

very difficult problem impossibly hard. So in that sense, there's a need for us to think about the dynamics of how information flows through the system to essentially ensure that basically, the right information makes it to the right places for those choices to even be possible in the first place. And by right places I basically mean, you know, at the face, you know, there's a sort of metaphor of the people that are working closest to the surface, are going to know the most about the situation, they're going to have the most direct contact. And to some extent, we actually need to incorporate that as part of the process, not just as an information source and an actuator of some sort or another, but literally part of the dynamic itself. And we see this in nature. So for example, you know, just in the nervous system of one's hands, some of the responsiveness happens, and before it even makes it to my elbow, or before it even makes it to my shoulder, right, there are reflexes, that effectively mean that some of the choice making is happening in the dynamics of the flows themselves. So this is why I use the word governance rather than government, because government would imply a kind of artificial separation, the brain is doing all the work. That's not even close to true. I mean, there's so many other things that are going on, we have stuff that's in our digestive system that is deeply involved in how our brains work, we have all sorts of connections between brain process and immune system process, which are barely recognised that science and technology have only recently started to uncover some of these connections. I was just reading an article, what, three days ago where they discovered this new connection between the immune system and the nervous system, quite frankly, I think in a lot of respects, the immune system is at least as complicated as the nervous system is. Although this is speculation, I actually feel there's some real ground for that. Anyways, we're getting off of the topic. But this gives you some ideas as to why the subtle notions again, being discerning about this, between, say the notion of governance,

footsteps of Habermas, who, you know, I consider to be one of the greatest sociologists that have ever lived. So in effect, you know, he's pointing out that, you know, we do reason we figure things out through communication, and that, in effect, if we get really, really good at this communication process, we're going to actually get better at this thing called community process. So if I'm trying to figure out how to solve problems at a political level, I kind of need to actually understand how to solve problems at an emotional level. And if I don't really have good things, like, you know, just dealing with people's individual traumas in place, the communication process is just going to be really messed up. Because you know, people will get triggered and they won't be responding from as holistic a perspective, they'll actually be caught in the trauma of their past. So, although I myself don't claim to be, you know, a great trauma therapist and so on, so forth. I know some people who are and, you know, I feel that it's actually quite important for us to get very, very skilful at knowing how to navigate just even our own emotional process in order to know how to navigate social process at a community level. And for that community itself eventually through some skilfulness at the community level, knowing how to be part of a tribe and so on, that we could effectively start to think about things at a broader scale, even than that without getting caught in again, all of these sort of pitfalls, for example, and this is maybe just an odd way of saying this, but we as a species, we know how to talk to one another, but we don't know how to communicate. We have language, but we don't have communication. Not yet. We're getting there, we're understanding it a little better. But there's a lot more that needs to happen at the, at that level of, again, the nuance of that process in order to basically parse out the kinds of things which are merely reaction, versus those things which are truly choice. To really notice, what are our values, like to essentially come into the self-awareness as a community as to just what is it that we care about. Now, ultimately, I can say things like, we care about life, right? Not just our own, but others too right? The ecosystem we live in, to some extent is necessary to support us as beings. So it's probably relevant for

that global governance does still seem quite abstract and remote from the experience of someone in the street, who'd be more of a globally governed individual. But so how would you I guess, trans-

Right? If somebody basically had a solution and said, here it is, would anyone else even notice that, that was genuinely a solution? Would we have the skill to be able to receive an answer? Right, so now we have to look back at our capacities, can we recognise what an answer looks like? Can we actually see that something is genuinely holistic? So in effect, this comes back to the questions, we have to upgrade our capacity to perceive a solution, we have to genuinely know what the problem is. So in this particular sense, there was a, at least in collaboration that I've had with other people. And you mentioned Daniel and Jordan in particular. There were a long series of conversations that, again, I

That's right.

Tom Pegram 53:16

Seems like a profound statement. I know that Sam's..

Forrest Landry 53:21

It's pointing to something. Yes. There's a realness there. Yes, exactly.

Tom Pegram 53:26

I know, Sam's got a question, Sam.

Sam Coleman 53:29

Yeah, hopefully, this transitions in quite nicely. But we've talked about the North Star, and about the importance of being able to discern and also talk to a wide variety of people. And it seems like concepts like governance and governments, science and modernity, all have a kind of baggage to them, like a kind of national understanding. I don't know if you're

Forrest Landry 53:52

Maybe.

Sam Coleman 53:54

Yeah, I don't know if you're different across the work of Wang Hui on modern Chinese thought, but he talks about liberating the object from its positionality as an object. For example, when we think of when China thinks of Empire, it's very different from when a kind of a jaded British student thinks about Empire, you know, and how can discernment help us with those kind of things, for example, modernity. Obviously, we've talked about the kind of the real meta level of the human kind of animal, but in the kind of the mid-tier concepts of modernity or science or progress or, or Empire and how can we get across, how can we use discernment sorry, to talk to very radically different cultures that have very different etymological roots of those kinds of concepts?

Forrest Landry 54:47

Well, I would point out first of all, that some of those concepts aren't as radical or as far out there or as different as they would initially seem to be. I can't claim that I know a lot about Chinese philosophy, I wish that I knew more. But the parts of it that I have encountered that I've really been able to feel into it, you know, things that are connected to, you know, notions of Zen Buddhism, for example. There's this emphasis on the notion of flow and being with the flow. And there's this, you mentioned the notion of deobjectification, like I'm displacing the notion of object as being the centre of the universe. And I think that Western culture, for the most part, has, actually taken this idea that objective is the centre of the universe, that if it's not objective, it doesn't matter. Whereas if we go into it a little deeper, for a little more discerning about the nature of what it means to be objective, the nature of what it means to be existing, existential, and the nature of what it is to be real. We'll notice through this discernment that these concepts aren't actually the same. That they are subtly different, they make different claims, they actually have different utilities, they, they show up in different places, and in different ways. But that they are actually, also if our discernment is really good

Tom Pegram 1:05:32

Thanks, first, perhaps just to shift focus a little bit, but along the same theme, really interesting. Can simplicity be in tension with clarity? And to make that acute, I'm just thinking of, you know, in the climate space, right now, there's growing emphasis on geoengineering. I read yesterday that apparently, China's now engaging in sort of modification of weather systems, and scientists are seriously talking about, you know, refreezing the polar ice caps. These are engineering solutions, perhaps to a very serious problem. Do they display clarity?

Forrest Landry 1:06:15

No. [laughs]

Tom Pegram 1:06:17

So if you were to explain to a student who is that say, wants to make a real, wants to contribute to climate action, and thinks the best way they can do that is to go into what geoengineering to go into engineering? What is the blind spot there that they need to, they need to sit with and take account of?

Forrest Landry 1:06:36

This is a little delicate to represent, but I'll try my best. There's a kind of underlying triple between complexity, simplicity and clarity. It feels like simplicity and complexity are. And by the way, I'm using the word complexity. But I could just as easily have meant complicated. But the idea is that simplicity and complexity feel to be an opposition. And I can't use simplicity as an answer to complexity, right, I have, I lose too much information, I can't make a good choice. If I don't have enough information, if I'm not thinking about all the factors. So taking a complex problem and forcing it into a simple perspective, which unfortunately, most democracies inevitably do. Any kind of mob rule process is going to result in taking complicated issues and trying to make them simple so that it's simple enough for people to vote on, it's usually meaning for sure the bad things are going to happen. It's, well, I won't get into all the rest of this and that but the idea here is, is that if we actually want to solve problems, we need to do it with clarity, clarity can act as a solvent against complexity. If I have true clarity, I can see into complexity, I have insight. If I have insight, I can anticipate things like unexpected consequences, because I have a way of operating that's more closely connected to the principle of the system itself. In that case, I can actually see the kinds of things that will genuinely make a difference without necessarily being likely to cause even worse problems. Oh, I don't know, 10 or 15 or 100 years down the road. So in this particular case, the reason why I was a little like, just sort of feeling like the geoengineering things were maybe not on the right track was because I haven't yet sensed. At least this is an opinion. Okay. But I haven't yet sensed that they know whether or not they're reacting to a symptom, or whether they are addressing the underlying cause. And until we can really even make clear distinctions like that, and to essentially have a sense as to what are we genuinely doing? Then the chances of unintended consequences are actually phenomenally high. So it's not that I'm against geoengineering by itself as a principle. I think that there are certainly things that we probably should be doing as far as geoengineering is concerned. But when I look at the solutions that are presented, the thing I'm filtering through is, how good is the thinking process by which they've come up with a solution? Have they actually done enough due diligence around things like the precautionary principle? If they haven't even addressed the precautionary principle or if there isn't some modelling that basically shows that they understand the nature of the natural systems well enough to have basically said, "Hey, there's actually

real clear connection between things that have happened in Earth past, and what we're trying to do to give us confidence that, at the very least, Earth has tried this before, right, we're not doing an experiment that has never been done and therefore have absolutely no idea what range of consequences we're going to have." So for instance, when I see things like, just to give you a couple of specific examples, there was a suggestion about spraying sulphates into the atmosphere in order to do cooling. I personally think that it's just a terrible idea. I don't see any real ground for that. But on the other hand, when I see is a slight suggestion along the lines of that certain serpentine type crystals and reactions can be enabled in beaches and in quarries and stuff like that, that would absorb CO₂. I say actually, you know, the carbonate cycle and the rest of the stuff that actually makes a lot of sense, right. It makes sense geopolitically, it makes sense environmentally, it makes sense in terms of the resources we have. And I'm not saying that this is a solution to the whole problem. Obviously, there's a whole lot that needs to be thought about. But I'm not adverse to the notion of using technology to heal nature. In fact, I think that ultimately, we're going to need to right? We're going to have to. I'm more concerned as to whether or not the nature of the thinking that's gone into the solutions that are being proposed is coming out of some sort of misguided reaction to symptoms, or actually hasn't done enough integrative synthesis of the whole dynamics of the problem, to even have a really deep understanding of it at the level of principle and is therefore, actually just in reaction, the more that you enter into a kind of reaction system, where you're basically healing the symptoms, you're actually increasing the brittleness of the whole system, you're going to end up with feedback cycles that are in a sense, going to be amplified in terms of their criticality, it moves us closer to existential risk. So for me, the difference between, say cloud seeding versus, you know, serpentine management is enormous. I mean, it's just, it's just like night and day in terms of the level of process that's gone into it. Now, that's an opinion on my part. And I could very well be wrong. You know, as I talk to people and I learn more about these kinds of things, I find myself sometimes shifting my point of view based upon conversations that I have, and that's part of the curiosity piece that comes back to the discernment. Am I thinking about this clearly enough, myself? Right. But I think that ultimately, anytime that we're looking at that triangle of simplicity, clarity, and complexity, that we're gonna have to favour and just even notice the difference between simplicity and clarity. Because there are so many people in the world that think those two ideas are the same, and they aren't even close. Right? If somebody offers you the simplest possible object, a sphere of black coal, like perfectly polished, simplest object, versus handing you a diamond with lots and lots of facets, the same size. Hell, man, you got to be pretty naive to not take the diamonds, right? The complexity of it, it's the thing that makes it beautiful, right? You stick it out in the sun, you're gonna end up with prisms all over the place. So in this sense, you know, when we're looking at, you know, what is enlightenment about? What is what is the nature of this process actually oriented towards? Go for clarity.

Tom Pegram 1:13:08

Thank you, Forrest. And I think we're rolling to a close, thanks so much for this conversation. It's been very rich, and we've really sort of traversed the matter to the ground in multiple times, multiple iterations. And given us lots to think about, I do want to give the last question to Sam.

Sam Coleman 1:13:26

Sure. So yeah, thank you Forrest for an amazing discussion. We've talked about the importance of questions, we talked about the importance of concepts and asking the right questions, and talking to a diverse range of people. I also just wanted to ask on a final note, is it possible to... How can we include

nature into these discussions? Obviously, nature can't talk for itself. But it seems like it's an important entity to kind of discuss with these issues. And I was wondering if you'd had any thoughts on that?

Forrest Landry 1:14:03

I have a lot of thoughts on that. Unfortunately, that is what I would call a category three question, which basically means this isn't a context that is sufficiently developed for me to actually answer it. So I'm going to have to punt

Sam Coleman 1:14:15

Not a problem, it was worth a try you know.

Forrest Landry 1:14:17

[laughs] I would love to hear what Zo has to say I didn't quite get an introduction with you. And I'm curious to know what your background and question would be if we have just a minute to address one.

been received by the other, and the questions that they ask in the envelopes of understanding that are created as constellated by those questions, that we get the handshake that moves it from speaking at to speaking with. And from that evolves the capacity for the conversation to continue. I believe that would be a wonderful place to adjourn. Thank you for that wonderful question, it was entirely appropriate.

Tom Pegram 1:18:09

That was good medicine. Thank you, Zoe. And thanks so much Forrest. We've really enjoyed this.

Tom Pegram 1:18:17

Thanks for tuning into 'Imperfect Utopias', to get access to all of our content, and to stay up to date with future zoom calls, workshops and events and more. Check us out at ucl.ac.uk/global-governance. If you liked this content, please do leave us a comment and subscribe. Until next time!