

Vinay Audio

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SPEAKERS

Jessica Knezy, Zoe Varenne, Sam Coleman, Tom Pegram, Vinay Gupta

Tom Pegram 00:00

Hi, and welcome to Global Governance Futures, based out of the Global Governance Institute at University College London. This is a podcast about the challenges facing humanity and possible global responses. If you're new to the show, and you want to get a list of our favourite books, other resources, listen to past shows, and to join our community go to ucl.ac.uk/global-governance. We're really

launch the Ethereum blockchain platform in 2015. And he's currently CEO of the
reum, which is using the blockchain to build a system which can authenticate physical
bare time, he's the founder and lead for the Hexayurt project or refugee shelter, which he
o scale quickly in case of humanitarian disaster. And Vinay is also a meditation instructor
his own bare bones meditation technique called the cutting machinery, specifically
rease psychological resilience in the face of challenging situations. So thanks so much,
g the time out to speak with us today. It's great to have you here.

01:55

e. Good to be here.

01:57

get to the questions, I'll just invite the podcrew to introduce themselves.

02:03

Sam. And I run the video editing, and hopefully some of the thought behind the podcast.

02:11

and I'm one of the founders and I do research for the podcast.

problems, like COVID should have been relatively containable, even relatively simple problems like that become these enormous monsters.

Tom Pogram 06:30

So let's drill down on this a bit more then. I mean, you've raised lots of different points that I think we can click on. I mean, one would be, I mean how, how do we understand the kind of historical origins of what seems to be a highly defective, maladaptive kind of social

Vinay Gupta 10:15

Okay, so the reason I smile when you say the word collapse is you think it hasn't happened already. Right? As I've said to people for years, collapse means living in the same conditions as the people that grow your coffee. Right, for whom has the world not collapsed? The answer is rich people. Right, you and I are probably top I don't know what 3% of humans in terms of access to wealth? Yeah, a little hard to measure because, you know, salaries versus access to university level resources versus inherited wealth versus, you know, access to debt. How you measure wealth is a tricky, tricky question. But at the end of the day, we're what winners look like in this environment. And above us there are several tiers, winners and hyper winners and hyper hyper hyper winners. But from the perspective of almost everybody in the world, they would change places with us in a metric heartbeat. Right? So for us, we say, when will the collapse come? Everybody else, they've already experienced the collapse. You know, these poor folks in India who you know, 50 Celsius in a city that doesn't have running tap water for everybody, never mind air conditioning, that's a collapse. You know, "what do you mean, there's no more water," "there's no more water until the truck comes at 6pm." "But you know, my kids are thirsty." "Well, there isn't any water." Does that sound like collapse conditions to you? Right, if that happened to me I would consider myself to be working through a collapse. So you know, to paraphrase William Gibson, you know the collapse is here, it's just not evenly distributed yet. And, you know, we have to live with that fact. It's just, we are in a world where there is a small elite, which is hanging on by its fingernails, to the illusion of business as usual, while the rest of the world is going very rapidly to hell in a handbasket.

Sam Coleman 12:17

On that point, Vinay, in terms of the unequal distribution of the collapse, there's inevitable elements of colonialism and past wrongs. I want to ask, how far is the situation we're in now, how far is it important to balance righting wrongs and solving a problem? Are they the same thing? Are they things that we should but don't have to include? Or what's your opinion on the kind of righting past wrongs and its relation to just solving the problem plain and simple?

Vinay Gupta 12:50

So my current take on this is the only kind of action on racism and colonialism that I think matters at all is reparations. Right? I think anybody that is not talking about racism in terms of reparations [fly attack interlude] I think that anybody that is not talking about racism and context of reparations is basically wasting everybody's time. Right. And when I say reparations, we're looking at by some estimates, a bill of about 45 trillion pounds, as the wealth extracted from the UK, from India by the British, right? The UK is 45 trillion up and India's 45 trillion down. And the capital, which fuelled the Industrial Revolution, was stolen at gunpoint from the Empire. You know, it's not a coincidence that the Industrial Revolution and the Empire are happening at the same time, the cheap raw materials and the gold that pays for building the machines. This is all stolen. Right? The Empire goes out there to feed Industrialization. So you know, then you say, "Well, what possible role could reparations have in the process of managing the climate problem?" And the answer to that is, how are we going to pay for all of the poor countries leaping over the phase of coal and oil and natural gas, going directly to solar panels and batteries and windmills and all the rest of that stuff? Because they don't have the access to capital to make that transformation. So I think this is a relatively straightforward equation. The West pays its debts to the

Vinay Gupta 26:18

So I have a lot of respect for conspiracy theories. Right? I mean, they.. Take a conspiracy theory, that turned out to be true, right? Have you seen this list of Wikipedia of conspiracy theories that turned out to be true? There's a long list of conspiracy theories that turned out to be true. So I think that we, you know, are headed down a very dark path, right? When we suggest that there is an official received version of reality, which is correct and that is taught to you by the education system, and everything outside of that as a conspiracy theory. And here I would point to the question of whether or not COVID-19 was originally cooked up in a lab in China. Right? Is that true? Or is that not true? Well, you know, kind of depends who you will ask. And it kind of depends when you ask them. Right, lots of different people have said lots of different things. I think it's entirely credible, that this thing, you know, was originally an American occurrence where somebody got exposed to a virus from a bat, it started in America, then circulated to China. I also think it's perfectly reasonable that somebody was doing a bunch of genetic tinkering with viruses because they wanted to understand them better. And that happened in China and the virus jumped to people who worked in the lab, and then from there to the world. Now, you know, there was the point not so recently, when Facebook was banning people fotght? gc7e? gc7

Vinay Gupta 29:47

Right. It's kind of an important question. If you're American, you're black. The question of whether the CIA was deliberately importing cocaine into Los Angeles right, as a continuation of the cultural warfare that started when they decided they were going to criminalise marijuana because black people smoked it a lot. You know, we've gotten government documents about the war on drugs, which make it very clear that it was intended originally as a tool of cultural oppression. Right? If we're going to teach people to make up their own minds about things, I think they're going to be very angry about a lot of the things that have been done to them over the last 30, 40, 50 years. And the stuff that has been going on particularly in America is like something out of the freaking X Files, you know, the Tuskegee Syphilis experiment. Right? You know, how is anybody supposed to trust an institution that did that to their ancestors? You know, if you let, if you really educate people to make up their own minds, you know, I think they're going to be very unhappy. Why was Alan Turing? Well, how did Alan Turing come to die? Right, the guy who is dramatically, centrally responsible for a huge part of the Allied victory in World War Two, right, you know, injected with a bunch of hormones, driven to suicide, or possibly assassinated, why did that happen? If we're going to be able to make up our own minds, we're going to have to get serious about getting transparency from the governments about what they've actually done. If you want the people to make up their own minds, they're going to need first class access to data. And that means declassification of almost everything. In the process. I think that people are going to get very, very, very angry with the state because the state has been doing a lot of incredibly evil stuff, not only on their behalf, but also to them on the state's behalf. So, you know, I'm all for education, but what is it we're going to teach people?

Tom Pegram 31:40

So I'd just like to circle back to that question of truth. You know, and certainly when we think about truth, as it applies to say, moral claims. So and to put it perhaps more starkly. I mean, how do we actually arrive as a collective at wise decisions? So the standard empiricists model in science brackets, such questions outside the appropriate scope of science?

Vinay Gupta 32:08

The first question is, are there any wise decisions? Right, I mean, only available data, there are things that you think are a good idea, but if the available data is 50%, wrong, and a third of the data you needed to make the wisest decision, it's impossible to make wise decisions.

Tom Pegram 32:28

Right, okay. But as someone who's worked a lot in existential risk, obviously, you've, you're very familiar with, and you've thought a lot about the precautionary principle.

Vinay Gupta 32:37

Sure.

Tom Pegram 32:38

So how does that relate to that argument, it would seem that even in the in, in a situation where you don't have sufficient data to know what the consequences of your actions will be. Sometimes it's, the wise decision is not to actually perform the experiments or whatever it may be.

Vinay Gupta 32:51

But all of these things are horrifically imponderable. So, you know, if we simply banned biotechnology completely on the basis that, you know, like, Hey, come on, if we're gonna wind up with 90% of the human race dying, it's gonna come out of a lab. Right? So we take a position that we're going to ban biotechnology, we're just going to stop teaching that material, we're going to defund the department, and we're going to get rid of biotech as an industry. Great, then the next plague runs around, we don't have the mRNA vaccine preparation capacity, and it kills 90% of us. Or we go down the other truck, iid .3 (tp6..RNA

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do the following thing with your central bank and with a bit inflation, deflation, or a healthy economy. We've run all the numbers, we think it's about 30%, likely in each direction, which policy are we going to pick? Right? Well, how do we decide? So if we model this as when we have to make a decision and there is no right or wrong answer? Because we cannot get access to the data because the data doesn't exist, and we don't have the modelling power to predict. How do we make those decisions. That to me is the job of your head of state, or your Supreme Court or your system of government, whoever is the, you know, the.. Actually maybe not Supreme Court, but the kind of ruling structure, whether it's an

take it or leave it. Right, that kind of ability to enforce. The only way you're going to get that is if the UN Security Council basically declares itself to be the Supreme High Ruling Council of Earth, and then starts pushing mandates down the pipe. Right, because, you know, we're not willing to get like, even if you had ran a planetary democracy tomorrow morning as a parallel institution, you know, one human, one phone, one vote. Right, could we do that? Sure, we can do that no problem. You know, it could advise, it could be wise, it could rule, it could make the kind of, you know, it could have a Council of 35 people like Nelson Mandela, who basically define how the world was gonna work. And then all the people who have nuclear bombs will simply ignore them, it might be able to exert influence, it will not be able to exert power. So, you know, you could have enormous social movements organised globally, that kind of pushed in the right direction that voted for politicians with the right policies that tried to have a coordinated international response by coordinating responses into each country and interconnecting them. And I would point to, for example, the sort of international network of green movements or green political parties, or International Federation, Red Cross, and Red Crescent has been things like that. But on the other side of it, just having the nuclear cartel take over the world, and then start giving orders by how things are going to get done. That seems much more credible. I'm not saying it'd be good, but, you know, even having a bad group of people visibly in charge might be better than having nobody visibly in charge.

Tom Pegram 39:03

You know you've written, you've written that our existing political structures, and I assume, you know, that is both national and perhaps international, perform extremely poorly, because they cannot handle complex, long duration, multi-actor conflicts. And what you seem to be suggesting here is that one

track one, or there's track two, you develop a bunch of wizzy new technology, and that wizzy, the new technology sorts the entire problem out for you. Right, those are the only two tracks. There's nothing else. Right? Like there, there just is no magic pixie, where you have perfect, perfect social organisation, you can have a middle class standard of living within your co2 limits, there's just nowhere there. Right? We don't know how to do that. So, you know, the left can tell us that, you know, they're going to have a just, fair egalitarian world, in which everybody has a little car and a little house, and they've got, you know, perfect insulation, all the rest of that stuff. And they're still going to be showing us a plan for a world which is consuming like five planets worth of resources. Because by the time you extend that to 8 billion people and their kids, you're really, really, really sort of out of chips, right? It just isn't there, right? So similar, we've probed plans on the right or 2.6 (r)6 (2.627 (2.6(R2.nlonσουou kue,9 €)10.5 € b)10.5 (y)2lealn2.6 (ns.

we're going to do a whole bunch of cost adjusted modelling for those risks. And at the end of that, we can say that's going to be our energy policy, until we actually start getting this down to grammes and calories. Nobody's environmental policy means anything, in the same way that nobody's anti-racism policy means anything until we get down to reparations. You know, at the end of the day, it's about money. It's about numbers, it's about grammes of food, it's about whose children starve to death when.

two, that includes your grandchildren, where we're not going to sacrifice your grandchildren's wellbeing for your current entertainment. So at that point, we're going to start putting an unbelievable amount of money, energy, power, intellectual capital, behind solving the fundamental problems, right, we're going to absolutely step on the gas, and we're going to fix this. And that is going to be space lit, race level spending. In these you know plenitude of high tech areas. And that, you know, begins to percolate through the university system it percolates through funding, the research councils and all the rest of that stuff. You put the country on a war footing until such time as you've gotten some kind of reasonable solution to the real problems we have. And then the third thing is we start questioning the role of inherited wealth. And we start looking very seriously what it takes to, you know, level, the enormous non-productive accumulations of wealth and power inside of the various corners of society that have been hanging on to those privileges unearned for literally 1000 years. Right. And that third point is extremely important because the people that feel like they are generationally insulated from the consequences of their actions, by wealth, that was won 1000 years ago, or 500 years ago, or 200 years ago. Those people are hogging a dramatic amount of the innovation capital in this society. Right, you just can't get things done in this world. Because the incumbents are very, very, very fond of stopping people changing things, and we need to change things really quickly. So the idea that you are specifically going to strip power away from incumbents and push it towards the edges, believe it or not the critical tool for doing that is inflation. Right? If you couple inflation with the right kind of approaches to things like taxes on land, you can very, very, very quickly create circumstances which break down inherited wealth, and they breakdown unearned income, and they push those resources back into the mainstream where they could get some actual work done. And I think that, that as an approach begins to offer a much more universal democratic mandate, where it's not that like your great grandfather won the lottery, and your family will be unproductive for the next 12 generations. Rather, it's you know, you got yourself a nice house out in the country, and you'll be able to hold on to it indefinitely, but you're not going to be able to hold on to the five villas dotted around the world, unless you're doing something that actually matters to people. And I think the combination of things like land value taxes and controlled inflation, have the prospect of making it nearly impossible for people to build little castles and then hideout in them. And you know, how much of the productive assets in the Western powers is currently hung up in those kind of wealth reserves? It's a lot, right? And breaking those things down, you know, is that socialism? I just think of it as running a competitive economy, where we make it very difficult for people to hang on to assets that aren't doing good, to any kind of productive use. A few percent of inflation and some kind of sensible taxation on things like property, very quickly, you can force assets back into productivity. Vote Gupta. Progressive utilisation theory for all.

Jessica Knezy 1:01:57

interests that fund the Conservatives. So the first thing you got to do is you have to demonetize politics. Right? Just get rid of the concept of campaign finance, political parties have members, members pay dues, or some other, you know, appropriate mechanism but no corporate money and no large individual donors. The rich do not get to buy a political voice. And, you know, potentially you turn the entire thing into mass amateurisation. Right. Is that a political campaign? Sure. The political campaign is run by local volunteers that come around and knock on doors and that's all there is. There is no advertising, there is no nothing is that unthinkable? Sure it's unthinkable? Is it any more unthinkable that a lot of other unthinkable things we're facing? Not really. You know, breaking the world by poisoning the atmosphere, that is unthinkable. Nuclear war that is unthinkable. Biological war that is unthinkable. Somehow we find ways of doing those unthinkable things. Why not these unthinkable things? You know it's not irrational, right? If you look at the level of effort that we put into the Trident thing, you know, nuclear retaliation, okay, we might agree that nuclear retaliation is an important capacity to have. But a lot of other things that are also very important, let us also fund those. And it's not a simple guns and butter thing. You know, like, if you're going to be spending an awful lot of money on high tech Science and Industry type stuff, it returns benefits to the whole of the society whether that spending is on nuclear submarines or space probes, or, you know, sensible looking electric cars. You know, as long as you're paying scientists and engineers to go out and do science and engineering, and as long as the result has been published in either patents or open source, you know, you're generating economic growth in a very realistic way. You know, I absolutely believe that you can have things like defence Keynesianism work. I need a shotgun to take care of that damn fly. I absolutely believe, you know, things like defence, Keynesianism work. And it's not j whe

control of their futures. I think that settling those scores will seriously discourage the next generation of politicians from doing that crap. And that means a very serious renegotiation by the young inside of things like the Labour Party to make very, very, very, very sure that the future of leadership never repeats the Blair betrayal.

Zoe Varenne 1:14:38

Thank you very much. That was very insightful, very helpful.

Vinay Gupta 1:14:44

When talking to me insightful and helpful are often two very separate things. But you know, it's time to start drawing up a list of names, right? And saying, we're never going to let anybody like that be in

state intervention. You know, like, okay, right, so politics does matter. Yeah, politics does matter. Right. And that notion of like, you know, our lives were destroyed by political decision making that happened shortly or, you know, right around when we were born. And if we are not going to have the rest of our lives determined by that we have to get involved in politics and we have to take a never again, policy to all of this nonsense. I think that there is an enormous amount of room for the total takeover of the political parties by the young. They just have to believe that they can get in there. And by sheer force of numbers, eradicate the kind of people that will ruin their futures, if they're allowed to rule. And the way that you win, that fight is not in the general elections, it's by controlling who isn't good. So run in the general elections. Control of the parliamentary apparatus happens with control of the political parties. And if the young don't join the political parties in enormous numbers and start participating, they're going to get a bunch of candidates which are selected by old people whose interests are completely divergent from

Sam Coleman 1:24:56

Yeah.

Vinay Gupta 1:24:58

So you know, we train doctors by having them do 120 hour weeks on no sleep, to try and basically force the medicine down to the brainstem. So that even if the doctor is fully overwhelmed and a total zombie they're still capable of doing medicine. I don't know whether training people that way is the best way to train them or not but that's what we do. Right? Flip side of that is, once they're through medical training, we don't work doctors that way. Because if you do you get terrible doctors, you know, GPs, one block to the surgery, do their thing at the surgery, then they go home, then they do something else. Right, you know, the medicine 24 hours a day thing is a training practice. But, you know, if you try and work your surgeons that way, pretty soon they're making mistakes. So medical personnel, that's, that's a pretty good model for how climate people ought to think about themselves. You know, it doesn't matter what you're doing on climate change. At the end of the day, if you work yourself harder than doctors work, you're probably degrading your performance over time. And not in three years of training. But in the long 20, 30, 40, 50 year medical career, you know, the doctors are doing lifesaving work every single damn day. And if they don't pace themselves, they don't have medical careers. And that's how it has to be for climate people.

Tom Pegram 1:26:24

Well, there is a very concrete note to end on, we really appreciate your time Vinay. Thank you for cutting through some of these really tough questions and joining us in this exploration. Perhaps you could just tell people where they can stay up to date, can learn more about your work?

Vinay Gupta 1:26:42

Vinay Gupta 1:27:49

Fabulous thank you. I really enjoyed talking to you all. And yeah, hang in there. It's tough times.

Tom Pegram 1:27:59

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