

**Taylor Pearson:**

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**Jason Buck:**

All right, Tom Morgan, I want you to just plug away right at the top, where can people find your fantastic blog? Where can they find you on Twitter? Plug away please.

**Tom Morgan:**

Usually I do this at the end of the call when everyone who's ever listened to a podcast of mine realizes one thing about me, which is I don't know my own Twitter handle, which is like you've got one job, Tom, know your own Twitter handle. No, it's Tom\_MorganKCP on Twitter. And I write for the KCPgroup.com and the insight section is a bang up top of the website and everything that I write is published there.

**Jason Buck:**

And highly recommend. And for some reason, somehow people haven't heard you on other podcasts like Jim O'Shaugh's. They should run out right away. They should just press pause, go read the blog, go listen to you on another podcast because it's going to be much better than my line of questions probably in general.

But yeah, the reason I do the plug at the top, actually I learned this from another comedian's podcast, he has them plug at the beginning and then the end, I was like, "That's brilliant."

Because sometimes everybody doesn't start listening to the end and sometimes you got to plug away and it's always my impetus, I got to be the one that drives that so that way you don't feel too terrible about it. Because even though I could watch your reaction, you're like, "I don't want to plug myself." That's how we all feel.

But the impetus for this conversation was, not that we needed one, was your latest paper, The Tipping Point, which you did a little bit more long form than usual.

And I think the best way for the dive into that is let's maybe start with what I'll call the Morgan dialectic. Riffing off of Hegel's dialectic, I assume that was the impetus for when you're thinking about the triumphant of the dialectic there. But why don't you start there and then maybe that'll give us a jumping off point?

**Tom Morgan:**

I don't even know what dialectic means. This is how badly things are going to start.

**Jason Buck:**

No, this show is like great minds think alike. So people know that Hegelian dialectic is that thesis, counter thesis then synthesis. I'm always going to have problems with synthesis.

So it goes thesis, counter thesis, synthesis. And a lot of people attribute it to Hegel and coming out of idealism, but I think it was actually really Fichte, which is most idealism actually could be tributed to Johan Fichte, but usually Hegel or others get credit.

But that's the Hegelian dialectic is that tripartite circular nature. So yeah, right away you're throwing me off. I don't even know what dialectic means. Oh, great question. So let's talk about the three parts then.

**Tom Morgan:**

Yeah. All right. So one of the things I try to do and just as a dude sat in his room is read a bunch of things, identify which people are on average better at surfacing insights or have a view of something highly unusual.

And I'm finding actually quite rarely those people are intellectuals. They're the weirder end of the spectrum. And then when you notice a lot of overlap between their ideas and these either archetype or fractal patterns, start to pay attention to that.

And the risk is always you're going to go into this over fitting where the moment you see a pattern, you're going to find it everywhere.

But this pattern, and I haven't read any Hegel so I don't know where or when it applies, although I have heard of that cadence before. The worst part of this pattern is that there isn't even a particularly good metaphor that I've found yet to explain it.

So there are a bunch of crappy metaphors. The one that Iain McGilchrist uses in his book, which quick plug there, masterpiece. It's called The Matter with Things. Talk all day about that.

But he talks about the brain's hemispheres where you take in sensory data from your right hemisphere and it's like a jumble mishmash. You then categorize it with a left hemisphere so that you can orient yourself in the world and then you check it again against the right hemisphere to see whether the model of the world you've made is accurate.

And a lot of modern society basically stops at the analytical stage and they don't test to see whether their map matches reality. And the way this pattern is interesting is that it's constantly about this interplay between map and territory. How is your model of the world bumping up against how the world actually is?

Because if you have this internal model of the world that's wrong, it's basically the source of most psychopathologies where it's like, "I'm a shitty person and everything I do is terrible and it's never going to get better. And everything I do is a result of me being a terrible person."

That's quite a good description of depression. Or you have this view that your drinking problem isn't particularly severe. You're destroying everything in your life around you. And then suddenly you have this moment of realization or this moment of clarity where you're like, "Oh my god, I'm an alcoholic." That's what AA people talk about all the time.

So you have this dissonance period where you're like, "Wow, oh my god, things don't quite fit together." And the thesis of my paper is that essentially we are in this dissonance point at the moment where

because McGilchrist thinks are analytical, abstracted, intellectual, left hemisphere is taking control, it's setting us up in dissonance with the world as it's flowing around us.

And that's creating all these secondary effects of nihilism, a meaning crisis, mental illness, suicide, all these horrible things that are happening because our internal model of the world as it's being created by society is not matching up against the way the world actually works. Does that make sense?

**Jason Buck:**

Yeah, I think it definitely makes sense. As we talk about all these large ideas, it's hard for it to make sense but you use it as a map. You were starting to get into that and we were talking about from different perspectives and the tension and everything.

So maybe let's go back for a second. What's that STS map for sure. What does that actually mean? Explain STS. Let's start there.

**Tom Morgan:**

Simplicity, tension, synthesis. So basically you have this simplicity, which is the data as it comes in. Then you have this tension phase where it's like, all right, is the analysis that I'm coming up with of this outside information accurate? And then you have a synthesis stage where you take your model of the world as it's come to you and as you've assembled it and then you compare it back against the world again.

And that synthesis stage is the resolution of both your model of the world and the world as you've conceived it. And not to over complicate things too early on, there's something about that final stage that creates something new.

And people talk about this all the time and it's something I don't think I understand fully, but there's something about the world being perceived and having been run through our analytical filters that brings something new into the world.

That might just be as simple as your individual perspective, but there's clearly a very deep idea in that synthesis stage that I haven't quite got my arms around yet.

**Jason Buck:**

And I know you draw a lot or heavily from McGilchrist, but I want to address something right at the beginning. Talking about hemispheres of mind or bicameral mind, that's more of an intuition pump because a lot of people are just going to ignore that right away because they think that's been debunked.

But don't you think of it as more of intuition pump of a thinking about the world through analytic and then creative models or what's another way of putting McGilchrist's model?

**Tom Morgan:**

Yeah, not to go back again, the thing about the McGilchrist model is that what he always says is that the idea that the two sides of the brain do different things is wrong, but the idea that they do them in different ways is right.

So the pop psychology of you having a creative side of the brain is wrong. But the idea that because they do the same thing in different ways isn't radically important.

The intuition pump to use your term that has been most effective in explaining his thesis very quickly is the bird thing. Where basically he's like a bird is pecking the ground and is trying to find whether a grain is a piece of sand or a piece of grain that it can eat.

And it uses the left hemisphere to break down the local environment to a very granular basis, quite literally to work out what it can eat. That's the predatory side.

At the same time you have the right hemisphere continuously scanning for cats, watching the world for patterns, trying to look over its shoulder, has this very wide understanding of the environment that's semantic and instinctive and intuitive. And the idea is that both of them should be working together at all times. That's why we have oppositional processing.

If you want to extrapolate the bird pecking analogy to what's actually relevant for you and me, it's that when the bird looks down at the ground and starts dividing the world up into grains, that's what we do when we interact with the world.

That we look at the world and we see cars, we see apples, we see pizzas. We see things that we can interact with. And we break the world up in such a way that we can manipulate it and that's made us incredibly powerful.

The fact that you and I can have long winded pretentious dialogues about these concepts that has given us the power to manipulate the world and create space shuttles.

But in McGilchrist view, it's also made us lose a sense of the primacy of that holism. That we actually are a part of the environment we're dissecting and that when the left hemisphere thinks it's really smart lies when questioned and doesn't really have a full understanding of the whole.

And that already sounds probably pretty familiar to people who are listening about overly intellectual academics, were very abstracted, very isolated in their single field of study. They don't have this holism sense.

And I think the thing that really brought it home to me when McGilchrist was talking, he was like, "All right, let's back away from all of this nonsense. If the left hemisphere was in charge, what world would it create?"

It would create this world where everything is digitally abstracted so that instead of sex, you get porn. Instead of really good social relationships, you get social media. Instead of adventure, you get movies about adventure.

And you get these grid-like cities where everything is very isolated from nature, everything's incredibly safe. More people now die from obesity than malnutrition. We've created these incredibly safe worlds where we feel very, very disconnected and very bored and very isolated.

And I find that very compelling. Initially when I first read it, I was like, "That sounds like bullshit to me." That sounds like how are you extrapolating from neurology to the structure of the world? And then you realize that actually the causality there isn't totally clear and that imbalance, you start to notice that imbalance everywhere.

### **Jason Buck:**

So to me thinking about the hemisphere sense and just keep using that metaphor, to me is it fair, I think about the old phrase that man's at war with himself. We have a both animal nature and then we have a societal nature and those are typically in conflict with each other.

But in a sense you would say that the left hemisphere is the societal nature and then the right hemisphere is our animal nature or I am overly simplifying?

**Tom Morgan:**

I don't think so and I don't really know. There's all this lizard brain stuff about how far out Maslow's Hierarchy are you before you could start to concentrate on proper things.

And I've never seen that really as part of the argument at all in terms of whether one side is more primal and one side isn't. I think the way that I've looked at it is one side is more predator.

And that predatory nature in us is actually incredibly sophisticated, or at least it sounds incredibly sophisticated because it's incredibly articulate. The left hemisphere has far greater access to language and syntax and logic and linearity.

And so it's like the slightly aspy guy that sounds incredibly smart and probably runs all the largest companies in the world, but also lacks an understanding of how that company is going to destroy its ecosystem around us.

So it's primal in the sense that it doesn't know as much as it thinks it knows. But it's not primal in that it sounds incredibly sophisticated. And I would argue a lot of left hemisphere imbalanced people actually run our world. They just don't understand their own limitations.

There's a great, great anecdote from McGilchrist where he talks about when people whose right hemisphere have been knocked out by strokes, get told that they can't use their arm on the opposite side. And when you can only operate from your right hemisphere that doesn't lie, people are like, "Oh, yeah, yeah, my arm's totally paralyzed. That's crazy, isn't it?"

The right hemisphere never ever lies. Michael Gazzaniga who does most of the split brain research says it's the most remarkable finding from split brain research is that the right brain is totally truthful.

But when the left brain is in control, if you say to it, "Oh by the way dude your arm's knocked out." They'll be like, "No it isn't." And then when you show them they can't use their arm, they'll be like, "Oh, that's not my arm. That's some dude over there."

And so you have this nature where one side of the brain lies and lies, it confabulates constantly. I think because from an evolutionary perspective it was more important to be right quickly than to take a long time deliberating and be wrong. But that really muddies the water in terms of primal needs versus longer term needs, I think.

**Jason Buck:**

Yeah, we'll dive into that muddiness because that's where I broke down. But it reminds me our psychological immune systems are so strong, it doesn't want that dissonance so it'll do anything it can.

And I would presume that the argument for left hemisphere dominant is just a full advent of the enlightenment and specialization in the world and we've just been dramatically moving in that direction. Is that the basic argument of linear basis?

**Tom Morgan:**

Precisely. And the causality is weird. Why did that happen? When did that happen? The argument is it might have been necessary. This might be a necessary intermediary stage. It might be the T of the tension stage.

But McGilchrist makes a couple of points that he believes there's no accounts of autism or schizophrenia in the scientific literature before about 1800. That these are effectively products of industrialization and specialization that we are now thinking people, we are being employed in mostly thinking jobs.

And that has dragged us slowly into the left hemisphere. And if you think about who we reward predominantly in our society, it's coders, it's engineers, it's people that are mastered abstraction like hedge fund managers and Metaverse people, whatever you want to call it.

**Jason Buck:**

So how do you square that? You're saying when you look through the historical literature, you don't get that much evidence for schizophrenia, depression, et cetera.

The idea what measures get managed or I think it was later on in your article, something about self-reported studies from kids in the last two decades is the highest level of depression. It goes back to maybe Homer and the wine-dark sea. We didn't use the color blue.

How do you caveat that with these longitudinal studies don't go back centuries. We don't have good reported data. So maybe we just weren't talking about those things or we talked about them in different ways that UNC represented in the literature from the 17th or 18th century.

**Tom Morgan:**

Totally fair. McGilchrist does address that though. He says that basically there are plenty of accounts of depression and mania and things that may not meet the DSM but are actually plausible and fairly accurately related to things that we experience today. It's just that autism and schizophrenia are absent.

And the whole part of the first part of his magnum opus is about society has basically become autistic and schizophrenic, writ large. But the depression angle is an important one in this is very simplistic, but I believe that depression can sometimes be caused by the tension stage.

That basically, as I was alluding to earlier, you have this very fixed model of yourself where you basically become a closed system resistant to all outside information. And as a result you start to eat yourself.

And you start to go into this negative feedback loop where you can't update your model with any new information. So I think that depression is related to this. It's being caused by the left hemisphere imbalance but in a very different way from schizophrenia and autism.

**Jason Buck:**

A lot of times I think about just allostatic bands the British philosopher John Gray talked about. We're always oscillating between liberalism and barbarism.

And I just wonder maybe historically, and as I say, we have homeostasis, we have homeostasis that's barely and then allostatic bands are large swings. So I just wonder how much of that is predicated upon societal wealth in certain parts of the world?

And so maybe during these times of extreme societal wealth, when we're moving much more towards abstraction and specialization, historically is that maybe where you saw depression or autism and maybe you don't see it when we get back to maybe just subsistence living or something like that? It's just something that popped into my head. I'm wondering if you found anything when you were reading about it?

**Tom Morgan:**

Ish. Right. I'm not really a civilizational expert. John Glubb was this guy that did this apparently this huge series of civilizational decline. And he found that the era of intellect was basically the peak, whether you looked at any previous civilizations.

I think one of the weaknesses of, I hesitate to say weaknesses, but one of the things I struggle with over McGilchrist's argument is the lack of data points in terms of this society definitely screwed it up for this reason.

There's a lot of myths though. And the myths is where I really gravitate to because I'm just a monster myth person. And you see this everywhere once you start to see it, the most famous one would be the Lion King, where you have Scar overtake Mufasa, the environment starts to fall apart and then Simba comes and reclaims his birthright.

But the Scar figure is super interesting in that it appears to be a relatively archetypal pattern that you have this very sophisticated intellectual figure that overthrows the rightful king and then everything goes to shit. And you see that all over the place.

And I think that that's very interesting to me. And McGilchrist talks about Iroquois legend which has exactly the same thesis. That the moment you have this usually British mad scientist figure or whatever, overtakes the rightful king, Jafar and Aladdin or whatever it is, things immediately go shit.

And I think that's really interesting. Whether we've seen that in enough societies, whether we can prove that the Egyptians were hemispherically balanced, whether we can prove that indigenous societies had different centers of cognition, that's harder to do. It's something I'm super interested in that.

**Jason Buck:**

It threw me off at a tangent there for a second. Have you ever read Don't Sleep, There Are Snakes about the Piraha tribe?

**Tom Morgan:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Jason Buck:**

They don't have any origin myths or anything. They throw everything we think about of whether we're a tabula rasa or not. And everything we've learned about language, whether we have the framework intrinsically or not, it's the one example where people don't have a lot of these myths and origin myths and everything.

And whether that's true or not, it's interesting that it's almost outside the box. It's that outlier effect. It's almost like as we deal in finance and stuff, it's people like now do Japan.

If Japan throws your system or we start talking about smoking and eating fatty foods and obesity, it's like now do France, the Piraha tribe of Brazil throws everything for a wrench. I just wonder if you read that in general.

**Tom Morgan:**

Maybe not. So when I went fully nuts, which I've done several times now, I became obsessed with the Piraha and so to listeners that aren't as weird as us, the Piraha tribe are very small sadly now tribe in the Amazon that basically don't have very many abstract terms.

And they got really famous because a Christian missionary went and tried to convert them and was like, "So there's this guy Jesus." And they were like, "Have you met him?" He's like, "No." And they were like, "Okay, cool." Immediately lost interest.

And anthropologists have basically described them as one of the happiest tribes they've ever known until they gave them alcohol at which point things went bad.

But I think one of the reasons why I got obsessed with them and I didn't know it at the time, was that basically they don't have abstract words and therefore they live entirely in the present.

And they can do that because they're hunter gatherers. They literally don't look more than a couple of days out. And when anything leaves their field of vision, it seems like it ceases to exist. So they're completely in the flow.

And I think that there's a lesson here that relates back to McGilchrist's stuff that it is I think a universal law that the more abstract you get, the less happy that you are. And you can look at this actually in a relatively scientific way that people that have had their right hemisphere knocked out, like serious schizophrenics, report that time doesn't pass.

It's a bit like Groundhog Day. They literally describe it as Groundhog Day where time just goes in this endless loop and it seems like there's no progress or flow to it. It's something that I actually experienced for a couple years when I got mega, mega depressed and I believe that I was fully in the left hemisphere.

And in the right hemisphere you have this amazing example of Jill Bolte Taylor who was a neuroanatomist who had her whole left hemisphere knocked out and a massive stroke. And she describes it as nirvana where she's completely at one with everything, completely in the flow but is so in the flow that she can't abstract herself enough to dial an ambulance.

So neither of these extremes are desirable, although one feels very pleasant. It is interesting to me that we do have an understanding of how it feels. And when I look at the Piraha, it's like we don't have any abstractions and therefore we are blindingly happy all the time. We can't go back to being the Piraha. But there's a lesson there for us.

#### **Jason Buck:**

And there's so many things I want to pull out of there, like you said, if somebody goes full on right hemisphere, I always say that's the idea of satori or nirvana or enlightenment is if you can go full on that side.

And I'm like, "Yeah, but then you wouldn't be able to take a shit in a toilet." Or you have no emotional context for choice. Choice is based on emotion.

And then the other thing that I'll pull out for the Piraha is their language has that simplicity of present tense and the amount of just even words they use, but a prime example of what you're referring to is even when the women weave baskets to catch fish in, they have this loose weave that only works for when you catch one fish.

Because they don't weave baskets for the future. That would be a good system. But at the same time, like you said, it was all relatively good until they introduced alcohol. When people were coming up the river, when the Brazilians came up the river.

And reminds me, and this is actually a data point for your thesis and throughout this paper, and I'm sure you've seen this is they rate the Nepalese the happiest people in the world.

Except for then when they go and find the people, because they've tried to keep on the traditional side of things and they've tried to eliminate the internet and TV, but then when they found on the fringes people that are hooking up illegal satellites and getting internet and TV, all of it falls apart.

So that goes into your thing of abstraction is it depends on who is filling out that survey and it's the rhetoric they're trying to have at the government level is that no, we're eliminating all these things and we're having a traditional society.

But then on the fringes, obviously everybody wants that. And I'm sure people have heard me say this a million times. There's a point when I lived in Central Mexico and always fascinated me that the the locals are one thing and then you had all of these expats.

And Starbucks was coming into the community and they took a historic building, they did an amazing job, the renovation and the entire time the expats were trying to boycott it. They were marching and signs saying don't bring Starbucks here and everything.

And then the day Starbucks opened, there was lines around the block of the local Mexicans that wanted to have Starbucks and it became this aspirational quality thing. And they had date nights and everything and it's always seeded in my mind those ideas too of we want them to have the traditional folklore and everything so we can take pictures.

But they want the aspirational qualities of the life we have and who are we to tell them you can't have Starbucks and that it might ruin their life when it's like they clearly wanted Starbucks and they spoke with their wallets and lines around the block.

### **Tom Morgan:**

It's impossible. We're not going back. And I was reading [inaudible 00:25:59] book a few months ago and he's just like, "Yeah, if developing countries get a tenth of China's growth in the last 20 years, there's going to be a 10X in the number of cars and a 40X in the number of air conditions."

I know that's a slightly different topic, but it's just like who are we to go into their societies and be like, "No, it's monsoon season but you can't have an air conditioner because climate change." It's ludicrous.

I think that the longer time goes on, I just think about the Amish. Where I'm like the Amish are really, really, really considered about what technologies they allow into their community.

And I don't know much about the Amish but I just like that concept or the digital Sabbath, these traditional ways of keeping us a little bit separate from that technology or at least monitoring our use of it.

And I'm pretty optimistic about the way that technology goes over the next 10 to 20 years. Because I think we're all aware of where we've got to. And I actually think the broader picture here is if you read McGilchrist stuff, he's like, "We're all doomed."

His recent pronouncements are this is an existential threat to society and he believes it and I think that he's right to believe it in certain ways. But then when you look at it from another perspective, it's like all of this stuff has given us the power of god's, to butcher the quote.

We have this godlike power but no understanding of the whole. We have no understanding of how these powers can be used. You've just handed a toddler a handgun and as a result it's mayhem.

But the idea is from a lot of people that I found very inspirational is that the left hemisphere will eventually be returned to the guidance of the right.

There will be this synthesis stage, unfortunately it usually is caused by a crisis, right? By this friction or dissonance point. And how bad that friction or dissonance point is, whether it's ahead of us, whether it's behind us, who knows, right?

There is typically this transition point where suddenly you go into the right hemisphere going back in charge of the left and then we'll have all these abilities. This incredible technology, this analytical intelligence, it will just be used in a much wiser way.

And I think, I'm probably going in too many different directions here, but there is an idea that came out of the piece which is that evolution does not go backwards in one sense, which is that the level and scope of human cooperation gets larger and larger over time.

You have this whole on idea where things just get more complex and more integrated over time and that direction of travel implies that we are just going to get more and more conscious over time. Not in a linear trajectory, but we're going to get more complex, more integrated and more cooperative over time, which is consistent with this synthesis stage.

So yeah, there's all this dumb stuff out there, but I think the dumb stuff will eventually be redeployed in a much more positive way.

**Jason Buck:**

You're actually doing a great job moving us back on task. Otherwise this is just all tangents. And I serendipitously, I'm actually in Pennsylvania right now, very close to Amish like Lancaster Country, but have you ever heard of Rumspringa where they get the year off?

**Tom Morgan:**

No.

**Jason Buck:**

This is great. So when they're coming of age in late teens, early 20s, it's called Rumspringa. They're allowed a year off to go out and be in regular society and use technology and all that to see if then they want to come back.

Can you imagine what that's like after 20 years of being in an Amish society? Getting dropped one year into 2022 and then deciding if you want to come back. That's really disorienting.

And then obviously I would guess probabilistically you want to come back just because that one year is just so disorienting in general and only few people could handle that amount of chaos in their brain. It's mind boggling to me.

**Tom Morgan:**

There's this bananas book called Nothing to Envy about North Korea. Very, very clever title. And basically there's all these stories about you've grown up in North Korea and you've been told that basically the world is a disaster and everyone else's savages.

And all these people that manage to make it into South Korea, when people are a foot taller than them because of nourishment, and South Korea are the most technologically advanced country on earth pretty much. And so the level of dissonance that you have when you suddenly come out of North Korea into South Korea, it must be like Rumspringa for these guys.

**Jason Buck:**

So I wanted to bring us back as you were to the simplicity, tension and synthesis. I'm never going to be able to pronounce that easily and where we get there.

But I want to go back to the beginning where we were talking a little bit about where it gets muddled a little bit. And that's why I was using the analogy and this is where it got muddled for me so hopefully you can help me unmuddle myself so to speak.

Is that when I started to say I was thinking about left and right hemisphere and I started thinking that man's at war with himself in the sense that we have the animal nature and then we have societal nature and they frequently conflict.

And so when I think about that left hemisphere and that societal nature, it's telling you to do all these abstract things that may go against your animal self and what you feel you should naturally do.

So where I started to have, and it is my own personal intellectual dyslexia, I got turned around reading your piece, is that to me the idea if the left hemisphere is the societal implications telling you what you should do epigenetically, if you were looking at the other part genetically, is like that part is telling you to cooperate and maybe your animal self is telling you to be predatory.

And so do you see where I almost got flipped around and that's why it started to get really muddled for me. So unmuddle me. Help out of this scenario.

**Tom Morgan:**

Yeah, it's the opposite. Where the left hemisphere is concerned with individuation and self regard and the right atmosphere is concerned with cooperation because it's holistic, right? It literally has a sense for the whole.

And that is I believe true when you knock people's hemisphere's out. So basically the left hemisphere you need to think of as a drive fit for necessary individuation and ego and the right hemisphere as a drive to be part of the whole.

So I don't see either of them as primal and I think that's misleading or at least it's not something that I've taken from the books. It's just one of them is pulling you towards higher individuality and individuation and all the good and bad things that come with that, strong ego, action in the world, really decisive, able to navigate yourself around, able to call an ambulance if you have a stroke. All of these really highly necessary things.

And I think one of the criticisms of the book is that you could overly demonize that side of you when analytical intelligence is phenomenal and individualism is phenomenal. It shouldn't be the final point.

The right hemisphere is in McGilchrist's sense though superior in almost every sense. In terms of its ability to come to an understanding of the world, at least in his terms. And it's just got a much better nuanced understanding of the way you should be navigating yourself in the world because it's actually connected to the world.

It's much more connected to your heart, it's more connected to your body. And so one of my central beliefs is that external input is more important than your model of the world.

You should be constantly updating your model of the world based on external input. And so if you let that left hand side drive, it's going to drive you into walls and it's not even going to tell you it's driving into walls because one of its main faults is certainty.

**Jason Buck:**

One of the things, before I get back to the iterative feedback, is I'm curious and this actually might lead to your synthesis thesis, is that when I think about cells in our body, every cell in your body is hellbent on individual survival but it cooperates with the cells around it to achieve that individual survival.

So I'm trying to think of that cooperation versus predatory where it's like individualization combined with the group dynamic. Is that what creates synthesis or am I thinking about that even-

**Tom Morgan:**

No, you've absolutely nailed it. Yeah. So another plug here, this guy Brett Anderson I recently discovered, wrote a piece called Intimations of a New World View. It's a 90 minute long essay on this substack and it's one of the most brilliant things I've ever read.

And he talks about this concept that I fully don't understand yet, but it's on my list for this week funnily enough of things, which is that as things become more complex, they become both more individuated and more integrated.

And he used this literally the example you just came out with of a cell in your body. But the metaphor that I found I could understand a bit better was if you have a village of 150 people and the village is kept relatively stable in a positive-sum game, everyone can then start to specialize in that village.

So you end up with a blacksmith, a weaver, a shopkeeper because everyone can start to occupy their niche in a more efficient way without having to do everything or worried they're going to get a spear through the face any second.

And so you get this increasingly individuated but increasingly integrated society. So it solves the paradox. And I'm sure there's much, much more to this idea. It's been playing on my brain in the way that these big ideas do. But it is precisely what you just said.

### **Jason Buck:**

We're front running your next piece. But it makes me think about like you're saying is as information becomes more abundant, more prevalent, we become more specialized, do we become more complex? Is then what overlay does the internet in general provide where we feel like even though we're fitting more complex specialized roles, we see more clearly how we're connecting to parts of the whole.

What I think about all the time is the Blue Marble photo of the planet, 1972. And to me all the environmental movement and stuff now is just 40 to 50 years of having that photo where maybe before we didn't think about it quite so subconsciously that we're all in this lot together and maybe the internet is helping that too.

So maybe there's the overlay of as we become more complex and individuated like you're saying or specialized, we still always have these overarching things about a singular planet or maybe the internet and the combinations thereof.

### **Tom Morgan:**

There's two interesting things here. First of which is that I think what the internet does in its purest most positive sense is it gives you the ability to pursue that niche.

So it's a radically more rich information landscape than anything we've ever discovered. So my ability to chase down these rabbit holes relative to 20 years ago is unfathomable. And I'll meet someone like you that I love and we'll go out and have a dialogue and I'll get smarter as a result of that dialogue. So it's like this crazy accelerant.

As long as the thing that's driving you is your curiosity and you're not constantly being driven off by algos trying to take you to something that's profitable but not actually interesting to you.

So there's this tension there where the Web3 model is like, all right, I'm going to meet people I love and they're going to show me things that they love and it's going to be a beautiful rabbit hole fest that's going to rapidly accelerate my development.

That will make me both more individual and also more integrated because I'll feel like I'm not competing with other people except in a very benign way and I'm essentially getting wiser.

And that leads to the second thing, and this is one of these other concepts that's really only come out over the last few weeks is just this concept of relevance realization, which is that to the Blue Marble.

The Blue Marble is an overview effect that astronauts report getting when they go into space where they suddenly see the whole picture. And there's something about wisdom that is being able to zoom in and zoom out and break your frame very quickly.

And it's something John Vervaeke, who I think is probably the best person right now on wisdom, has talked about the Shaman would literally have this ability to break frame and go out and see things from an overview. It's where the word overview comes from.

And then he could narrow back in again and see whether his attention was focused on the right place. Whether the group's attention was focused on the right place.

So that you have this weird combination of things where people can use the internet to focus very, very narrowly on things that are very specifically their niche in a way that they couldn't before.

And you also have the ability to take a much wider perspective that allows people to zoom in and out and make sure they're focused on the right things. So those two concepts hang together.

**Jason Buck:**

Yeah. I was just pulling it up because that's actually a STS map, right? Simplicity, tension, synthesis and you're using zoom in, zoom out and all that stuff.

The one thing that threw me off for a second is maybe it's my perversity, but all this stuff just gives me cosmic insignificance is the way I think about it. When I see Blue Marble or I take a broader view, it just makes me see what's the point of anything?

**Tom Morgan:**

Well funny enough, there's a new book called the Romance of Reality that takes the other side of that and Brett's piece cites it quite heavily. I'm reading at the moment. It's good.

All right. So let's look at it from a very selfish perspective. The goal of evolution is to get better at playing positive-sum games so that you get more correlated with your environment.

If you're a bacterium that keeps swimming in the wrong direction, you're going to get selected against really quickly. And so the idea is that you get to this perfect point, which can obviously never be achieved, where the tiniest amount of egoic left hemisphere effort has the maximum amount of result.

You have almost no gap between map and territory. You're just swimming through the world with perfect ease. That's the view of this Daoist sage.

The idea being that the more integrated you get as a person, the more complex you become. Your model of the world gets really, really, really clear. But also you get incredibly efficient at acting in it.

You can basically see the world super clearly but navigate the world incredibly efficiently. So it's this weird combination of perfect high leverage individual action and this beautiful right hemisphere view of everything.

So the Daoist sage clicks his fingers and starts a thunderstorm. That's the apex cliché behind it. And so why do we matter? Because if you can get to that apex stage, you can have a cascading positive impact on the system.

When you talk to physicists or the Santa Fe guys, they're like, "Wow, everything's a complex system." And you're like, "Yes, but you have more agency than a piece of sand or a butterfly."

So when you are perfectly correlated to the system, you can have this incredibly positive cascading effect. And because we are the most sentient things that we know of in the known universe and the

brain is the most complex thing that we know of in the known universe that gives us the most creative agency of anything we know of.

It gives us both for good and for bad and we've mostly just seen it for bad. It gives us this crazy propensity and ability to create.

**Jason Buck:**

God. There's so many things but the problem is as soon as you say something, it makes me think of 10 things. So I'm going to try to tie it together because there are so many things you said in there I want to pull on.

And as you all know in private my natural proclivities for things like that we have agency. My mind breaks with that because as you brought up evolution, what's interesting and I'm glad you brought up bacteria, because the question is evolutionary when we say evolution's desire, need, as you know, and I'm not putting you on the spot, it's like evolution doesn't have a desired need or theological end goal.

Evolution is really actually maladaptation is where we actually move in evolutionary structures and in advance so to speak. If there is any such thing as advancement. Got to be very careful in choosing my words.

But with bacteria, even for human beings, how do we know we're not just carriers of this microbiome and it's genetic coating and that's our actual evolution is just to carry on our microbiota and the ancient evolution that you find into ATP cycles.

So part of it makes me wonder then with agency, like you're saying, even in that complex adaptive system, do we have agency or that's the zooming out, zooming in and maybe we're like where we think we have agency, where I'm trying to go to here is because I want to bring us back to the iterative feedback loop.

Because if you're getting this map territory iterative feedback loop, how do you pull back just to make sure the solipsism of that? Because once again, solipsism makes us think that the evolution is for our own benefits and that we have agency, all of that's liberated out of solipsism.

So when you're getting the map and territory and iterative feedback, you think you're getting somewhere but maybe the overarching view is maybe you have the wrong ideas. Do you see where I'm trying-

**Tom Morgan:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I think you can overthink this in a lot of ways and Christ Almighty am I guilty of that most days.

**Jason Buck:**

That makes two of us for sure. If anybody's gotten this far and hasn't...

**Tom Morgan:**

I'm here for this, I'm here for this. Does it feel good? We can look at the teleology of it or are we here just as a carrier for a microbiome, any of this stuff, right?

What's interesting is this morning I was reading a 30 year meta study of wisdom research and they were like doesn't correlate with age or intelligence particularly strongly. What it does correlate with is hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing.

But the better you get at relevance realization, the better your life goes because you just end up navigating the world much more flawlessly. And the bit where I'm going to go a bit crazy town is that I do believe the world responds to that with an intelligence and complexity that isn't typically very well accepted in our modern society.

But I see it mostly as synchronicities where basically when you're on the beam and going in the right direction, you will see synchronicities and coincidences and cues from the external environment that you're going on in the right direction.

And let's call bullshit on all of that and be like, all right, well what does the opposite look like? The opposite looks like someone that keeps doing the wrong thing. How do you know it's the wrong thing? Because your life will go to shit.

And we all know those people intuitively that have a fixed view of themselves that isn't accurate as to the way that other people see them. That have all these internal traumas that stop them seeing the world clearly.

One of Brett Anderson's lines, which I thought was great, which is the source of almost all psychopathologies is refusal to pay attention to your own cascading errors. That you pay attention to the wrong things and when you make mistakes, you don't realize that you are making mistakes.

And so you get locked into these negative feedback loops. And I know that because it's happened to me for a very long period of time where basically you keep letting the left hemisphere drive and it keeps driving you into a tree or whatever metaphor you want. You just haven't updated your models quickly enough. And that literally is the definition of depression.

So we can think about all these really big ideas and stuff and how they relate to evolution, but what I've noticed from people around me and having watched the people that are living really good lives and really, really enjoying themselves, they mostly tend to be following their curiosity.

And in this infinite game positive feedback where the more they focus on things they're interested in or do things that they enjoy, the better they get at it and the better they get at finding things that they're interested in and spookier weirder things than that where their lives actually tend to start going better.

#### **Jason Buck:**

Well I want to come back to that for a second, but it made me think that maybe, not a counter argument, counter theist to that was almost tying into what you were saying about left hemisphere is it's really egregious with that alcoholic, the example you gave, is your tension is the feedback from the world is like you're fucking up your life.

But almost going back to, like you said, the complexity and over specialization and everything is actually the feedback loops you're getting from the map and territory are actually positive.

So how do you know that you might be going down, and what you're saying is maybe a net negative path, but you could be going down there for decades because society's on a wrong path.

That's what I'm more getting at is what if the feedback's not quite there from a societal's perspective that you're fucking up. But to your point, that may be the wrong direction societally or individually that you're heading in even though it's getting rewarded by the left hemisphere.

#### **Tom Morgan:**

Well dude, that's actually totally my argument, which is that why is everyone mega depressed right now despite us having everything that we need?

And it's basically because the model that we have developed as a western society of the world, it's not actually how the world works. And when you read a lot of indigenous wisdom, you're like, "Oh no, we've got it all pretty, pretty radically wrong."

And this sense of creeping dissonance that we have, that we are mismatched against our environment, and that is creating this epidemic of mental illness that I think is messing people up so much.

So we're societally the alcoholics in this stage. And, yeah, I think you can spend the whole of your life as an alcoholic. It's just a question of the level of suffering that you want and whether you're a functional alcoholic or whatever.

But again, that implies that you're functioning well in the world. The reason why I would bring a counterpoint in there is that the moment of clarity, people don't think the moment of clarity is bullshit.

You don't hear many alcoholics be like, "Oh, I had this moment of clarity and you know what? I think it's rubbish. I think I don't have a drinking problem."

All spiritual awakenings people tend to report as more real than real. Where they've had this encounter with something that's this emergent force. And I believe that that's the way this works.

And let's give the example of iboga or any of these psychedelics that manage to cure people of alcoholism or heroin addiction in one go, because it basically breaks people's maladaptive frames instantaneously and makes them realize that their habits were wrong. I don't see that process working backwards.

**Jason Buck:**

I got it. You know these things as well and we see things not as they are, but we see things as we are, right? So you're saying when you see these synchronicities and you see those patterns in your life, it's impossible to know as the numbers are probably wrong, but it's directionally correct that our five senses, we experience 14 million bits of data a second, we're only consciously aware of 16.

Those numbers vary, but you generally get the idea. So we're essentially putting a solipsistic lens on the world or a filter, and we only notice the things we want to notice. But at the same time, what you're saying, and correct me if I'm wrong, to me it's it's a form of placebo effect and I believe placebo is the best medicine by far. There's nothing wrong with placebo effects.

But I think what you're saying is those synchronicities might not be real or exist, but there's no harm in believing they do if you view that you're on the correct path. Is that-

**Tom Morgan:**

No, it's exactly the opposite of what I'm saying.

**Jason Buck:**

Okay.

**Tom Morgan:**

Which is that they're extremely real. I completely subscribe to the viewpoint that you have that the number I heard was you've got 60 bits in your conscious awareness and 11 million in that pool.

But then I think the thing that you can't neglect is that there could be a trillion times more information out there that we're not evolved to. So the idea that there wouldn't be some forces acting on us, that we could not be consciously aware of, I think then becomes a probability, which is a bit of a brain scrambling idea.

I think that the question like all of these things is the calibration of relevance. So John Vervaeke talks about affordances, which is if you look at a room full of stuff and you see a mug, the mug has a handle on it, and that handle says to you that you can reach out and grab that handle and pick up the mug.

That's what the handle of the mug does. That's an affordance. When we look at the world, if we're wise and have good relevance realization, certain things will stand out to us as salient that we can interact with and should we continue to interact with those things we'll flow in a more seamless way through that information environment.

And the question is how well calibrated is your balance? If your full right hemisphere, you are going to see handles everywhere. Everything's going to look significant. And some people have those experiences in mental illness where everything's a signal from the gods and that makes you nonfunctional, right?

And then if you are like hyper, hyper rationalist, you are like, well, nothing means anything. There's no such thing as a meaningful coincidence. And most people I speak to lean heavily in that direction, which is there's no such thing as a synchronicity.

And I think where you have to be is in the middle, which is that sometimes it's just a coincidence, but sometimes it's a meaningful coincidence. And the answer to when is one, when you're wiser, you'll be able to spell that it's more meaningful.

But also it's somatic. That you'll have this sense in your body, non-intellectual in your heart, or somewhere else that's more intrinsically connected to the right hemisphere where you're like, "Shit. That was a serious cue from my environment that I need to take very, very seriously." And those cues from the environment are extremely real in my opinion.

#### **Jason Buck:**

No, this is great. I think we're getting to the same place we just go about it in very different paths. But that's my point to get to is this is the trickiest question that we're getting down to brass tax is how do you calibrate to know if it's signal or noise? That's the impossibility.

And then on the somatic side, I've always wondered this, how do you know the somatic response is not driven intellectually through patterns as well? How do you differentiate somatic versus intellectual if it could be giving you the wrong signals? Once again, how do you get that calibration function attuned to, like you said, that middle way? Man, I can't fathom how you do that.

#### **Tom Morgan:**

Yeah, I've spent two years writing about it and I still have no idea. I think there's a whole host of things you can do from a deeply practical basis, and that's what I've been focused on.

So Vervaeke says you need a meditative practice, a contemplative practice, and an embodiment practice. So the meditative practice is like, am I focused on the right thing? And then the contemplated practice zooms back and forth between narrow focus and broad focus. And then the embodiment practice makes sure that you're well tuned into navigating the world.

And I'm not going to go through it right now, but I turned it into a constructive metaphor about a man and a snake in a jungle where anyone that's listening to this can go and see the Talking Serpent where I discuss that.

I think there's also a way that if you pursue things that are interesting to you, you get better and better and better the more you cultivate that sense of what is interesting to you at navigating that information landscape in three dimensions or even four dimensions. You just get a better taste and sense for what interests you.

Like I get recommended five books a week at minimum and sometimes I'll just be like that one, that one. And I don't know what I'm not reading, but it takes me down very, very interesting rabbit holes where stuff just grips my attention from the outside world. And I think understanding that the outside world is signaling to you is a big part of that.

And I think the other thing that I've run into, which is probably the meta skill, is boundary practices of conscious and unconscious. That if those 14 million or 11 million bits are out there all the time, the only thing that matters is your filter. Are you getting the right 60 bits through that filter?

And having a good relationship with your unconscious is part of that. So being able to calibrate your own emotions. Am I feeling this emotion right now and why?

The George Soros back pain cliché. He knew when he had back pain, his portfolio was out of whack. He didn't take an Advil, he knew what it meant. Or knowing what time of day you get insights.

For me it's first thing in the morning or cold showers, those clichés. Those embodiment practice and clichés work. And what they do is they gradually improve your relevance realization so that you get better at navigating the world. And I think getting that Taoist balance up.

**Jason Buck:**

No. I was actually going to say, when you talk about the book choices, it's like a Daoist balance as you just said. I was going to bring up that it is a Daoist balance and that's a Daoist way of going through life.

But what do you think when the Daoist say, "The Dao is not for everybody." Very few people can handle trying to navigate life with that balance. I think your argument, not to speak for you, would be that your left Hester is the one yelling at you that you shouldn't be living that way. You need to ignore it.

**Tom Morgan:**

Dude, funny enough, the infinite loop guys were super crazy, unbelievably flattering and did an analysis of, well a synthesis of all my work the other day.

And the dude that wrote the synthesis at one point wrote questions and one of was just like, I'm being unfair to him, but isn't this all for rich people? If you are far enough up Maslow's Hierarchy that you can have these slightly douchey conversations, why is this stuff relevant to you?

And I think about that all the time, which is that if you are working a dish washing job or three jobs because you have to, does any of this stuff matter? Will you be able to achieve that Daoist balance in your life? What level of subsistence does this stop at?

And the answer is, I don't really care because my audience is typically people that have enough and enough I think is a highly relative thing. But it starts quite low for most people.

I don't believe the 75 grand a year number, particularly if you live in Manhattan, but after a certain level you've got enough. And so it's right, how do you flourish after that point?

And what's nuts about all the wisdom literature is how closely it correlates to flourishing. We tend to focus on intellectual stuff to the exclusion of anything else. But the wisdom stuff has the tightest correlation to flourishing and therefore I think it's one of the most important things to pay attention to.

**Jason Buck:**

And actually us just miscategorizing this or simplifying it, I will actually push back against that general opinion because I've felt both sides of the same coin. It's not just for the ultra rich, it's actually for the ultra poor too.

I say it in this way is I've lived in California as both. And you either want to be really poor or really rich in California. The in between is the nightmare. Because you actually are provided for on all the baseline needs if you're at a subsistence level in California. Healthcare, food, shelter, clothing et cetera. And then if you're ultra rich, obviously if you can afford California.

It's in between that's the nightmare when you're trying to make ends meet and you don't have time for this naval gazing so to speak. So people always push back it's only for the rich. I'm not so certain.

And as we know as all the traditions out of the east is primarily for wandering mannequins. It's like it's the ultra poor. So it's not just for the ultra rich, it's more that in between when you're part of that society and you're living in a middle class dystopia and you're trying to make ends meet, that's when it's really hard to have these discussions and you're like, "Bro, you're not helping me at all here."

But I want to go back, so the idea with the simplicity, tension, synthesis is what I was trying to get at too is when I was thinking about these allostatic bands or John Gray's liberalism and barbarism.

Part of what I wonder is that framing have, even if I do agree with it, is how do you know over the next few decades what society's going to look like? And by trying to go maybe more right hemisphere, you're limiting your ability to thrive in a left hemisphere world.

### **Tom Morgan:**

Well your first point's exactly correct. It's a face shift which follows power, which means by definition you don't know when the face shift comes, right? But you know what precedes the face shift, which is what's called a frustrated state.

This dissonance where this is tension that builds up a bit like tectonic plates and a bit in tectonic plates you can't predict when an earthquake comes. You just know it's going to follow a power lull when it does, which is a bit nuts because how nature works thesis does actually apply to all these ideas, which is bonkers.

So yeah, no idea. And it's the biggest weakness of this thesis, which is like, yeah, 300 years from now great, who cares, right?

But the strongest part of the thesis is the fact that it's so unbelievably applicable to individuals and that all of the principles of the model and this relevance realization and this wisdom acquisition are like to again different extent in different people's lives, super, super applicable.

There are practices that you can implement that can improve your ability to navigate the world efficiently and the world will respond to you I believe very positively even though our world at the moment doesn't really believe in those things.

And then the weirdest part of that is, is that because of the whole butterfly effect, if you are an individually aligned person, your ability to have a cascading positive impact on the whole system is that much greater.

So this is an emergent move and all the emergent moves happen bottom up. And so if you and me decide that we're going to sort out our shadow and sort out our shit and work out how to navigate the world more effectively, we A, don't know if we're randomly going to be teaching the next Nelson Mandela or the next cascading positive thing. We don't know because of the complexity of the system what positive impact they're going to have.

But we know that the more conscious and integrated we get, the better things are going to go for us and the better things are going to go for everyone around us. And we might randomly catalyze this move.

One of the things I wrote about in the paper is that they found that once three and a half percent of the population is engaged in a social movement, it basically becomes inevitable. And that face shifts do follow these tipping point structures.

So to address the maybe Daoism for everybody, maybe heroism isn't for everybody. Maybe the person that goes out and breaks the frame and delivers all these ideas, becomes a prophet and gets crucified and all of these, the guy that delivers the message that you've all fucked up and you've all gone wrong. That's not for everyone.

Because all we have to do is listen to that person. But I think each of us in our own individual lives can bring these wisdom practices and this relevance realization in. And what blows me away is people don't really tend to talk about it very much. At least I don't notice people talking about it very much.

#### **Jason Buck:**

Man. You threw me off with heroism because I had a different line of thought then that brought back something else. But I did want to be clear about one thing that you said that's clear in your writing too is be the change you want to see in the world.

Because most people complain about the world and they want to change the world because it's much easier to try to go outwardly that way through slacktivism than it is to change yourself.

And you're trying to say if you change yourself, if you deal with your shadow and ego that is a light beam or some sort of unifying force to the world, it's more harder to deal with yourself and so maybe you should focus on that first.

#### **Tom Morgan:**

It's actually much worse than that. It's much, much worse than that. I go back to Aladdin. So in Aladdin, Aladdin gets three wishes and all three of his wishes are catastrophes. He sets something in motion that he doesn't understand.

And one of the ubiquitous myths is to be careful what you wish for myth. That you go to the evil witch and you say, "I want to be beautiful." And something horrifying happens as a result of that, that leads to the end of the story if it has a happy ending, you going back and being like, "I'm really sorry. What I should have just done was try to be myself," right?

Aladdin. That's how Aladdin ends is that he should have just been himself with Princess Jasmine all the time. And this actually speaks to I think an incredibly profound idea, one that I haven't unpacked yet, but I've been thinking about for literally five or six years now, which is this idea of top down where Mao and smashed sparrows.

And I think in 1950s Mao was like, "All right, sparrows are eating all the grain, we're going to kill all the sparrows." So they kill all the sparrows and the population goes out of control and it kills 50 million people.

It is the worst manmade disaster of all time because he prodded something in a system that he didn't understand. And that actually is the way the left hemisphere acts, right? It's like, "Oh, I'm just going to move this brick over here. You know what? I'm just going to put an engagement algorithm on my social network. I'm sure that'll be fine because it's going to make me a bunch more money." Oh wait, catastrophe.

You see this cascading effort all the time. So it's like actually the individual is the only level you should be thinking about doing things, which is right, okay, all right, the outside world is smarter than me. I'm

going to respond to its cues hopefully in a judicious way. And that's big hope, right? That's an impossible balance.

But you do respond to the world in a judicious way and you start with yourself and your own consciousness. The problem with 19 and 20 year olds protesting and I find that has merits, is that a much more positive thing to do is have the aligned individual, the person that's come alive.

**Jason Buck:**

That's perfect. I was going to go a [inaudible 01:01:59] hold that back is you basically saying is like atrophic cascades. We don't know the cascaded consequences from a reaction. That's what drives me crazy about consequentialist philosophers, right?

They could view all those cascades that you never know actually can happen. But going back to the heroism idea, I remember this was the other piece that you reminded me, that's why it threw me off for a second, is that I was reading in yours and I'm curious because what I'm really highlighting is the nuance, right?

You did a great job and you try to reduce and have a easily readable paper. But there's a lot of nuance under there that I want to pull back out on. And one of them is the idea of heroism or the hero's journey.

And correct me if I'm wrong, I want to say it's your home mate Rory Sutherland that's talked about, no, there's actually not just five storylines. There's actually a multitude of storylines.

And if we keep reducing it to hero's journeys or Romans, or storylines, then we're reducing the nuance of human existence. And so what I started with is my intellectual dyslexia is when I hear about the hero's journey and those heroic stories and those myths, like you're saying in the beginning those myths, to me those myths perpetuate the left hemisphere.

And this is where I may intellectually dyslexic because you're putting in the societal influences and the directions that society wants you to go in and through that complexity. And so correct me where I'm wrong there.

**Tom Morgan:**

I love Rory. Rory is the bestest, but I think that's wrong. Well I don't know exactly what he's saying, but I'll say what I'm saying, which is that I believe that the power of stories directly corresponds to their social usefulness or for want of a better term, their evolutionary usefulness.

So I take the piss out of my wife for watching Real Housewives, but like Robin Dunbar said that 60% of human combination is gossip because social cohesion, understanding social dynamics is existentially important.

Breaking Bad and Better Call Saul, they're massively popular because they show the cascading negative effect of bad moral decisions. There's all these things that convey information that's important.

And I believe the strength and interest of that narrative on a very rough basis, not one to one, roughly corresponds to how useful that story is. So the monomyth is popular now and I don't know whether it was popular 3000 years ago. It wasn't as popular 30 years ago based on Hollywood blockbusters.

But right now this one story is so popular because it's about the evolution of consciousness. It's literally about returning the right hemisphere over the left. It's literally about moving away from abstraction. It's literally about integrating your own consciousness and confronting your shadow.

And I can go as long or as deep as people want on that but my view is that because societal changes are emergent, they get reflected in what we're interested in.

Our right hemisphere controls our exploratory attention. It basically points us in the right direction. And so that people are getting so interested in the hero's journey, it's 11 of the 15 highest grossing movies ever including Avatar.

Avatar literally could not be more accurate. And it's even about environmental disruption. It may not be everyone's favorite movie, but it's literally about a guy achieving a higher level of consciousness and realizing he shouldn't be destroying the environment.

It's as cliché as you could possibly get. So yeah, there are a million storylines. I'm not saying there aren't a million storylines, but people that look at Marvel and Pixar and Star Wars and they're like, "Guys, why do you keep remaking the same movie? Is it because you are like creatively bankrupt?"

I'm like, "Well yeah, maybe." But that's not a sufficient answer. Why does this one story sell every single time it gets produced? What's in this story that makes it sell every time it gets produced?

And when you move away from that story, you create a pile of crap, at least subjectively, in my opinion, The Matrix versus The Matrix sequels or The Force Awakens versus The Last Jedi. You have these very strict structures that you can mess with a little bit on the margin, but if you mess with them too much, they lose the arc of the story. And the arc of the story is what's important.

And to address the left hemisphere claim, actually myth, and this took me years to work out, years, Campbell has this line, which is the purpose of myth is to harmonize mind and body. And I was like, "Well, what does that mean?"

And what he's talking about is he's taking abstract ideas and he's putting them in a flow. A story is a flow and a bunch of facts. And so when you hear a story about something and you realize it applies to the model you have of your own body or your own mind or your own existence, it can resurface you.

And the example I think of is if you're in church and you're listening to someone tell a story from the Bible and your blood runs cold because you're like, "Oh, fuck. I haven't been living that way." I haven't been living according to this story that clearly has this evolutionary utility and you sort your life out and you suddenly get converted to living a life in a different way.

That's an extreme example, but it's more we're all drawn to this hero's journey because it literally is a story about the change in consciousness. That is the STS model. The hero's journey is the STS.

### **Jason Buck:**

It reminded me of in a way then you brought up religion is in a way Nietzsche's idea of slave mentality of religion. That's why I wonder sometimes the hero's journey too is it makes us feel solipsistically like we're a hero and self-aggrandizement. Now we have no autonomy or direction over our lives.

And so it's what I meant about it's putting us in the same rubric of the left hemisphere is we think we're driving the car, but meanwhile we're a child in the backseat with a plastic steering wheel thinking we're the F1 driver or something like that.

I told you, I have intellectual dyslexia. So I read things the opposite way. Maybe they weren't dented, but that is the way my brain was working is it tells us all these stories that help us sleep at night not realizing the overarching journey we're on in a sense that we're maybe out of tune or out of touch with.

But I want to try to tie things back together even though they don't need to be tied back together. But you started to talk about when or if this is going to happen, and like you said, how can you predict the future?

And you and I have talked about this privately is I come from a history of religious traditions. My father is a zen Buddhist, I studied comparative religions in college. I spent time with Hopi Indians, Mahayana Buddhist, Shamans to Sufi's.

And even going back to some of the people I originally was in contact with, they were part of the Esalen, EST, Landmark, Human Potential Movement, more university, all that stuff.

And what I found my entire life in the history of all that stuff is like is they're always talking about this changing consciousness is going to happen and it's right around the corner, right? It's been right around the corner my entire life.

And it reminds me of when I lived to Brazil, there's an old saying that Brazil's a country of the future and then Brazilians say, "And always will be."

So I just wanted you to touch on that. And so that's what I was saying about Anais Nin and maybe seeing these synchronicities is, do we see what we want to see? And we think it's right around the corner, but it might never get there.

And quite frankly, how is that not a better way or going through life or worse way? There's no judgment on if that's a better or worse way, but we want to see it's right around the corner because it gives us a broader color palette or maybe some more vivacity to our life. I'm curious how you think about that.

**Tom Morgan:**

Yeah, I think it's a great point. I think that the things I'd say against it would be life doesn't ever get less complex, right? Life doesn't ever get less conscious. We're on a one way trajectory.

I understand that things are cyclical, particularly in markets, but all of the evidence shows that life is getting more conscious. And then you're back to timeframes. The 60s in not even a blink of an eye in terms of the timeframes that we are dealing with, right?

That doesn't really help you and me because I don't really care about a thousand years from now. And understanding how and when, I don't know. But Tarnas writing in '91, and he was a big Esalen guy, wrote about the idea of the focus on embodiment, charminism, psychedelics.

The Body Keeps the Score going to number one last year, despite having been published in 2014. Now Aaron Rodgers talking about getting two MVPs from his ayahuasca retreat, it's like there's something in the air right now, and again, I might just be overfitting and it might end up meaning nothing, not least because we have free will, right?

I'm a big free will guy and I believe that we have the power to drive this car over the cliff if we really want to. And there's no guarantee that the forces of light win. I happen to think they will. Because an iterated game cooperation tends to win. And all of these frustrated states tend to result in some collapse in the emergence of a higher order at the end of that.

Whether humans are part of that, I don't know, right? All very long-winded, crappy way of saying, I don't know. Again, the thing that I do know because I've been living it over the last couple of years is that all these concepts are hyper applicable to our own lives.

And there is a there there. I used to really subscribe to the Yuval Noah Harari story that everything was a fiction just to create cooperation.

And one of the things that I now believe, and it is an article of faith, is that there is some intelligent force that we can interact with that represents our evolutionary growth more than just beyond survival of the fittest.

And I do believe that there is this niche that we can all start to inhabit as individuals, which makes our life go better and better.

So those are two heretical positions, which I've come to believe through personal experience, but it makes me optimistic about my life and the life of everyone around me. Whether this face shift happens soon, I don't know.

But when people get really super fucking gloomy at me and like we're all doomed, I'm like this middle frustrated state is actually archetypal, this is what's supposed to happen.

And Tarnas said the same thing. So you get this forest fire burned down stage of total nihilism and Nietzsche said the same thing, enslaved morality, where he says you need nihilism to empty the cup so that you get a better philosophy on the other side of it that's more real.

And I think that actually we're going to go back to more of an indigenous understanding of the world. Because those dudes were right, just science is only starting to work it out right now. And if you live that way, your life goes better is the shorthand.

#### **Jason Buck:**

No, this is so perfect and it ties us back in perfectly to plug your essays again. And your most recent one was about your shadow and maybe your blind spots and everything like that.

And so it ties in what I'm going to call the Morgan dialectic simplicity, tension, synthesis related to the Hegelian dialectic. But the one thing, and this is what we're going at the whole time too, is I always think about we oscillate between these extremes, however you want to call those extremes.

But then part of it, especially when we started talking about these dialectics, what always bothered me about Hegelian dialectic is you go thesis, antithesis, the synthesis, right? And everybody goes, "Great, we're done."

And similarly, I wonder with your dialectic, when I always go, "No, that end point is just the start of the next one." So it's much more circular than it is linear.

And part of that and I'm curious how you deal with this is the problem is when we start going down these roads and let's say we bifurcate let's say the material world from the spiritual world, is once we start going down these roads, we think the spiritual world then becomes a hierarchy where we're gaining more rank among the hierarchy.

And to me, at the end of the day, it's still just people selling trinkets in the marketplace of the world and it's still materialism and hierarchy.

So how do you get away from that whether it's material spiritual? To me they blend into the same thing. And when you go through these dialectics, you end up back in the same place. Maybe you're not any better off. So I'm curious to how you'd push back against that?

#### **Tom Morgan:**

Yeah, I've got a real problem with hierarchal group development models. Because the old joke is there's no one who talks about hierarchical development models ever thinks they're at the bottom of one.

All the Ken Wilber stuff of mullerian angle of sooner or later everyone's going to be as enlightened as we are. And I think that's super problematic and really bad. But there is still this idea where I think the way you get around the douchiness is it's you occupying your niche.

Thelonious Monk said the genius is he was most like himself. So what you do is you end up getting an incredibly clear view of your place in the world and then you get incredibly good at navigating it.

But that's done through a series of insights like the structure of the SDS or the Hegelian dialectic where your model gets created and broken 15 times a second when we're interacting with the world. And then it's fractal. So it's like it can happen in your life where your model of the world, the way you're living is completely wrong.

You'll have a spiritual awakening and you'll get thrown into chaos and then you'll reform at a higher level. That's the spirit, that's the hero's journey. So this whole dialectic process goes back and forth. It's just an upward spiral.

So there is a level to it. Every time you have an insight your worldview just gets a little bit better and a little bit clearer. And I think the idea of being integrated rather than higher, I find less problematic. Because higher consciousness just sounds like another way of abstracting yourself from the world.

**Jason Buck:**

Perfect. Absolutely brilliantly said. I want to thank you for indulging all of my simpleton questions and my intellectual dyslexia. So once again, plug away. Where can people find your essays? Where can people interact with you on Twitter? Or quite frankly, if you want any other email, Instagram, TikTok, whatever you want.

**Tom Morgan:**

Yeah, I gave up all the other social networks and then filled all the available time with Twitter, much to the loss of my wife and children. At Tom\_KCP on Twitter. Please DM me. I've received an insane amount of value in my life from people like you just randomly reaching out to me or me reaching out to you as I think that's the case and just turning into phenomenal conversations.

Twitter only works if you do it in real life, in my opinion, really does. But the conversion rate is like 90% great people. And then the KCPgroup.com, the insight section I publish every two weeks and then occasionally long form essays.

I also host calls with the most interesting people that I can find. So if you have found someone you think is unusually interesting or have some very interesting perspective either on markets, investing or the crazy stuff that we've just talked about, let me know.

**Jason Buck:**

Perfect. Thank you so much. I appreciate your time. Always enjoy our conversation. Hopefully we'll talk again soon.

**Tom Morgan:**

Thanks, Jason.

**Taylor Pearson:**

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