

The Great Simplification

Nate Hagens (00:00:02):

You're listening to the Great Simplification with Nate Hagens, that's me. On this show, we try to explore and simplify what's happening with energy, the economy, the environment, and our society. Together with scientists, experts, and leaders, this show is about understanding the bird's eye view of how everything fits together, where we go from here, and what we can do about it as a society and as individuals.

(00:00:33):

This week I'm joined by Swedish social entrepreneur and philosopher Tomas Björkman. Tomas started in physics and mathematics and he moved to investment banking and is now a philanthropist working with numerous organizations like the Eskaret Foundation that he founded, Emerge, 29K and Perspectiva.

(00:00:57):

Tomas and I discuss his recent books, including *The Nordic Secret* and his championing of a philosophical framework called metamodernism, work that ultimately aspires to have more engaged, mindful global citizens and why having multiple perspective is so critical to our coming global challenges. This was a really great conversation. Please welcome my friend Tomas Björkman.

(00:01:26):

Hello, Tomas.

Tomas Björkman (00:01:39):

Hello, Nate. Great to see you again.

Nate Hagens (00:01:41):

Great to see you. We've known each other a couple years now. We've had many Zoom conversations, which in retrospect I wish we had recorded, but you graciously have sent me your three books. I want to talk about those on this podcast, but maybe for people who don't know you, you could tell us what you're currently doing, what is your worldview, your philosophy, how you got to this point, and give us a big aerial view of Tomas Björkman and his efforts to shift our global culture.

Tomas Björkman (00:02:20):

Okay, that's a great question, a broad question, so we'll see where we go with that. So I have a natural science background. I studied mathematics and physics at university, and I think that's important for my work that I really come from a natural science and system complex, dynamic systems perspective. But I spent most of my active years so far in business world being a serial entrepreneur, main venture has been in investment banking, and when I sold my banking business some 15 years ago, I decided to set up my own foundation in Sweden, the Oak Island Foundation, Eskaret Foundation to really look into the systemic aspects of our human world and the great transformation that I believe that our Western civilization, possibly the global civilization is going through at the moment.

(00:03:23):

The Great Simplification

So that's really my take. It's a very broad scale, try to understand where we are coming from. And again, I'm starting from a very natural science perspective. I'm an engineer, a member of the Royal Swedish Society of Engineering, come from background within the Club of Rome, from the environment and systemic thinking around the environment. But I come more and more to understand and appreciate that we cannot just understand the world today and our problems from a natural science perspective. We definitely also need a sociological perspective on our world, our socially constructed world, and also a psychological perspective on our inner worlds.

(00:04:14):

So for me, the complex evolving system, civilization system has got natural science components, but also very much social constructive components and inner components. So the think tank that Jonathan Rowson and I started in London some years ago, *Perspectiva*, we have as our tagline, systems, souls and society. And I think it's important to understand all three of those aspects and understand that they have very different, both ontology and therefore also epistemology. We need to approach our knowing around those three worlds a little bit differently.

Nate Hagens (00:05:00):

What does the souls refer to?

Tomas Björkman (00:05:03):

The souls refers to the totality of our inner experience. There is not necessarily anything religious or spiritual in that, even though I have a great respect for religious and spirituals perspectives of our inner world and that those perspectives in many cases are much, much more richer than our natural science perspectives of those worlds. But I, myself a card-carrying atheists, so I don't put anything religious in the soul.

Nate Hagens (00:05:41):

While your overview of your work of integrating natural science, anthropology, sociology, and psychology, naturally you would be a guest on this show because that is exactly what I'm trying to articulate to hopefully a lot more humans on how things fit together. So what sort of work are you doing now or were you finished? *Perspectiva*? What else are you working on?

Tomas Björkman (00:06:07):

Well, so my foundation in Sweden, the Oak Island Foundation, we have our own island outside Stockholm where we are exploring the connection between our inner worlds and societal change in many different ways. Anything from youth camps in the summer where we try to help adolescents to take the first step on their adult developmental journey, adult development retreats, but also invitational conferences.

(00:06:37):

The Great Simplification

Perspectiva in London is doing a bit more of the deeper philosophical work around this societal transition. The Emerge project, which both has a website, whatisemerging.com and a annual gathering at different places in the world. We have been in Berlin, in Kyiv, and most lately in Austin, Texas, where we met last time this summer. Have a communication projects called the Inner Developmental Goals, where we are trying to communicate the understanding for what does a scientific view of our inner development mean and how is inner development important in relationship to the global challenges. So it is the IDGs in order to reach the SDGs.

(00:07:36):

And then perhaps finally, I'm also involved in a non-profit, open source digital platform to really democratize in the development and growth.

Nate Hagens (00:07:49):

All that in 40 hours a week, right?

Tomas Björkman (00:07:53):

No, not really. It's a bit more than 40 hours.

Nate Hagens (00:07:55):

Yeah, I can imagine.

Tomas Björkman (00:07:58):

Yeah, I'm keeping busy.

Nate Hagens (00:08:00):

Yeah. So if you are successful with your efforts, what can you envision in 10 or 20 years as a product of these and related initiatives?

Tomas Björkman (00:08:12):

Yeah, I think, just like you are so excellently outlining in your podcasts and in your video series, we are, as a civilization facing some very serious threats. And I, like many today in the world believe that the only way for us to really come out on the other side of this societal transformation that we are in front of is to deepen the possibilities for us all to both understand the nature of these problems, but also really be able to integrate these problems and work on ourselves in order to develop the capacities needed to become conscious co-creators of a new civilization.

(00:09:11):

And also in that, realizing that it is not just about our inner worlds and the natural world, but it's also to a very large extent, a matter of our social world, the social structures that we have built in this world, our value systems, but also it comes down to our worldview itself. So it's as much as systemic

The Great Simplification

transformation, a cultural transformation, an inner transformation that we are looking at as a natural systems transformation.

Nate Hagens (00:09:50):

So I don't think I've ever shared this thought with you nor publicly, but we are a can kicking species. And a couple hundred years ago, Tomas Malthus predicted population decline because the linear and exponential differential between reproduction and food would hit a inflection point. Then Paul Ehrlich predicted a population problem, they didn't know about fossil fuels or globalization and debt. And then we kicked a can with the central banks taking over the banking model in 2009, and now governments and central banks together are taking over the guarantees of the market system.

(00:10:34):

In my view, I think the next can to kick, there aren't any more biophysical cans unless there's some major, major new technology that I don't see on the horizon yet, the next can to kick is in our minds. Do we need all this stuff on this rat race to compete with others for monetary material things or can like you say, the inner development, can we mature as a culture, as individuals, but ultimately a culture and shift what we do with the resources that we have?

Tomas Björkman (00:11:09):

No, absolutely. I think that that is the big question, but perhaps even before we have such a substantial cultural and inner shift, which I again think we do need. I think a first step might just be to help ourselves get enough inner psychological resources to really be able to face these global challenges.

(00:11:34):

I think a lot of us, so certainly I myself, are really daunted by the size of these challenges that we are facing. And when we are overwhelmed by external challenges and threat, then it's just so easy for us humans just to deploy psychological defenses, like a plain denial of the problems existence or rationalizations, like what can I as a single individual do and other psychological defenses.

(00:12:11):

So first step is really helping a lot of people build the capacities, both emotional and cognitive capacities to take in the challenges and by they having the courage to try to be part of the solution.

Nate Hagens (00:12:27):

I would add to that the defense mechanisms of self-medicating and unhealthy behavior as a coping mechanism where we don't have the social networks and the deep social capital that's necessary that I think you're trying to breathe life into at your conferences and workshops, et cetera. So I think it's-

Tomas Björkman (00:12:52):

And an important thing here to remember is that when we're talking about building these inner resources or capacities, it's really the corporate world that is starting to wake up here because we see in many of the global or the international tech companies, especially the tech companies that are in this

The Great Simplification

rapidly moving technological environment where you really need to have organizations where every person in the organization can take a responsibility for the totality. You cannot any longer work with the old sort of modernistic corporate structure where you aggregate all the information up in a hierarchy and you have a small management group that takes the important decision and then makes a five-year plan, three-year plan or a one-year plan or whatever. That doesn't work any longer.

(00:13:48):

So now as corporations are pushing more and more responsibility for the complexity of the totality down in the organization and expect self-organizing group, et cetera, et cetera, the corporations find that a lot of people thrive in that environment and say, "Wonderful, finally I can take responsibility for a larger part of what is going on." But the flip side is that many, many employees in some organizations up to 50%, they cannot cope with that complexity and that results in psychological suffering and even burnout. So the corporations are starting to see a need to help build these psychological resources within their frontline employees.

(00:14:40):

And then the good news is that exactly those same inner capacities and skill that we have documented in the Inner Developmental Goals project is what you need as an individual to be able to live a better life as a family member, but also as a citizen, responsible citizen and as part of the global humanity. So it's really the same psychological resources we need on the individual level, the organizational level, the national governmental level, and the planetary level. And that I find is good news.

Nate Hagens (00:15:17):

Can you give us a little bit of a brief overview of what the individual development goals are?

Tomas Björkman (00:15:25):

The inner development goals and-

Nate Hagens (00:15:27):

Inner. Yeah.

Tomas Björkman (00:15:27):

... and it is important to stress when some people hear inner, they immediately think individual, but these inner development goals are to a very large extent, also collective. So we can develop some of these capacities as individuals, but it's really important that we develop them as well as a collective. So in this program that is really modeled on the SDGs. So we have identified 23 skills or capacities and arranged them in five different dimensions. And the five dimensions are starting with being, and that is your relationship to yourself, thinking, that is your cognitive capacity. Relating is very much about emotional capacities, collaborating, and finally acting.

(00:16:27):

The Great Simplification

And just to mention a few skills in relating, it's of course empathy and self-compassion. And to take that as an example, again, the good news is that science clearly show that we are not born with a certain amount of empathy. No, we can both extend our empathy to include more and more people, even perhaps future generations and even all sentient beings. And we can also deepen our capacity for empathy. So that's the good news. That's what science shows.

(00:17:08):

The flip side is that you cannot teach empathy or compassion in a normal school setting. Like all of these inner development skills, developing empathy involves deeper layers of your psychology and involves what some might call transformative learning, immersive learning over a longer time. Another capacity that is more cognitive might be perspective-taking, both being able to take more perspectives in other people's perspective on a subject, but also perspective-seeking, actively seeking to find more perspectives and finding out about your own blind spots on a certain topic.

Nate Hagens (00:17:58):

And that's pretty rare, I would imagine.

Tomas Björkman (00:18:01):

Yeah.

Nate Hagens (00:18:03):

I mean, I think you can consciously say, wow, I wonder what that person feels like and walk in their shoes. But to actually seek that out every day would take some practice, I imagine.

Tomas Björkman (00:18:17):

Yeah. And of course, it's also culture perspective. And if we lift this example of the perspective-taking to a more collective level, you could say that we, in the Western culture today, the Western civilization today, we have privileged the scientific perspective, the rationalistic perspective. And that was probably exactly the right thing to do during the enlightenment when we went from a religious, dogmatic worldview and we discovered the power of science and reason.

(00:18:56):

And this perspective, enlightenment perspective, the scientific rationalistic perspective have of course given us all these wonderful things like modern medicine, human rights, and democracy that we would never want to be without the whole technological evolution comes from that perspective. And I am a scientist myself, as I mentioned, I'm a physicist and I believe in the power of that perspective, but only using that perspective as a single perspective on all aspects of our human world. That's where we go wrong.

(00:19:36):

So I think that today it's also expanding the capacity of our civilization, of our culture's ability to take more perspectives on the problems. And of course, the environmental problem might be one of those

The Great Simplification

where my organization, the Club of Rome, has very much from the very beginning, from our first computer model in 1972, that resulted in the report limits to growth, favored the scientific way of defining and solving the problem. But I think we are more and more coming to the conclusion that this is not just a scientific problem, it is as much a cultural, structural, and also psychological problem.

Nate Hagens (00:20:24):

So of those 23 categories, are you a guru on the inner development? You yourself, personally, Tomas?

Tomas Björkman (00:20:32):

No.

Nate Hagens (00:20:34):

Isn't that interesting?

Tomas Björkman (00:20:35):

Not at all. It's always interesting just to make a self-test and see amongst these five dimensions where your strength and weaknesses are. And I could say immediately that perhaps my strength are within the cognitive side, the cognitive dimension, the thinking dimension, and perhaps also on the acting dimension. And I think that's quite typical for an entrepreneur. We need to be able to see the world and we need to act in the world, whereas when it comes to the... And perhaps also collaborating to a certain extent, you need to be able to do that.

(00:21:13):

But my two weaker spots are certainly in the being, in the relationship to myself, knowing myself better and in the relating aspects of my personality. So that's where I need to do a lot of work.

Nate Hagens (00:21:29):

You and me both. I've spoken to young people for 20 years about human behavior and the little traps and hacks and evolutionary supernormal stimuli and knowing about it doesn't give you a trump card to overcome it. So it's a lifelong thing. And I think it's wonderful that you've set this all up with these different categories because especially with the content on this website, on this podcast, it's really heavy.

(00:22:03):

And I think more important than knowing the facts of our systems ecology of this moment is having the psychological foundation of what it means to be alive today and having the social and human networks of wellbeing as tools to cope with all this stuff, especially with young people. So I think that's great that you're really working on this. Have you found it being-

Tomas Björkman (00:22:34):

The Great Simplification

Could I just say back to you that yes, that's of course very important, but also I think you are doing a very important work here, bringing also back reality into this discussion. Because again, we need all the different perspectives. And in some respects, especially within the humanities at university today, we are so much focusing on the subjective experience of us as individuals, and on the fact that reality very correctly, human reality is to a very, very large extent, socially constructed and could be different in many way and are subject to our cultural understanding of that reality.

(00:23:24):

But that is only to a certain extent, it is very, very important to remember that there is also a physical reality out there which we humans are completely subject to. And in our postmodern way of thinking, in our postmodern way of philosophizing, we sometimes tend to forget about that and think that everything is just narratives and stories. And yes, narratives and stories are important. We will not solve this crisis without understanding the values and how we humans are trapped also in those narratives and stories.

Tomas Björkman (00:24:03):

But we cannot ignore the reality of what energy is and how dependent we are. Not just humans, but the whole universe is just dependent on the fundamental energy equations, and we cannot put ourselves above those.

Nate Hagens (00:24:27):

I think this is why we initially found each other, because I realized that there are a lot of different flavors out there where people are focused on poverty, or social justice, or climate change, or debt, or any number of things. And that there wasn't a broad enough umbrella both to connect the natural science, the reality, as you say, but also, the social web of engaging and listening to other people's perspectives and suppressing your own identity for a while in order to get a broader perspective. You are, in addition to the other things you've mentioned, a vocal champion for the philosophical concept called meta modernism, and you just mentioned postmodernism. Could you maybe explain to me and our listeners as if I were a sixth grader, because I've heard this a few times and I don't think I fully grasp it. But could you explain what meta modernism is and why you think that perspective is important?

Tomas Björkman (00:25:35):

Yes. You might call this field of inquiry or worldview with many different names. For me, it's a placeholder for whatever worldview we are right now as humanity discovering something that comes after the postmodern worldview. You could say that we already touched on the very important transition in worldview that we in the Western society went through a couple of hundred years ago during the Enlightenment, and then, the Industrial Revolution, when we went from what is usually called a pre-modern worldview, which is very much the religious worldview. And there were and there still are many different pre-modern worldviews in the world. Within the umbrella of the pre-modern period, you can have very many different worldviews, very different religions, but they still have something in

The Great Simplification

common, the pre-modern. Then, with the transition to modernity. There are also different flavors of a modern world view, but they are all built on the fact that we privileged scientific and rationalistic understanding of the world.

(00:27:02):

And again, that has been wonderful and given us all the different things that we were talking about before. But the modern world view is also blind to a number of things. And therefore, we had at the end of the last century, at the end of the 1900s, a very sound philosophical critique coming up of the modernistic worldview and our over reliance on science and rationality. And that was called the postmodern worldview, where we are starting to realize that for us humans, narrative, and context, and stories are extremely important. And we are also starting to realize that a lot of these things out in the world that we've taken for granted and during a large part of our human existence are actually human constructs. So, we are very much more as humans, co-creators of our human world than we thought. If you take that, and also, in the postmodern philosophical critique of modernity, it's a critique of the power structures, the hidden power structures that are built into modernity. That had its expression in colonialism and other things.

(00:28:26):

And all of this is very good. These are sound insights, but if you take them to the extreme, you can wrongly get to the point where you think that all human values, all human perspectives are just subjective and are just a matter of power gains. And that there is no real reality out there. And when you come to that, you really come into a value vacuum. You cannot really talk about societal development any longer. In a postmodern world view, you talking about societal development would more or less be heresy because a postmodern philosopher would argue that if you're talking about progress in a society, you are really just applying your power perspective on that society. Postmodern thinking has been very good in critiquing the world, but it is absolutely clear as postmodern philosophy is lacking this direction, no aspect that we need to move humanity forward that needs to come something after the postmodern thinking-

Nate Hagens (00:29:49):

So, it's deconstructing, not constructing.

Tomas Björkman (00:29:53):

Yes, exactly. What we need now is some sort of a reconstructing postmodernism. And there's some thinkers are using the name a meta modern perspective, which is really about trying to integrate all the insights from the different worldviews that humanity has gone through into a much more richer multi-perspectival worldview. And this is really the first time in the history of humanity that we are trying to develop and adopt a multi-perspectival worldview because the previous worldviews have all in different respects, been mono-perspectival and somehow claimed that they are holders of the whole truth. I think the meta modern worldview knows that there is no such thing as ultimate truth, but that there is a reality out there that we as humans need to relate to.

The Great Simplification

Nate Hagens (00:31:03):

But there are some universal truths. I know there are 5.7 million BTUs in a barrel of crude oil. That is a truth.

Tomas Björkman (00:31:11):

Yes. And if I should take the postmodern philosopher's perspective on that, he or she would say that that concept is a human invention. Those units that you just mentioned of measurements are not out there in nature. They are human inventions. So, what you just said is they would say, "Just a human invention." I would from a meta modern perspective say, "Yes, our understanding of these energy things, and the formulas that we are using, and the units of counting, they are human inventions. But that does not negate the fact that they are describing something fundamental deep down that we need to respect." It could have been described in another language, but there is some reality down there. And could I say that - not to become too philosophical and too abstract - I would want to take a very concrete example to illustrate this, if I can.

(00:32:26):

And that is to talk about the distinction between oxygen and money. Oxygen or air, in our modern society, to me, to survive, I need oxygen to breathe, and I need money. If I'm deprived of oxygen or money, I will die. For me, as an individual, money and my need for oxygen meets me at some sort of objective reality. But there is a fundamental difference between money and oxygen. And the difference is this. If even the whole of humanity came together and said that, "We do not as humans want to be dependent on oxygen," we couldn't do anything about that. But if we as humanity or even just a majority in a nation state came together and said, " We don't want to be dependent on money any longer," then money could be gone tomorrow.

(00:33:36):

Of course, we might need some other mechanisms for allocation of goods, and services, and things, but money is correctly just a human invention. And the market is a human invention, and they could look very, very different. The sad thing is, the sad thing is that in the postmodern world, we even tend to mix this up, and we somehow think that oxygen and the planetary boundaries are up for negotiations, whereas the market forces, we just have to obey, when the truth is exactly the opposite. That's why it becomes important to do these distinctions. And making these distinctions is typical for a meta modern thinking.

Nate Hagens (00:34:26):

I have lots of questions. First of all, just correct something you just said. If you didn't have oxygen or money, you would die. That is probably true in the United States, but in Sweden, if you didn't have money, I don't think you would die where you live. Someone would take care of you.

Tomas Björkman (00:34:44):

The Great Simplification

I would die. But the difference is that in Sweden, I would probably be given the money I would need. if I didn't have money, I would be given the money so I could buy some food.

Nate Hagens (00:34:57):

Okay, got it. Good point. When you try to move from postmodern to meta modern, one of the key things that I'm hearing is the ability to take another perspective, like you were saying earlier. But aren't humans, at least historically, evolutionarily, we're very, very tribal. And we seamlessly create in-groups and out-groups, and favor the in-group and ostracize the out-group. In the step from postmodern to metamodernism, is it a maturity, or a skill, or a temperament that allows some people to suppress that? Or what's going on there?

Tomas Björkman (00:35:43):

It's all, and it's also cultural. It's also cultural. That's why it's important when we're talking about inner development and inner development goals, that it is not only an individualistic journey, but it's also cultural journey. And going back to Sweden or any country, we don't need to go back that many hundred years. Sweden was divided in many different tribes and groups. And I'm just going back a couple of hundred years, and it was actually a cultural effort made in Sweden a couple of hundred years ago to really install the feeling that all Swedes are part of your in-group. Before that Danes or a Goth from the western part of Sweden would easily kill someone from the Svea tribe in the middle part of Sweden.

(00:36:50):

So, it was an effort. Everything beyond the Dunbar number, 150, small tribe, to create that as an in-group is a cultural effort. Now, during the 1700s, 1800s and 1900s, we managed to in most part of the world, extend our circles of belonging, our in-group to the nation state. But that is in itself a cultural effort. I think what we need to do now is to make the similar cultural effort to extend our in-group to include all of humanity, and even which might be difficult, future generations of humanity into our in-groups, the group we care for.

Nate Hagens (00:37:34):

And other species.

Tomas Björkman (00:37:36):

And other species, yes. And natural resources and what have you. And each of these steps, of course, is in some respects more, and more difficult, and involve even more cultural efforts and building, expanding this circle of belonging, or empathy, or compassion and not othering those other groups of people, which we so naturally, as you pointed out, do almost instinctively.

Nate Hagens (00:38:10):

This is an attempt at a new social evolution of our species really at this place in time in history.

The Great Simplification

Tomas Björkman (00:38:18):

Not new. Yeah, well not new because again, what made it possible for us to move from these below Dunbar numbers, small hunter gatherer societies to start building big cities and even civilization 3,000 years ago, was the axial revolution, as we call it, the axial transition when many of the world's dominating religions today were formed as cultural phenomenons. And without those cultural phenomenons, we would never have been able to create cities of tens of thousands of inhabitants or even the early empires of millions of people. That was a social innovation, but it's an old social innovation. So, we need today to really understand the values of these social interventions and take them to the next step. And I think extending this aspect to a global reach rather than just a religious reach, rather than just seeing all the other Christians or Muslims in the world as my in-group, to go to the whole of the world, I would say that that is a smaller step actually than the original step we took 3,000 years ago when we started to overcome the in-group, out-group instinct in us.

Nate Hagens (00:39:49):

Well, I think the in-group, out-group instinct is always in us. And one way that it could happen, not really, but theoretically, is if an alien armada of ships circled the Earth and was trying to destroy Earth. We would sacrifice and organize 8 billion of us in protection of our oceans, our other species, our future generations, everyone. We would do that except we're not getting the emotional cues of something like that. It's a problem.

Tomas Björkman (00:40:23):

Yes, yes. And again, it might be easier to deploy psychological defenses to the existential risk and threat of climate change, for example, than if there was actually an alien space ship there. But then, we have the film, Don't Look Up, which puts its finger on exactly this, that even if there was the immediate danger of a meteorite, we might still deploy the same technological defenses.

Nate Hagens (00:41:02):

The human agency recognition, we're much more likely to conflate a shadow that we see as a burglar or something than the reverse, a burglar for a shadow. So, if Don't Look Up, if that was about an alien race attacking us, I think people would've paid attention because it's a creature as opposed to an asteroid, which is a natural science thing that we've only recently learned about. Anyways. Getting back, I have a question. I'm very naive on this. I'm very interested in it, and it's been explained to me, meta modernism, several times, and I'm at the edges of understanding it. Can an individual human be all these things, premodern, modern, postmodern, and meta modern? Or are there different personality types, or temperaments, or identities that naturally fall into these categories?

Tomas Björkman (00:41:59):

Even if a single individual can adopt or try to adopt a meta modern worldview, and we have to be clear here that just like when we talk about a modern world, the pre-modern world view, or modern worldview, or even post-modern worldview, they come in many different flavors, many different flavors.

The Great Simplification

And the meta modern philosophical space is still very much under development. But having said that, yes, I think a single individual can adopt a meta modern worldview and attitude. It's in some ways a more complex worldview because it is multi-perspectival. And as you said earlier, taking any perspectives all the time does not come natural to us humans. So, it requires an effort, both emotional and cognitive effort. But I think you can, as an individual, adopt a meta modern worldview. And if you do that, I would even say that that would give you a certain advantage in our world today because you would see things and perhaps even be able to predict things that other people cannot see.

(00:43:14):

Just like someone adopting the scientific worldview at an early stage during the medieval times could start to see things, and project things, and invent things that someone who was stuck in the pre-modern religious world view would never do or perhaps not even think about trying to do. So, that is possible, but, and here is the big important but, as all of these world views, they are mainly a culture phenomena. I think it is more interesting to see if a group of people can adopt a meta modern worldview and what that would entail. And if you do that, we should also remember that any society, even if for example, the Scandinavian societies to a very large extent are modernistic societies. At the same time, there are other worldviews in our culture like the pre-modern, even indigenous, and certainly, postmodern worldviews. All these different worldviews are always interacting with each other and competing a bit for our attention and our understanding. Again, it's a messy field.

Nate Hagens (00:44:34):

You're trying this experiment, Tomas, in real time. You organize conferences around the world. They're focused on how do we navigate the meta crisis, which I call the human predicament. Other people call it the poly crisis, but just how everything fits together. How do you find this in real time, trying to breathe life into a meta modern perspective at these conferences and convenings? Are people able to take multiple perspectives, or is that a steep slope still?

Tomas Björkman (00:45:15):

Yes. I should just first comment that on the meta crisis or poly crisis. I prefer myself to use meta crisis. Poly crisis indicates for me that there are many crises out there, and there certainly are. I think using the term meta crisis, that implies some sort of understanding that they are not just related, but they might even have a common cause, that there is an underlying meta crisis that gives rise to all these different crises as symptoms of this underlying. And I would argue then that the underlying crisis is a crisis of worldview, and of understanding, and of capacity to really live up to the challenges that technology and the shrinking size of the world is causing. That's a comment on the meta crisis.

Nate Hagens (00:46:11):

That's all true. But the science part of that would be linking everything you just said with the ecological concept of overshoot.

Tomas Björkman (00:46:20):

The Great Simplification

Absolutely, absolutely. And I can't stress that more again, that in our multi-perspectival, in trying to understand the world from multiple perspectives, we are certainly helped by all these different perspectives that we mentioned. But today, in many parts of the world, not least in Scandinavia, if we are too much in the postmodern mind frame, we might miss the most important perspective, which is the natural science perspective of the reality. Because if we don't respect, for example, the planetary boundaries, then there will be no other perspectives to take.

Nate Hagens (00:47:09):

There's no social justice on a dead planet.

Tomas Björkman (00:47:12):

No, exactly. That's a good formula. I will steal that. There is no social justice on a dead planet.

Nate Hagens (00:47:16):

I stole that from Randy Hayes, but feel free.

Tomas Björkman (00:47:19):

Okay. That's a good meme. That good. No, that's exactly my point. And today, sometimes, at least in some circles, the focus, it's a bit too much away from the hard facts of the ecological crisis that we are in. Having said that, I should also answer your question there on what I think just during the last couple of years compared to five years or even three years ago, I see an awakening and an opening up to these perspectives, both the fact that we might be facing a meta crisis, meaning that there is not just different crises, but there might be some underlying patterns to all of this that we would need to try to discern. That is one thing, and the other thing is that when we are trying to face these problems, it might be that we need to have more perspectives, so people are open to that. Whether we are all able to take more perspectives, it's difficult, but there is an opening to that, that was not there five years ago to that extent. Finally, there is more and more acceptance that we are in a deep societal transformation, and that we are reaching this bifurcation point where it's really up to our civilization to either break through, or face a break down.

(00:49:03):

Incremental change, small policy tweaks here and there, and value shifts here and there will not cut it. We are in for a deep transformation and that, that transformation will probably, to make things even more complicated, be emergent. Meaning that we cannot, theoretically, predict how it will evolve, and what might come out on the other side. Adding to that emergent quality on the transitional transformation, the exponential tech development makes it completely difficult to navigate it.

(00:49:44):

That is also why it's also so difficult to try to envision any utopia, or any vision about where are we heading. We humans need that to be motivated, and the inability to do that, the even theoretical inability to do that, is difficult. For me, if we can't have an end state as a utopia, then we need to focus

The Great Simplification

on what does the good process look like? How should we be on the process that takes us in the right direction? I shall finish by saying something controversial. That is that, the two main forces that we are relying on for the process today, taking us into the future, are the market and democracy. I'm convinced that the market and democracy, at least in its present implementation, will not cut the cake.

Nate Hagens (00:50:42):

I happen to agree with you. Let's use that, Tomas, as a segue into your first book, called *The Market Myth*. In it, among other things, you suggest that the market is a social construct. Can you explain a little bit about the main logic in that book? How could we still have markets in the future, but with far fewer of the social ills that they currently create?

Tomas Björkman (00:51:17):

Yes, I believe in the market and I believe in democracy, but the present implementations are flawed, and are not helping us at the moment. One way to see that is to understand that both the market and democracy, neither of those are natural phenomena. That are not like the oxygen out there, or the planetary boundaries, or the energy equations. They, both of them, are human inventions and they have been extremely powerful and helpful human inventions, but they are still human inventions. As human inventions, they evolve and we can upgrade them, and we can have new implementations of them that might be more helpful today.

(00:52:08):

To understand that, and I think it's a little bit easier to understand democracy is a human construct, because we all know about the constitution, and the thinking about the government structures we have today. We don't have a similar founding document of the market. The market has been a much more slow development, and of course you could say that there might be some primitive exchange market, where you might have two or three beaver skins, and I have a stone ax, and we barter them. But that's not what the market is today.

(00:52:50):

Today, 85% of all exchange in the global market, just to take an example, are immaterial property rights in different ways. As soon as you have an immaterial property right, you need to have a definition of that, you need to decide what can be owned, for how long can that be owned, how can you use that ownership, and who could exercise that ownership? For example, patents and copyrights. Patents were a very important invention in the market, but it's a relatively new invention. It's a bit more than 100 years old and it came from the insight that you can actually speed up technological development if you encourage people to publish their findings, and their inventions.

(00:53:50):

In exchange for making the facts public and putting it in public domain, and allowing other people to build on your ideas instead of keeping them secret, you would be granted a monopoly of use for 10 or 20 years, or something that would be reasonable for you to have the incentive of putting it in a public domain and innovating, but that concept has morphed. Today, of course, when we talk copyrights and

The Great Simplification

patents, we have completely deviated from the idea of having things quickly put in the public domain for reuse and for innovations.

(00:54:31):

For example, when Mickey Mouse was about to celebrate 50 years and fall into the public domain, Disney lobbied to the government to extend copyrights from 50 years to 75 years, and got that. Now, there's even talk now when Mickey Mouse is about to turn 75, that we should extend copyrights into 150 years. Of course, this is just a matter of economic transfer. A market would clear very differently if you had copyrights and patents that would be 10 years, or maximum 20 years, which is really the economic lifetime.

(00:55:21):

If I'm running a corporation and I'm doing an investment calculation, anything today beyond 10 years, definitely beyond 20 years, is discounted to absolutely zero. That does not affect my business decision at all, so it doesn't make any sense to really have any copyrights or patents longer than 20 years. That's just one example of how we have these constitutive rules of the market, that are really the rules that makes the market start working. Then we can have regulations and regulative rules, but we have constitutive rules like what can you own, what can you patent, can you patent human genes? Can you own radio frequencies?

(00:56:09):

Then, the next question is, who can own? That I, as a private individual, can own something, absolutely. But then we have this very strange social innovation like the corporation, that is also not very much more than 100 years old, and are completely dominating the market today. By changing the rules, what can be owned, for how long, for what use, and who can own things, then you can change the constitutive rules of the market, and it could clear completely different.

Nate Hagens (00:56:39):

The market, in many ways, is like the social media algorithms. They started something-

Tomas Björkman (00:56:48):

Yes, good example.

Nate Hagens (00:56:49):

... in a benign way, but then the shifting baseline is, so many years later, it's become this leviathan that we've outsourced all of our decisions to the market.

Tomas Björkman (00:57:00):

Good, I've never heard that comparison. I will steal that, as well, that's my second steal today. It's very good, because that's exactly it. Then, who controls the algorithms for social media? That's done by the social media corporations and they are tweaking the algorithms for one thing only, and that's profit. They don't care about the collateral damage in society. It's the same thing about the algorithms, the

The Great Simplification

constitutive rules of the market. Unfortunately, through lobbying and other pressure mechanisms, those algorithms are tweaked all the time in society, so we are constantly reinventing the market, but only for one purpose and that is for increased profits for the corporations, for increased shareholder value, and of course we don't care for the collateral damage. Or we have not so far, at least, cared too much about the collateral damage.

(00:57:59):

We could have algorithms in the market that would produce far less externalities for the environment, for example, than we have today. Without having to apply a lot of regulatory rules, because it is correct what the economist says, that when you apply too much regulatory rules on the market, that you lose efficiency. But you can tweak the constitutive rules without losing efficiency.

Nate Hagens (00:58:28):

I want to move on to your other books, and I have several more questions on top of that, but could you give us the hopeful summary of *The Market Myth*? What do you envision as something possible in 20, 40 years from now?

Tomas Björkman (00:58:43):

Yeah. One thing there is, the market is a very powerful tool, one of the most productive inventions of humanity. First thing is, let's rely on the market where the market is really delivering. Then there are many areas where we have collective goods and public goods, where you have market failures. Even in the first course you encounter at university study, economics 101, we are taught about the market failures, but many decision makers and politicians are not aware of those market failures, and trying to push a lot of things to the market, which the market is not capable of handling. That's a simple first thing.

(00:59:31):

Just use the tool where it is useful, and then we can tweak the tool. By becoming aware of the fact that we have all of these constitutive rules in the market, we could fairly simply, with not too many changes, correct a lot of the skewed distribution effects of the market and externalities of the market. But that will, to a larger extent, unfortunately come... not so much at a cost to efficiency, we would still be able to produce a lot. Perhaps not as much as today, but we would still be able to produce a lot, but those tweaks would hurt shareholder values. They would hurt profits and shareholder values.

(01:00:23):

It's all a political question in what priority you put people, planet, and profit. Today it's profit, people, and planet; in the future it might to have planet, people, and profit.

Nate Hagens (01:00:38):

I will sign up for that. Your second book, Tomas, was called *The Nordic Secret*. Let's just start with, what is the Nordic secret?

The Great Simplification

Tomas Björkman (01:00:49):

Okay, I should first of all mention that I had written the book together with Lene Rachel Andersen, my Danish friend and colleague. She is a philosopher and author, and she really did the most heavy work on that book. Full credit to Lene on *The Nordic Secret*. What we do in that book, is that we unpack a very important part of the history of the Nordic countries, and the fact that, just a little bit more than 100 years ago, all the Nordic countries, at the end of the 1800s, were amongst the poorest, non-democratic, authoritarian nations in Europe. We were so poor that, at the end of the 1800s, up to 30% of the working population in Sweden emigrated, made it to the US.

(01:01:48):

Then, just a few generations later, even before the second World War, we were all amongst the happiest, the richest, the most stable industrial democracies in the world. Many of those benefits are still amongst us; we are starting to lose a little bit of this, but the fact that we managed the transition from a pre-modern society into a modern society so well, is worth investigating, because I think that we, as a civilization, are now at a similar transition from modernity into some sort of new society.

(01:02:29):

What can we learn? The learning and the secret around this is that, we had some very visionary intellectuals and politicians in all the Nordic countries 100 years ago, who knew the importance of inner development, and inner growth, and specifically the connection between inner growth and cultural evolution, and societal evolutions. They knew that in times of rapid societal change and uncertainty, it's just so easy for us humans to want to have an external authority to hold on, a dogmatic religion or a strong authoritarian political leader.

(01:03:13):

These intellectuals and politicians, they didn't want to be authoritarian leaders, they were firmly committed to build democracy, and they knew that the only way to build democracy and keep democracy, is if you build it from bottom up. They wanted to find a way where they could facilitate the inner development of capacities in a large part of the population, on a large scale, and specifically help in this very important adult development step, where we go from being dependent on an external authority, being outer directed, to become inner directed. To connect with our own inner compass and to be able to, in a much more profound way, hold the complexity of rapid social change without freaking out.

Nate Hagens (01:04:16):

This was 100 years ago?

Tomas Björkman (01:04:20):

100 to 150 years ago, this was at the end of the 1800s. The way they went about to do this was extraordinary, because what they did was, they created educational centers, or even we might use the word retreat centers, because these were small centers out in nature specifically dedicated to helping young adults in their 20s, to take these important developmental steps. At the turn of the last century,

The Great Simplification

year 1900, there were 100 centers like this just in Denmark, 75 in Norway, and 150 in Sweden where young adults, later on with full state subsidy, could spend up to six months in retreat with a specific aim of trying to develop their emotional and cognitive complexity, and becoming conscious agents and co-creators of the new society.

Nate Hagens (01:05:34):

Did those exist in France, Germany, and the United States at that time?

Tomas Björkman (01:05:37):

No.

Nate Hagens (01:05:41):

Or not, as such...

Tomas Björkman (01:05:43):

No, not in France. This originally came from a German idea about how we, as humans, have the lifelong capacity to continually develop our inner capacities, our emotional and cognitive capacities. That was from the German Bildung philosophers, philosophers like Schiller, Goethe, Herder, von Humboldt, Heigl-

Nate Hagens (01:06:11):

And this is where the market comes in, again, as if we quantify all the things that our ancestors valued, we're parsing it into a dollar, and the dollar doesn't reward some of the things that you just said. It's almost as if Scandinavia already had a people, planets, profit hierarchy 100 years ago, it was just...

Tomas Björkman (01:06:38):

Very much, because back then, German was our first academic language. Our intellectuals back then were actually reading these German philosophers in original German language. As I was about to say, they all reacted against the enlightenments, materialistic view, and the view of our mind as a rational machine. They were very much into nature, the relationship between humans and nature, the relationship between our inner capacity to develop our mind and consciousness, and how that inner development was always done in relationship to culture and cultural development.

(01:07:23):

With that view, that it is important to facilitate lifelong inner development, not just for the benefit of the individual, but for the benefit of societal development, then of course these ideas come very natural. But when we then, later on, lost that world view and definitely after the second World War, if not a bit earlier, reverted to the enlightenment materialistic world view. Then these centers, as inner capacity building centers, or consciousness development centers, didn't even make sense to us in our understanding.

(01:08:03):

The Great Simplification

Today, we believe that these centers were mainly adult education, which they were to a certain extent, absolutely. But the important reason for their establishment was really to empower people to take these important developmental steps, to be able to not just have the knowledge, but to have the inner capacity to act as co-creators of the new world.

Nate Hagens (01:08:27):

Do those still exist today?

Tomas Björkman (01:08:29):

They do. Many of them do exist, but today we have more the impression that they are around lifelong learning, rather than developing these capacities. But I should answer your question there, if they exist in other parts of the world, and there is an interesting twist there. I'll show you a copy of the book, this is *The Nordic Secret*. Do you recognize the woman in the corner there?

Nate Hagens (01:08:55):

No.

Tomas Björkman (01:08:56):

It's a Black American woman and this is her mugshot. It's Rosa Parks, who refused to give up her seat on the bus in Alabama. The reason - you could ask, what is Rosa Parks doing on the cover of *The Nordic Secret* there together with the German philosophers Goethe and Schiller? Well, she has said in many interviews that what gave her the inner compass and the strength to actually remain seated on the bus, even if she knew that the land of the land said that she should give it up to that white guy, was the fact that she had participated in one of these developmental centers.

(01:09:40):

Not in Scandinavia, but in the US, because there was an American guy called Myles Horton who, in the '20s, spent a year in Denmark learning this concept, and then going back to the US and then starting four folk high schools, which this concept is called in the US, of which the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee is the most notable one, where Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, and a lot of the people in the civil rights movement participated.

(01:10:17):

These four schools in the US played such an important role, that President Obama at the end of his Presidency, when he had the four heads of states of the Nordic countries at a state visit, said something along the lines, and this is still available on YouTube this speech, that, "You Scandinavian countries have given a lot of gifts to the world, and I don't know if there was dynamite, and Ikea, or whatever, but a forgotten gift, and perhaps the most important, is the concept of the folk high schools. Because if it hadn't been for that originally Danish concept, that had come to the US, I would probably not be standing here in front of you as the first Black American President."

(01:11:01):

The Great Simplification

That's quite strong. This idea about these inner development for societal transformation, that knowledge is still living in some sectors of the American culture.

Nate Hagens (01:11:16):

How can this be scaled, both in the United States and beyond, or is it something particular to the temperament and culture of Scandinavian cultures?

Tomas Björkman (01:11:27):

No, I think this is universal. At least, the capacity for us to develop these inner skills and capacities. One of the projects that my foundation in Sweden is working on, is together with another foundation in Sweden, Norrsken Foundation, which is a technology for common good founded by the Swedish tech billionaire Niklas Adalberth, we are looking at taking the experience and the knowledge from all of these developmental centers back then, but also from personal development centers all over the world to today, like the Ekskaret Foundation or SLN is perhaps the most famous center in the US, and to try to use technology to scale this. We have a non-profit, open source Wikipedia project approach where we are trying to bring online the scientifically-backed best methods to develop these kinds of emotional and cognitive skills, and using the fact that a technology platform, which enables the intimate video meetings amongst small groups, that that can actually scale with almost zero marginal cost. That initiative is called 29K. That's 29,000. That's the number of days in your life. And our tagline is make them all matter. And there is an app, 29K, that you can download and try this out. It's amazing how well these things can actually work on the internet and in a virtual meetings, just like our virtual meeting now. I think we're just discovering the potential of human development through technology.

Nate Hagens (01:13:34):

That's very exciting. You have a recent book called *The World We Create*, and in your book intro, you state, "It is within our power to create meaning, and how we create meaning will decide whether we face a bright future or a tragic decline." Can you outline your vision for how this might come about along with maybe a short summary of your main point in the book?

Tomas Björkman (01:14:03):

Yeah, so I think we have covered most of the points already in this talk. The book takes a very sort of starting from a very natural science systemic point of view, pointing out and analyzing the 13.8 billion years of cosmic evolution that has resulted in humanity and in human civilization, and then, unpacking these. If it starts with a natural science perspective, then it adds this social perspective, the fact that we are creating the world, the world we create, and that we need to wake up to that fact, and realize that we are actually not spectators in this evolutionary game that has been going on for 13.8 billion years. We are actually the agents, the self-conscious agents of that evolution, and we are just now waking up to that. And we need to take on that responsibility. And realizing that we need to take that responsibility not just on an individual level, we certainly need to take it on an individual level, but we

The Great Simplification

also have powers beyond our everyday understanding when it comes to shaping the world, the socially-constructed world.

(01:15:28):

So, we have a lot more power, both individuals and collectively, than we think. The collective power that we have, unfortunately, we need to exercise that collectively, which means collective decision makings, which means collective sense making. And I would say that during the last 20 years, our capacity for humanity or even in our nation states for collective sense making, and thereby, collective action has diminished substantially. We are leaving a lot of freedom and possibility on the table, so to say, that we can see is there, but we cannot grasp it, and we cannot handle it because we are unable to do this collective meaning making. For me, and that's what I argue in the book, I hope we will have a wonderfully diverse and multi-perspectival world in the future, but we also need some sort of baseline understanding of reality and the limits that reality is putting on us. And we need to have some sort of common language to realize the human potential that we have both on an individual and collective level. That is really the challenge that we are facing.

Nate Hagens (01:17:04):

For someone that started in investment banking, you are a true renaissance man, Tomas.

Tomas Björkman (01:17:09):

Thank you.

Nate Hagens (01:17:10):

With everything you're attempting. I could ask you a lot more questions, but I know it's approaching dinner time in Stockholm. I hope you'll be okay to answer some personal questions that I ask at the end of every interview. Given your lifetime of activism, and writing books, and organizing conferences, and all this, do you have any personal advice for listeners at this time of a global meta crisis?

Tomas Björkman (01:17:46):

Yeah, I think there are many advices, but I think just realizing and admitting to ourselves that we are in a deep societal shift, and trying to summons the courage to face that, and not look away, and to stay open, and perhaps develop your inner capacities to hold and to face this, whatever that might be and however you want to do that, but not turning away from the challenge, but rather, facing the challenge. I think that that is one advice.

Nate Hagens (01:18:37):

And you host Emerge convenings in Sweden and elsewhere. You mentioned you host these gatherings on your island, especially for young people. What specific recommendations at these seminars or just now ad lib, do you have specifically for young humans who become aware of all the realities in the meta crisis?

The Great Simplification

Tomas Björkman (01:19:02):

Certainly during our hour together, we have been talking a lot about the problems and the deep problems that we are facing, but I would say to young people, do not despair. We are at the point of breakthrough or breakdown, and it's really up to us and perhaps even more specifically, the young generation, to really take the opportunity and do as much as possible to help facilitate a breakthrough rather than a breakdown. But that does involve conscious actions of various sorts. Again, be prepared for that, and yes, certainly get a good university education, but also, realize that what the university is teaching you today is not everything you need. You need that, but you need other things as well to be able to navigate this transition.

Nate Hagens (01:20:07):

Could we change the education system, not you and I, but could culture change the education system so that it integrated the realities as we've discussed, the science, the liberal arts education, but also the inner development, like you were talking about, the Nordic Secret? Is there a way that our universities globally could change or are they too embedded in the market?

Tomas Björkman (01:20:32):

Absolutely. Absolutely. They can change, and I see a lot of positive signs here in Stockholm. I can, for example, mention the Stockholm School of Economics, which is one of the top rated economic universities and MBA educations in Europe, really one of the top rated that has gone during the last 10 years from being very, very much only in their old neoclassical economic paradigm to really understanding that to prepare people for tomorrow's challenges in industry and in government, you need a much, much broader education. But this is a very innovative and relatively small and elite organization. I do not see enough changes happening in the broader educational scene, at least not in Europe. I think the best advice is to get good university education because that knowledge, and especially in natural science and technology, will always be valuable, but then, be also open to take in alternative ways of learning where podcasts and discussions like we are having. And it's wonderful how much you can find today on YouTube, but again, you have to be discerning because there is more misleading stuff out there than-

Nate Hagens (01:22:08):

There's a lot of noise.

Tomas Björkman (01:22:10):

There is a lot of noise. One thing that we could do in this space is, of course, to help curate the space a little bit, to publish some YouTube lists or a curriculum even. If you just finish university, and you want to expand, and take half a year, go traveling, and go through these lists of YouTube podcasts, or animations, or other things for you to really broaden your worldview and get fit for the 21st century.

Nate Hagens (01:22:48):

The Great Simplification

I think you're absolutely right. That can emerge online. We are Facebook friends, not that I use Facebook that often, but I can see vicariously some of your pastimes where you hike to the Arctic Circle in Sweden and such. Just a personal question, Tomas, what do you care most about in the world?

Tomas Björkman (01:23:15):

That is difficult because caring is on so many different levels. Of course, I care for my family and my close people. Of course, I care for... But if I should give a nontrivial answer or an unexpected answer, it's probably that I care for the process, the process of life, and the fact that we humans, we shouldn't stick to a human centric perspective. We are not the crown of the creation, and we are certainly not here, being put here in a role of dominion, but we do, through our self conscious ability, through our ability to create culture, and through our ability to affect the whole living system totally, we have a fiduciary responsibility. So, my hope would be and my care would be that we would help as many people as possible to take that fiduciary responsibility for life seriously.

Nate Hagens (01:24:44):

Hear, hear. Of all the issues that comprise the meta crisis, is there one thing that you are particularly worried about in the coming 10 years or so?

Tomas Björkman (01:24:57):

Yes, and I think my work within the Club of Rome has moved me from having the environmental issues at the top. As we said, many times, they are the most fundamental. Without a planet, there is no need to talk about anything else. So, they are the most fundamental. But 10 years ago, I thought that it would be the environmental disaster that hit us first. Now, I'm afraid that it might be a social breakdown disaster that will actually hit us before the environmental disaster, and that is unfortunate, and not because the environmental disaster is far away.

Nate Hagens (01:25:42):

No, I happen to agree with you, which is why I'm doing this work as you know. In contrast, what is the one thing that in your work at your conferences and your experiences traveling and meeting other humans that gives you hope for the next 10 years or so?

Tomas Björkman (01:25:59):

It's the fact that we can see just during the last five years or even 10 years, that through all the things that has been happening, through Brexit, through political turbulence in the US, the storming of the Capitol, the pandemic, and now, war of aggression in Europe, a very, very small, but rapidly growing part of the population is actually waking up to the fact that we need to find completely new ways of addressing these problems. And again, that these problems are not solved by incremental solutions, that we are in some sort of outer transformation. And the small part of those people also starting to realize that this is a cultural transformation and an inner transformation. And even if this is a small portion, I can say that today, in Sweden, for example, I would guess that 2% of the population would

The Great Simplification

resonate with what we are talking about today. Perhaps not in these words and in these formulations, but generally, you have a resonance with perhaps one or 2%.

(01:27:25):

Five years ago, that would have been a fraction, a fraction of a percent. And 2% is not enough to have any significant political impact or even enough for this to go up on the main media radar screens. But 2% in a small country like Sweden, 10 million inhabitants, that's still 200,000 people. And I'm convinced that of those 200,000 people, 500-50,000 would be in the greater Stockholm area. And just helping us find each other and starting to dialogue around this would be a very catalytic event.

Nate Hagens (01:28:07):

I absolutely feel the same way. Just this podcast, I didn't sleep well last night, and I knew I had this podcast with you this morning. I'm a little tired. And the fact that you and I found each other, mutual friends, of course, but over the internet, and this whole conversation has turbocharged me. I'm going to be fired up the rest of the day because there's someone in a different continent working on the same sort of thing. And so, finding the others and passing the baton for others to wake up and integrate the reality with the inner development, it's exciting. What more important thing could we be doing with our time? So, thank you for all your work on this.

Tomas Björkman (01:28:51):

Yeah, and it's fantastic that technology is helping us do this at the time when it's most needed. How can we right now use technology to connect even more people into this conversation and see what comes out of that? And thank you then for the work that you are doing through your podcast in bringing more people into this conversation.

Nate Hagens (01:29:19):

We will see how it goes. I have a final question for you, Tomas. If you were a benevolent dictator either of Sweden or of the whole world, what is one thing you would do if there was no personal recourse to the decision to improve planetary and human futures?

Tomas Björkman (01:29:40):

One thing, and this is almost possible. We see what Elon Musk is doing right now, so it's even almost possible. I think that taking control over the social media algorithms and just tweaking those algorithms to instead of serving the only purpose of the profit of the media, social media company instead serving, the greater good for humanity, and for collective sense making, and extending our circle of belonging and empathy instead of breaking them down. I think that could be a very simple thing that could have a tremendous impact in just a couple of years even.

Nate Hagens (01:30:34):

The Great Simplification

You're not alone in that wish. Tristan Harris has been on this podcast saying, likening that to bringing the ring to Mordor, social media being the one ring that's captured all of our momentum and civic discourse.

Tomas Björkman (01:30:56):

It shouldn't be so much, you need to tweak them. It's a small tweak, so it's not a huge invention or something, but it will, of course, affect the profitability of the platforms when you are not any longer optimizing for just capturing our minds and our emotions. Yes.

Nate Hagens (01:31:23):

Well, I think a lot of people are working on that, and I'm hopeful that something will change. Do you have any closing words for our listeners, Tomas?

Tomas Björkman (01:31:32):

No, I think this was wonderful to talk to you, Nate, and I just wish you good luck in the future with your podcast and the important things you are doing around bringing the reality of the environmental problems to our knowledge.

Nate Hagens (01:31:53):

Thank you. We will certainly be in touch, Tomas. Thank you so much.

Tomas Björkman (01:31:57):

Thank you. Thank you.

Nate Hagens (01:31:59):

If you enjoyed or learned from this episode of the Great Simplification, please subscribe to us on your favorite podcast platform and visit thegreatsimplication.com for more information on future releases.