had a kind of interesting conversation about that. But later, save the Children ended up writing a report all about being a good ancestor. And the general thrust of it was that if we care about the lives of those children, actually one of the things we need to do is not just have the emergency response, but do you know, deep investment in education and health care?

### **Speaker 2 -** 48:13

Lots of kind of long term thinking and planning to build the resilience for for young people to survive in difficult times. And I think another way of thinking about this is that there are so many confluences between doing things for the present and the future.

### **Speaker 2 -** 48:29

You know? So in Wales, for example, there is a public position called the future generations. Commissioner, who's job is to look at the impact of public policy. Up to 30 years ahead. I think it'd be quite good if many countries had future generations. Commissions or commissioners and speaking to the commissioner.

### **Speaker 2 -** 48:45

You know, they've you know, said to me, well, the first thing we try and do is do things which help both the present and the future. So things like obvious things like green energy shifts, cheap renewable public transport. Helps people today. Helps people tomorrow. So we need to be thinking about those things.

### **Speaker 2 -** 49:00

And I think one of the insights I had on this issue, and of course, let me just also say there are always going to be tensions between due, you know, deal with an emergency. Now, if you have a limited budget and do long term investment in a tidal power scheme or something like that, of course that's just what politics is to me.

### **Speaker 2 -** 49:18

What's important is to bring the voice of the future into our current debates. So they are not ignored and sidelined because never in history. Have our actions had such potentially damaging impacts on future people and the world they live in. But one of the things that gave me real insight was the writings of the great biomimicry thinker and forestry.

### **Speaker 2 -** 49:38

Expert, Janine Benyus, and I remember talking to her. In fact. Listening to one of her talks, I asked her in fact, I talked about exactly this. I asked this exact question. The one that you've just asked me, and she said, well, if you're thinking about how she's very interested in what can we learn from nature's 3.8 billion years of research and development to help us today?

### **Speaker 2 -** 49:59

And she said, well, if you think about most other creatures, how do they survive for the long term? 10,000 generations from now, especially when they're not going to be around 10,000 generations from now? What do they do? Well, what they do is they take care of the place which will take care of their offspring.

### **Speaker 2 -** 50:19

In other words, they don't foul the nest. Which is the opposite of what? Human beings have been doing. You know, at least for the last century, with the great acceleration we are experts at fouling the nest. So in some level of particularly around the ecological issues.

### **Speaker 2 -** 50:35

To think long term is to be here now. To fall in love with rivers and mountains and ice sheets and savannahs. So I think there's a necessary presentism. And let me just say, one other thing. One of the things I think is really interesting and important is that many of those people who are facing deprivation right now of the most acute kinds are also thinking about the future as well.

### **Speaker 2 -** 51:03

So think about this is something actually my father pointed out to me, who was a refugee from Poland to Australia after the Second World War. He said, you know, think about people who are in the lifeboats crossing from the Mediterranean, from North Africa. You know, to southern Europe.

### **Speaker 2 -** 51:19

What are they doing? They are risking their lives right now for their children. Basically, a lot of them for their futures. They are, of course, immersed in extreme deprivations and violence of the present moment. But they are also thinking about a longer term survival.

### **Speaker 2 -** 51:38

And so we all, I think, have to be thinking about the present and the future and their relationship with each other. But as I said, I think ultimately it's about bringing the voice of the future into the room. I don't know what do you think? Yeah.

### **Speaker 5 -** 51:52

No, I do love that idea of not spoiling the nest and it reminds me of this quote and I don't remember who said it, but something like live as if you're going to live in a place for your whole life. Like, I've really taken that on where if I'm somewhere short term, like, you know, there for a little bit or, you know, a school, whatever, if you just invite that thinking of what if I was going to be here the rest of my life, then you do plant the trees.

### **Speaker 5 -** 52:17

You actually do get to know your neighbours, you start to get involved in the local cultural activities. You know? So I do love that sense of that idea, that being here now. Like you said, is connected to the past and the present.

### **Speaker 5 -** 52:32

The being here now, the tyranny of now. Or the marshmallow. Thinking when I feel into that, it's very cut off from the body. It's very impulsive. Right. And maybe hedonic, whereas Eudaimonic would bring in that deeper sense of the now and that relates to this word.

### **Speaker 5 -** 52:51

You use deep time. And I love that that idea of what is deep time. Right. And it makes time not as linear, but deep right. And expansive. So, you know, the now can be expansive to include the past and the future. And, you know, you brought up a few ways that we can bring in the other the voices of the future.

### **Speaker 5 -** 53:13

And I want to move to those examples now because there's some there's some beautiful experiences of deep time that we can cultivate One of them that I actually facilitate and have participated in is from Joanna macy. Ecojustice, British philosopher and activist who invites a deep time ritual called the Seventh Generation.

### **Speaker 5 -** 53:32

Inspired by indigenous seventh generation. Thinking as you mentioned, where you invite two people sitting across from one another one. Person to use their moral imagination to imagine themselves as a present being. And the other to imagine themselves as a being of the seventh generation from now and then, you meet in a point beyond space and time, where the two can have this conversation with one another, and there's a series of questions that you explore together.

### **Speaker 5 -** 53:59

And at the end, the seventh generation being gives the present day being kind of there. Their marching orders or their words of encouragement as they're about to go back into 2024. And every time I lead it, every time I participate in it is such a powerful experience.

### **Speaker 5 -** 54:16

And another experience of deep time. Stefan Harding. Doctor Stefan Harding, who just passed away, um, he created or developed the deep time. Walk. So this idea of our deep time throughout history, the the history of our whole planet.

### **Speaker 5 -** 54:32

But also where humans fit into that and it's just beautiful experience. And now it's actually an app that you can listen to, even though he's passed away. But that's another experience of deep time that we can cultivate. And another example that you offered in the book was from Japan, where folks are part of political decision making, um, embodying that voice of the future being so please tell us that example, because I found that really insightful and particularly what those future being people recommended politically.

### **Speaker 5 -** 55:04

Yeah.

### **Speaker 2 -** 55:04

So I mean, like you, I've you know, I've been on some Joanna macy. Workshops and dubbed that seventh generation imagining that journey. And it is very powerful. And I've also done the deep time walk and the app, and I do like you recommend it. I mean, there's so many ways I think of trying to connect with deep time.

### **Speaker 2 -** 55:23

I actually think its extremely difficult to do so in general to to get that sense, especially that great. That sense of the 13.8 billion years of, you know. Life. Of the age of the universe. In fact, I once did a workshop which was this was also very powerful, where we were invited to go to the top of a hill.

### **Speaker 2 -** 55:44

A group of about 20 of us, and there was a spiral. Rope, sort of laid out, and each of us was given a little envelope and inside of it was a word. My word was the big Bang. Somebody else had birth of the dinosaurs. Someone else said, had the first cell and we were all moments in the long history of the universe, and we had to go and stand in our particular point in the in that spiral.

### **Speaker 2 -** 56:07

So I was right in the middle as the big Bang and then everybody else was spread around at different points. Most people were bunched up in the last couple of hundred million years, you know, with the rise of, you know, human beings and things like that. Um, and then we had to do a piece of kind of automatic writing. You know, just for a few minutes of how we felt as being the big Bang.

### **Speaker 2 -** 56:26

Or being the first cell. And we read them out kind of in order. And some people were really serious, some people were very funny. But it was very, very profound. And and I think it's something about the embodiment of, of these kinds of ideas, which are so important.

### **Speaker 2 -** 56:43

I mean, I can look at a geological graphic of the Jurassic and the Cretaceous and all these kind of things. I feel pretty much nothing. You know, um, and, you know, maybe that's an inadequacy on my part, but there's something about just being told about the lengths of time which doesn't really do it for me.

### **Speaker 2 -** 57:03

And I think for most people. Though, I do know geologists who really feel that, you know, not just seven generations, but 7 million generations or, you know, or cosmologists who who sort of have a sense of what might happen over the next billion years or 5 billion years.

### **Speaker 2 -** 57:22

I don't I don't feel it. I think it's important for most people to try and embody our investigations of deep time on a kind of human level within a sort of something which is within a few generations.

### **Speaker 2 -** 57:38

Span, like seven generations, even seven generations. I think people find hard to really think exactly seven generations. Not about that. It's about sort of something that you might feel connected to in the past or future. So that's why I'm kind of interested in a mechanism that they have in Japan.

### **Speaker 2 -** 57:53

A movement called Future Design, which is a kind of local government or local community. Decision making. Methodology influenced by the idea of seventh generation decision making from native American peoples and what they do is they invite local people to discuss and draw up plans of a town or city where they live, and they typically divide them into two groups.

### **Speaker 2 -** 58:15

Half are told they are representatives from the present day and the other half are given these kind of ceremonial kimono. Like robes to wear and told to imagine themselves as residents from 2060. So only a generation or two away. But even that is leap.

### **Speaker 2 -** 58:32

It turns out that those who imagine themselves being in the shoes of people from 2060 systematically advocate far more transformative plans for their towns and cities where their. Whether they're talking about climate or I or dealing with issues around an ageing population, they'll they will they've advocated for higher paying, higher taxes, higher water bills, so that they invest in the water infrastructure that their children and grandchildren might enjoy.

### **Speaker 2 -** 58:56

And in a sense, here. Yeah, you don't need to think a thousand years from now to do something like that. You know, one of the ways I think about it, if you think about one person or think about yourself, if you knew your grandparents, you know, think about the date, your grandmother was maybe born.

### **Speaker 2 -** 59:11

And if you have children or might have children or grandchildren. Think about the date that your grandchild might die. Well, there's a span of a couple of hundred years already in which we are kind of anthropologically connected at a deep level, even if we were operating on that level.

### **Speaker 2 -** 59:28

The world would be very different than it is today.

### **Speaker 5 -** 59:32

So one of the parts of your book I found really fascinating was the argument for an enlightened despot or benign dictatorship, or also called eco authoritarianism. And you phrased it because of this problem with the tyranny of the Nao and Marshmallow thinking, which I really do attribute to politics today, really can see how a politician would want to appease voters.

### **Speaker 5 -** 59:57

Now so that they get re-elected and would not want to do things like raise taxes or fund projects that would be long term in the future. Because it could mean their political career. So I see that challenge. And so this idea of an enlightened despot or benign dictatorship to kind of address the fact that so much of politics and also so much of our ways of thinking can be very hyper short termism was really interesting.

### **Speaker 5 -** 01:00:22

So I'm curious, tell us about this. This idea. The argument for it. And then of course, what you found and your analysis of it. Yeah, I remember a few years ago being really struck by the number of people from across the political spectrum who kept saying to me.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:00:37

Or I hearing it in public meetings or on the radio or something, or even my own father saying, you know, look, the only way we can deal with our problems now, you know, like the climate crisis is by having some benign dictators. We need to be more like China or like Singapore. Give up some civil liberties. Hand the power over to a good dictator.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:00:54

And they can sort out our problems for us. And I thought, well, that's interesting. And interesting thought. And maybe because I'm used to be a nerdy political scientist, I thought, I'm going to investigate. This is it actually true? That, um, authoritarian regimes perform better when it comes to long term public policy, whether it's an environment or health care or education or inequality?

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:01:18

What's the evidence that they perform better than democratic governments? Let's say. So I worked with a brilliant statistician. Called Jamie Mcquilken, who developed a index called the Intergenerational Solidarity Index, which ranks countries on their long term public policy.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:01:35

And so we plotted those countries on one axis, on their intergenerational solidarity. Score, 122 countries. Against their scores on how democratic they were. A very sort of standard measure of democracy. Called the V-dem liberal democracy. Measure.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:01:50

It comes out of the University of Gothenburg in Sweden and lo and behold, what did we find? Did we find that the authoritarian regimes. Performed brilliantly? No, actually, quite the opposite of the 25 highest scoring countries on intergenerational solidarity. Index 21 of them were Democratic governments of one form or another, and of the 25 lowest form scoring countries in other words, very bad long term public policy, environment or healthcare, etc..

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:02:17

21 of the 25 lowest scoring ones were authoritarian regimes of various kinds. They were military dictatorships or monarchies, etc.. Now there were some outliers like Singapore, but the general message is if you want to try and deal for example, with your long term ecological crisis.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:02:36

Don't have a benign. Don't you know, bring in a dictator and hope that they're going to sort out your problems for you? It's very high risk because dictatorships tend to be very fragile and this is not to say that the current state of democracy is being very effective at dealing with the ecological emergency.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:02:54

Far from it. But I think that's probably the system that we need to work with. But we need to go far beyond the machinations of the representative system of just putting a X on a ballot sheet every few years. We need radical decentralisation of power.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:03:11

We need citizens assemblies. We need local assembly style government of the kind that they've got in Rojava, in Kurdish controlled Syria, at the moment. We need those kinds of radical Murray Bookchin esque styles of local democracy.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:03:29

I think if we're going to have any hope of bending, not breaking

### **Speaker 5 -** 01:03:33

Yeah, and I do. Hear. The both and the deep democracy. Piece that you talked about, which, you know, can take more time. You mentioned this, this group in Ireland. You know, meeting over several months. Right. So the deep democracy and hearing from each other and allowing people to receive the experts, the presentations and then also to reflect and then to share, can take more time.

### **Speaker 5 -** 01:03:55

But that ultimate conclusion is more holistic and also can bring in that future perspective more clearly and then there's also I'm reminded of the piece you mentioned around what ideas are lying around in crisis. Are what can get elevated.

### **Speaker 5 -** 01:04:10

And so it is also important to, you know, uplift the leadership, the people who are doing the thinking on this. Right. Doughnut economics De-growth, etc.. So, you know, maybe a little bit of the, the both and but I did find that section just really fascinating.

### **Speaker 5 -** 01:04:26

But I think it's also, you know

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:04:28

Yes. Important the leadership of ideas is, important. But you know, you mentioned earlier the word prefigurative and I think the prefigurative politics of mutual aid and community action is really also vital here for creating these models of change and, you know, as you were talking there, I was just thinking about Britain's National Health Service, which emerged after the Second World War as a kind of a state institution, a very long term state institution.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:04:55

But what did it grow out of? Well one of its founders and Bevan. The health minister at the time. Always used to say that actually he was modelling, modelling the National Health Service on a something called the Tredegar Medical Health Society, which Tredegar is a small Welsh mining village where the workers themselves.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:05:15

In the 1920s and 30s had formed their own mutual aid association to provide health care for each other through regular voluntary contributions and through that they funded a, you know, a ambulance service and hospitals and, you know, all sorts of insurance for health and funerals and things like that.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:05:34

And Bevan used to sort of say, I'm just scaling up that. In fact, Pre-figurative Kropotkin esque mutual aid model and so in times of crisis. We are going to need those kinds of models and those kinds of learnings to draw on.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:05:51

So I'm all in favour of that. And I think, in fact, just a couple of days ago, a new book by David Graeber was just published, a collection of his old essays. I Can't quite remember the name of it, but also worth mentioning. To people listening to This is it's the 100th anniversary. This year of the birth of the great British anarchist writer Colin Ward, who wrote about anarchy as a form of social organisation.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:06:14

The way that we cooperate in local communities and community gardens in children's playgrounds, tenant run housing cooperatives, all these different kinds of areas are fundamental for for bending, not breaking

### **Speaker 5 -** 01:06:27

Yeah. Thank you for that. And our last episode, one of our last episodes was on Prefigurative Politics and we will we will be doing more on anarchy as well. So speaking of models, we have to. Speak about doughnut economics. We've mentioned it a couple times and obviously I saw.

### **Speaker 5 -** 01:06:45

Doughnut economics throughout your books. The holding a transcendent goal, the practice, holistic forecasting, even the story of circular economics in Japan's history. So of course, I thought of Kate in doing economics. So Kate, is your partner and obviously the, you know, the the founder of doughnut economics.

### **Speaker 5 -** 01:07:05

So I'd love to hear how how do you two share inspiration and intellectual influences with one another? How does your work? Influence each other? Yeah, well, over the years it's actually got closer and closer.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:07:19

You know, together. Of course, she's always reading every draft manuscript. I have, and I read hers as well. Um. You know, I think I've learned a huge amount from her own journey. Kate's journey from being a development economist originally to shifting towards ecological economics in many ways, you know, it was through her that I discovered thinkers and writers like Herman Daly.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:07:43

Who taught her, and I think taught me that you know, when you're thinking about an economy or a political system, the first thing to do is draw a big circle around it. It's called the biosphere. Right? Everything happens within that non-negotiable. Space of the one planet. We know that sustains life.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:08:00

And to be honest, it's taken me many years to really get that at a kind of deep level and to get the idea of systems thinking, the work of. Daniel Meadows, which has come through. Kate to me. As well. So I'm incredibly grateful to her for opening my mind, because of course, I studied economics.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:08:18

Like she did. You know 30 years ago. And I was also taught what she was taught, which was a demand and supply diagram on a white background with no circle or the biosphere around it. So I try and make sure that everything that I do is kind of consistent with the doughnut goal.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:08:34

I still, of course, I would say this. I do think it probably is. The most coherent and effective vision for a different kind of economy that we have. But I think what I try and say bring to it myself is partly the political piece which is what kind of governance systems are most likely to bring us into that doughnut shaped space.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:08:59

And if the stuff that I write about politics has that in mind all the time. That's why I'm interested in things like citizens assemblies and you know, direct democracy. Decentralisation. I think these are parts of the roots to doughnut economics. And then I'm also thinking about the historical piece, which is what have we learned from the past to help us to get into that doughnut shaped space.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:09:21

So hence, in my new book, history for tomorrow, I write about 18th century Japan. The fact that they had what we were today call a circular economy, where almost everything was reused, repaired, repurposed, or recycled and I hope that that you know, contributes to discussions about what it means to create a regenerative economy today, to bring in some of those other angles.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:09:43

And who knows where. Kate's work. And my work might go in the future. But, um, I think that, yeah, in a way, I sort of feel grateful that I've taken me on a kind of intellectual journey of my of my own and to always be open or, you know, to always be thinking about what does it mean to create a regenerative culture in the, in the broader sense, possible.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:10:09

Yeah.

### **Speaker 5 -** 01:10:09

And for folks listening who maybe are unfamiliar, you know, the, the main premise of doughnut economics is to move from gross domestic product. And our typical metrics of success and progress and development and instead to say, what if the goal of the economy was to meet human needs and to stay within the needs of our ecosystems or the planet?

### **Speaker 5 -** 01:10:28

And so it really is a a very holistic and ecological alternative goal. And aspiration and a very much a like all of us are a part of that. All of us are a part of the meeting of the human needs. And staying within the ecological boundaries. And I love what you said about your work being kind of looking at the actual doughnut, the safe, and just space for humanity.

### **Speaker 5 -** 01:10:48

How have we gotten into that space in the past or in cultures or places of the past and also, how can this be a model for the future and for thinking about the future generations and also the the inheritance or the gift to the future generations to live to leave them a liveable world One of your earlier books is titled How to Find Fulfilling Work, and I love that because I'm also a right livelihood coach.

### **Speaker 5 -** 01:11:14

So I wonder, as we kind of wind down our conversation. You know, if there's anyone listening who might think, how can what you're sharing and your work and your books influence our livelihoods? What would you what would you offer as you know, how our work can align with this future thinking?

### **Speaker 5 -** 01:11:32

But also, you know, being good ancestors as we practice our livelihoods. What do I think about that?

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:11:39

You know what pops into my head is a quote, attributed to Aristotle. But which I've never found in Aristotle, which is this where the needs of the world and your talents meet their lies, your vocation. That kind of sense of when we're trying to think about what path should we be pursuing as individuals to somehow find the meeting point of those things that to look at the world we live in, to keep asking yourself what?

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:12:10

What does the world need, but not have, but then also, you know what is my role in in this, in terms of my talents, my passions, my skills? I mean, it's easy enough to say, but I also think for many years I taught courses and workshops on finding purposeful work.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:12:29

I was a co-founder of an organisation called The School of Life, which provides sort of teaching and stuff around the big questions in life that college doesn't teach you, like how to find fulfilling work or how to make relationships work, or how to deal with death. And one of the things I really discovered from all that work and thinking and running workshops and talking to people, is that most people don't find vocations.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:12:51

They grow them, they grow them through experiment. They grow them through conversations with others that you find your path, not by just walking around in circles and trying to work out what the hell should I do with my life? Or what should I be doing next? Or how do I deal with you know, the turbulence of the world or a living in a land ruled by Donald Trump or living in a world where the planetary boundaries are being overshot?

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:13:15

That we we find a way through, that we find our path in kind of communion with others in conversation with others, and in fact, that's what I do. Like when I finished writing a book, when I'm in that. That state which I mentioned earlier of, I've got nothing more, I feel like I've got nothing more to say.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:13:35

Um, I do a lot of talking to people. You know, talking to strangers, talking to friends, seeing the lie of the land, looking at the state of the world, feeling what my path might be through it. And realising that it's always all life is an experiment.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:13:52

And you may tumble. But up again. Um, you know, keep on going. Um, keep on struggling. And I think, you know, in my book, The History for tomorrow. There's a historian who I mentioned.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:14:07

Quite often, the historian Howard Zinn, and he wrote a beautiful essay in the 1960s called Historian as Citizen. And in that essay he talks about two very powerful words or powerful phrase, as if and what he meant by that is we always have to act as if change is possible, that those who struggled against a colonialism in India or, you know, against all sorts of subjugation, probably thought they were never going to succeed.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:14:36

But one always has to act as if change can happen, because I think if you look through history. It's sometimes does not always, but sometimes. And that gives me hope not. Hopium hope without action. But a sense of a kind of vigorous sense of hope, which I think even with when the odds are against you.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:14:55

Um, we can, you know, create change and that, I think, is something that can give us that deep sense of purpose which goes beyond the the hamster wheel of, you know, pursuing wealth and social status and all of that kind of stuff.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:15:12

Yeah.

### **Speaker 5 -** 01:15:12

The Aristotle possibly Aristotle quote that you said reminds me of a Frederick Buechner quote that we are called to the place where the world's deepest hunger meets our deepest gladness.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:15:22

Beautiful. That's even better than apparently Aristotle. So we're going to close now with our final invitations for our listeners.

### **Speaker 5 -** 01:15:31

So a few that all uplift and then I'll ask you for yours. One in your book, you invite us to join the time Rebellion. I love that, and to become time Rebels and to follow the path of being a good ancestor. And yeah, I'll just say this, this idea of what would it feel like?

### **Speaker 5 -** 01:15:50

What would it be like to be a good ancestor just to invite that question and regularly is powerful, such a powerful prompt. Um, for us to develop intergenerational solidarity and empathy and practice that deep time perspective, but also that moral imagination.

### **Speaker 5 -** 01:16:07

Imagining that, you know. How would my actions efforts. Even policy decisions, all of that? How would that influence maybe the seventh generation from now, or even the next generation from now? And also the empathy for those those beings that silent majority and then to each of us do our part to decolonise the future, to engage in biophilia, right?

### **Speaker 5 -** 01:16:30

That love of of place and of our, you know, our wider body. We could say our Gaia and then also to participate in mutual aid and solidarity today. Right, to support those who are maybe struggling or suffering today and to get to know our neighbours and do that Prefigurative politics for that time when there are crises, because they will come so that we bend instead of break.

### **Speaker 5 -** 01:16:56

So those are some that I heard, but I'd love for you to close with your final invitations, particularly if there's anything around the six Ways to Think long or anything else. We haven't shared. Just what would be your invitations for the listeners as they go forth? I'd say one thing.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:17:13

Just to draw on what you're saying in a way, is, you know, remember listening to this, Steve Jobs talk that he gave at some college and, you know, he talked it was a kind of a seize the day message about he used to say that, you know, if I when I look in the mirror, each morning, I'd ask myself if this was the last day of my life.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:17:32

You know, would I do what I'm about to do today? Now, I don't advocate that what I what I would advocate is to say, look yourself in the mirror. Every morning and ask yourself, you know, what am I going to do today to be a good ancestor, you know, or at the end of the day, ask yourself, what have I done today to be a good ancestor?

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:17:47

And there are many answers to that question, but I think these are about existential habits of mind, which just get us to see the world in a slightly different way to interpret what we're doing in a slightly different way. So just that question. To carry it with you in your mental back pocket.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:18:02

What could I do today to be a good ancestor? And I think the second thing, you know, you mentioned that getting to know your neighbours. I think there's something very fundamental about that. You know, I would say to people, have a conversation with a stranger once a week.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:18:18

You know, joining a local sports team with players from diverse backgrounds. You know, on some level it doesn't matter what you do as long as it is helping to create that asabiyya that social glue that collective solidarity, that group.

### **Speaker 2 -** 01:18:34

Feeling, which is then a basis for doing the kinds of things we need to do to bend rather than. Break, whether in the ecological field or in the social justice field or in other areas in the more directly political field, as well. So I would say that power of of conversation and to become a great empathic listener as part of that, which of course, Joanna macy was, was so good at advocating that to You've been listening to an upstream conversation with Roman Krznaric, a social philosopher and research fellow at the centre for eudaimonia and Human Flourishing, and the author of several books, including history for tomorrow.

### **Speaker 1 -** 01:19:21

Inspiration from the past, for the Future of Humanity, and The Good Ancestor. How to Think Long Term in a Short Term World. Please check the show notes for links to any of the resources mentioned in this episode. Thank you to Haley Hendricks for the intermission.

### **Speaker 1 -** 01:19:37

Music and to Nina Montenegro for the cover art. Upstream theme music was composed by me, Robbie. This episode was produced in collaboration with Eco Gather, a collapse. Responsive Co-learning network that hosts free online weekly eco gatherings that foster conversation and build community around heterodox economics.

### **Speaker 1 -** 01:19:59

Collective action and belonging in an enlivened world. In this collaboration. Eco Gather will be hosting gatherings to bring some upstream episodes to life. This is one of those episodes. Find out more, including the date and time for this eco gathering in the show.

### **Speaker 1 -** 01:20:18

Notes, or by going to Eco gatherings. Upstream is almost entirely listener funded. We could not keep this project going without your support. There are a number of ways in which you can support us financially.

### **Speaker 1 -** 01:20:35

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### **Speaker 1 -** 01:20:53

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### **Speaker 1 -** 01:21:15

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### **Speaker 1 -** 01:21:33

And if you like what you hear, please give us a five star rating and review it really helps to get upstream in front of more eyes and into more ears. Thank you.

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