

Tim Urban – Exploring Ourselves

- Jim: [00:00:18](#) Well, hello everyone. It's Jim O'Shaughnessy with my colleague, Jamie Catherwood, and today's guest I have been looking forward to before I even invited him on this podcast. He is one of my favorite writers and I love that on his Twitter bio, he says, "Tim Urban, writer, infant." If I didn't do what I do, I might put something very, very similar.
- Jim: [00:00:48](#) So Tim is the great mind behind Wait But Why, which is one of my favorite things to read. His ability to look at a variety of things really stuns me, and the brilliance that you show in being able to put things in terms that people really understand. Instead of using Overton window, you use color codes. I love it. But I want to get to, I think the main part of our conversation is going to be your piece, The Story Of Us, but you put up a tweet that I thought was great. And it was if you're looking for doing something nice for an entrepreneur or a creative, an artist, tell them that they're good. Because as you put it in your tweet, internal belief needs external validation, especially the first time around. So Tim, welcome. A long-winded introduction.
- Tim: [00:01:55](#) Thank you.
- Jim: [00:01:56](#) But talk a little bit about that.
- Tim: [00:02:00](#) Yeah. So I write that as someone who has really been on both sides of that. I've had zero external validation periods when I relied entirely on internal belief and, and then I've also had some things work out where I had a lot of external validation. So I was reflecting back on it. And it kind of hit me that these are really two very different things, but they kind of ... I say, I think, creator, which could be entrepreneur or artist or really anyone who's just making something new, which is a pretty specific kind of craft.
- Tim: [00:02:42](#) And those two things are really different, internal belief in external validation, but they actually serve the same purpose in the artist's and the creator's head. So in the creator's head, it's a confidence thing. And confidence can be built really in two ways. And the thing that's so hard is a lot of times, everyone in someone's life knows that they're smart and they're going to go and try to get a job with this thing. And people do believe in them. But when someone's creating something new, often it, the people around them, and this is no criticism of those people, but they don't really necessarily believe that person can make something successfully because they've never done it.

- Tim: [00:03:24](#) And so really often the only person who really believes that you can make something that is on par with great things that are out there is you at the beginning. So I think of that as internal belief. And a lot of creators don't ever get to the next phase because their internal belief, it isn't quite high enough. And sometimes instead of getting external validation, you're actually getting a negative there because someone in your life is putting you down or telling you that this is true. Sometimes it's a really loving parent or grandparent or someone who truly just doesn't have the risk tolerance that you have and they don't know how these industries work and they think it's one in a million. And they actually tell you that you're not good enough for this.
- Tim: [00:04:14](#) So the internal belief has to be blazing in hue to usually get you to that first success. And then once that happens, that changes everything because you have all this external validation, and even for your next project. Now that external validation sticks. Now that people believe that you probably can do it and you you're getting compliments on the work early on before it's hit the public. So I think that it's just something for early creators to remember.
- Jim: [00:04:39](#) Which I think is fantastic because I went through it. I've started four companies. Luckily the first one did well, so I got a lot of that external validation. But also delusional, something that we'll talk about a lot later, highly delusional, believing that I can do this and went out and did it.
- Tim: [00:05:01](#) Delusional optimism, I think, is a term that I've heard you use as a helpful thing for an entrepreneur, actually.
- Jim: [00:05:07](#) Absolutely, because if they don't have it, they're probably going to fail. And I get triggered. I do a lot of threads on Twitter. I used to blog, but then my basic rest state, if you will, is laziness. And so I found doing the things on Twitter easier, and I get really triggered by these 10 things entrepreneurs do before 10:00 AM in the morning. They're all bull shit and they're all self-selected samples. So if you know me and you bring up the millionaire next door, I'm going to just start going like this, because all of those people were self-selected. In other words, it was millionaires, yes. But millionaires who would give up an entire day to be interviewed by this guy, so they got \$5,000. Okay. So that tells you about that kind of millionaire, but it doesn't tell you about the massive set of millionaires that probably share very little in common with that person.
- Tim: [00:06:18](#) Totally. Yeah.

Jim: [00:06:21](#) So you get this and now I want to move on to The Story Of Us. So I think The Story Of Us is a masterpiece. I envy your ability to come up with terms that are so much more accessible to a reader. So instead of Overton window, you've got green zones and red zones for thinking. I love it. And as I was going back through it last night, I gif a lot on Twitter and there's a reason for that. But anyway, there's a great gif where the guy's head is smoking and it's too many thoughts. And my wife was asking me, she looked at my face and she's like, "You are concentrating. What is going on?" I pull up a gif and I turn it around and she goes, "Oh yeah, you've got Tim Urban tomorrow."

Tim: [00:07:14](#) Yes.

Jim: [00:07:16](#) As I'm reading it, as I'm going through it, I'm talking to my wife and saying, "Why didn't Tim do this as a book? This could be a PhD thesis." And then you told me ...

Tim: [00:07:39](#) Yeah. So I'm doing it as a book. It wasn't the plan at all originally. This was supposed to be a blog post. This was supposed a blog post that took me a month and it took me many years instead. Many years. It's just because as I dug in and as crazy current events are happening in the world, it continued to kind of grow and evolve. It was a topic that really wanted to literally talk about everything. There was nothing that existed in the world that the topic didn't want to talk about and touch and make a theory about. So it got big.

Tim: [00:08:26](#) And then I spent a long time trying to rein it in. The process of the book has been much more of a reigning in process. The book is going to be shorter than the series, hopefully. It was just trying to kind of wrangle the whole thing into what is the most kind of core set of ideas here, and how can they be told most succinctly? And so, yeah, that's going to happen. I credit Tobi Lutke from Shopify who, we went out to lunch and he basically was like, "This should be a book." And that means a lot coming from him.

Jim: [00:09:07](#) Yes, absolutely.

Tim: [00:09:10](#) If he says that, that really means something. And so that really fired me up to kind of say, "Okay, well ..." Because I had had that thought a little bit and I kind of thought, "No, look, it's already on the blog. Just move on. Next thing. Okay." But when he said that I was like, "Okay. I think this should be a book because there's just a lot of people who aren't going to read something really long on the internet."

Jim: [00:09:32](#) Right.

Tim: [00:09:32](#) So hopefully this will help get it into more hands. I think it's an important topic. So I want it to reach more people.

Jim: [00:09:40](#) Yeah, absolutely. And kind of what's nice about it is you've got the blog version, which people like me are going to love and read and think about and write about, but then if you can use that as kind of version 1.0 and then you can go through it and throw out your darlings, as my wife who's a professional photographer says, and really bring it down to the message, I'll read that too of course. But it's a great way to think.

Jim: [00:10:12](#) So let's get into it.

Jim: [00:11:18](#) So I guess my first question about what led you to do the series Story Of Us is, and this is me, so you might not agree with me, but I find so many people are almost programmed by nature to be very reluctant to think. And this is the ultimate thought piece, in my opinion. Obviously, you build a very good case. You bring in the scientific method, which means you've got to be open to having it tested, et cetera. But A, what got you to say, "I know. I'm going to write about us"? And number two, a very thoughtful process, but do you agree with me that most people are kind of programmed to the default zone is, "Yeah. Just go along. Don't think. Don't think too much"?

Tim: [00:12:17](#) Yeah. Well, I try to separate the human mind into two things. And I'm not a neuroscientist. I haven't even really studied this. This is much more from intuition. I think of my procrastinator brain as two things. There's this rational decision maker and the instant gratification monkey. And to me, that really gets at what's going on. I'm sure a neuroscientist would somehow disagree and tell me that actually these two parts of the brain are actually one and this ... Whatever.

Tim: [00:12:48](#) So it's not a statement on anything scientific, but I think of the same kind of idea, this dichotomy going on when we think. And it's kind of a broader version of this procrastination idea, which is that there's just this higher mind and this primitive mind, and both of them of course are equally primitive. The higher mind isn't some new thing. It has evolved as well, just like the rest of us. But to me, the higher mind can see the world in real time. So the higher mind actually can see the world around him that he actually lives in. So it's 2020, maybe in the US, the higher mind can see that, can understand all the lessons from growing up, see what the culture and society is around, see what the opportunities are, see where danger really is versus whatever.

Tim: [00:13:45](#) And then the primitive mind can't do that. The primitive mind to me is just ancient software that is a survival program for 50,000 BC, because 50,000 BC represented not just that world, but the world we've basically lived in for millions and millions of years. So it really had evolved very fine tuned to that world. And then things rapidly changed. And now half of our brain, in my view, is this 50,000 year outdated survival program that is meant to be in one world and it was woke up in a completely different place than it was expected to be. And it doesn't know that, and it can't see that.

Tim: [00:14:24](#) So there's all kinds of examples. I used to think about this when I was in my 20s and I was dating and you're at a bar and you want to go talk to some stranger. There's a girl over there. You want to talk to her. And it just seems scary. "Oh, I can't. Whatever." And if you take a step back, but that's your primitive mind. Because your primitive mind is programmed very specifically, because if you're in a tribe, 50,000 BC, you might know five women your own age that you have a chance to meet with your whole life. And if you make an ass of yourself and they go and they laugh at you and they gossip about how much of a whatever you are, then you're done. You're done, and your genes will never pass themselves on. And to your primitive mind, that's the most terrifying thing.

Tim: [00:15:05](#) So your higher mind meanwhile, in the bar, is saying, "Go talk to her. What is going on? This makes absolutely no sense. She might as well be a figment of your imagination. If you go up and you try to talk to when it goes badly, you will never see her again. It never happened." So that fear is not of anything. There's no danger attached to that fear. But your primitive mind thinks there is. Now, if you can get that in your head as a single person, that's a superpower. That's a superpower because suddenly you have no fear. And then of course you come off all confident and then things go well on the bar.

Tim: [00:15:35](#) It was this life lesson that the primitive mind has all kinds of important purposes. It makes you eat when you need to eat. It does all kinds of things that you do need. So it's not a bad character. It's trying its best, but it's outdated. And the times when it's in conflict with the higher mind, if you can find a way to get in the habit of having your higher mind win that interaction, it's a super power. And it's not just for dating and it's not just for procrastination and it's not just for eating healthy and all these other things that these two minds conflict about. To me, it's also about thinking.

- Tim: [00:16:18](#) And so the reason I got into this is I was looking around. This was 2016. That's how long I've been working on it. Looking at current events out in the world and I was just looking at the way people were talking about politics. And I was thinking about the fact that the only topic and I'm scared to write about is politics, because that's the one topic that's a sacred religious tribalism attached to it that will ruin your career if you piss people off. And I said, "Okay, I need to write about this. What is going on? It's fucked up what this is doing."
- Tim: [00:17:05](#) So that was the beginning. And then that turned into me brainstorming for a long time and realizing that there's these two minds and that what's going on in politics here in the world, and with all the individual thinkers and how they think about politics is another version of this two minds thing. And that's when I started to dig into that.
- Jim: [00:17:33](#) Yeah. The most recent thread I did was called The Thinker And The Prover. And it's based on some stuff I read by Robert Anton Wilson, and he's referring to a Dr. Leonard, who devises the mind into the thinker and the prover. And what's really is the thinker can think anything at once. It can, as Carroll would say in Alice in Wonderland, have three impossible thoughts before breakfast. And the prover, honestly, doesn't care. Think whatever you want, red team, blue team, football's the national sport, no baseball is. But the minute thinker decides, it gets kicked over to the prover. And the prover exists for one reason only, and that is to prove you right.
- Jim: [00:18:19](#) So what the prover does is it is the bouncer, as you would call it at your cognitive entry, and any information that disproves your belief is shunned, not let in, can't get by the velvet rope. And every thing that confirms it is let in. And so when I was going back over your stuff, you're kind of telling the same story when you start with sort of genes. And I love your comment. Genes are selfish, little fuckers in that all they do is want to survive. They're not thinking about anything.
- Tim: [00:18:57](#) They don't care about you.
- Jim: [00:18:58](#) No, not at all. Right. They only care about surviving. And I get it. That's evolution. And this miracle happened where human beings suddenly learn how to talk, suddenly learned later how to write, which I think that was the real massive explosion, because you could time bind your thoughts. You would die and your thoughts would live on unless library burned down. And as you put it in your work, it also gave birth to imagination and reason. This is your higher mind.

- Jim: [00:19:38](#) So I believe that we come out with ... We're not blank slates. We come out with human operating system fully installed, and that is something that you touch on when you talk about beliefs and how they're transmitted. I think you call it super glue story. I love that. And would like to hear you talk a little bit more about that, because what happens is in this battle between the primitive mind and the higher mind, the primitive mind wins a lot more than it should, in my opinion. And so there's us, and as you rightly point out, which I always say, "Yeah, we are optimized for a world that no longer exists." Fear is still our defining emotion and fear of the new is what really freaks us out. I mean, just look what happened with the pandemic. So it's very difficult for us to conquer that.
- Jim: [00:20:46](#) Meanwhile, over here, you have cumulative societal evolution. And that gives us the iPhone, that gives us this Zoom, that gives us everything that we kind of think is cool in the world. So that's where you start. Walk me through how you evolved us and society in your piece.
- Tim: [00:21:16](#) Yeah. So I started by thinking about individuals, which is what I've written about more times before. I've written about individual thinking. And to me, I was like, "Okay, I think this isn't going on again here. I think this is another version of this battle, this tug of war in our brain between this automated software and this thing that can see what's going on, this consciousness." And your question earlier, why do most people not think, to me it's the same reason we don't exercise, the same reason we don't like to eat healthy. It's the same reason we're scared to walk up to a stranger in a bar, because if you think about ...
- Tim: [00:22:05](#) So just tiny diversion here. Our eyeballs were originally built to see in water because we were fish. And now they've evolved. They've changed to really fine tune to the environment we did live in over huge amounts of time, which was land. Now we can see on land, but we actually can't see well in water anymore. It's blurry if we try to see in water. To me, the brain is another tool like your eye. And it evolved to fit the 50,000 BC tribe environment, as just like your eye evolved to see here. And now in this advanced civilization, your brain is a little like your eye in water. It's a little blurry. It doesn't quite work so well. It's trying its best, but it's not what it was made for. All right?
- Tim: [00:22:55](#) And so when it comes to thinking, think about what your brain was supposed to be doing as far as thinking. It needed to be able to solve problems, and that's why we do have a very ... Even your primitive mind is a hell of a thinker. We evolved to solve problems and to socialize, to gossip, because that was

how you got closer together. And frankly, to believe what the people around you believed, because what is the best tribe back then? Is it the one who's who's closest to the truth? Or is it the one who believes they're right fervently and unified? It's probably that one. I'd bet on that one surviving. Not maybe that one creating the best technology or that one, whatever, being the nicest tribe.

Tim: [00:23:40](#) But I bet on those genes in that tribe having a solid chance of passing themselves on probably better than the tribe that is being more high minded, that is focused on truth, that disagrees with each other all the time, and that maybe has a concept of human rights and that the other people in the other tribe deserve the same kind of treatment we do. That tribe probably didn't last. Those genes are gone. I think that's too bad because they would have been nice genes to have around, but we don't have them on the planet anymore.

Tim: [00:24:08](#) And so when it comes to thinking, what was good was unification. You wanted the tribe to feel like they all were sure that they all believed in the same God, they all believe that the chief was the rightful ruler of them and that we should listen to the chief. Whatever it was, when they all believed it, that this is our land, and this is our land gifted by the gods in the sky, and so we need to ... Whatever it was, the little kids born, ideally they would grow up and just believe whatever was told to them by the authorities and they would then carry it out and be fervent about it.

Tim: [00:24:39](#) So now bring us to 2020 when it doesn't make sense anymore. It's actually not the best way to be successful, to be happy, to be whatever. It's actually much better to search for truth and to be okay with disagreement and to be, like you said, to be a thinker, not necessarily a prover. The prover has a ball and chain attached to them at all times. And that is a massive burden. And they're in a prison at all times of that thought. That thought is now their boss. You don't realize that that thought is your client, your boss, whatever. You work for them now. Your brain now is their tool. And that makes no sense. No idea is worthy of being your brain's boss.

Tim: [00:25:22](#) So it doesn't mean you can't have opinions and can't research stuff and learn and start to feel like I do know what I'm talking about here. But the second you get into that mode, and this is the difference between the two minds. The higher mind has always is just very rational about it. Just is open to truth, open to changing their mind at all times, open to whatever the evidence says. The primitive mind doesn't think that way. The

primitive mind's uncomfortable with uncertainty, hates changing your mind because primitive mind thinks of ideas as part of your identity and how your identity is almost like your body. So when you're changing your mind, you actually get a fight or flight response if your primitive mind is doing too much of your thinking. And-

Tim: [00:26:03](#) ... a fight or flight response, if your primitive mind is doing too much of your thinking. And in that fight or flight response, the primitive mind is going to protect you, it's going to protect your ideas, and it's going to think that's protecting you. But protecting your ideas is, like you just said, it means that it now treats incoming information... I think of it as a bouncer outside the door of your beliefs. And the bouncer's criteria for the thinker says, "Well, we want to let things in that seem true." When you're being the prover, as you say, or I call it the attorney, or the zealot, the primitive mind is now the bouncer, and the criteria for entry is no longer, does this seem true? It is, does this confirm my current beliefs? Is it right, or is it wrong? And if it challenges your current beliefs, it will not be let in.

Tim: [00:26:55](#) You can watch the mechanisms, we all have done it, that no idea is good enough or true enough or well-articulated enough to get past a determined confirmation bias in a brain. Nothing. It doesn't matter what it is.

Tim: [00:27:09](#) As a last anecdote here, I had participated in a documentary about flat earthers. And the question is how? How could they... There's a growing community, 10,000 strong, of people who their central core belief is that the earth is flat, and they believe it with all their hearts. And it seems insane. How could they believe that? They see the pictures. And then you start to understand that confirmation bias, that the round earth is no match for confirmation bias. So when you've watched this documentary, I think it's called Behind the Curve, and everything that you could present to them, they have an easy argument for because they've come up with it, and they've come up with it as a community.

Tim: [00:27:58](#) I actually said to the director of the documentary, I said, "Well, how about if..." [Inaudible 00:28:02] "How about this?" He said, "No, they would say that." I said, "Okay. How about if you took them in a spaceship up to, and you let them watch the earth get farther and farther away..."

Tim: [00:28:09](#) And he said, he wasn't even close. They would say, "You've drugged me. This is a screen. This is..." It doesn't matter. If you

are determined to believe something, there is absolutely no one who is going to stop you from believing it.

Tim: [00:28:22](#) And then I started to realize, why are we all laughing at these flat earthers when we are all like this in other things? And the only difference is, 0.1% of people believe what they believe and 50% of people believe what you believe.

Tim: [00:28:31](#) But it is a hundred percent, you are no better than these people. And I'm no better than these people. And if you realize that, maybe you can start working on it and actually become a better thinker.

Tim: [00:28:42](#) And so that's the individual thing. And then I started to look at society and I realized that I think that these things all scale up to a macro level so we can get into that or not. But that's where I went from there. As I said, I think this is actually exactly what's happening on a larger scale as well.

Jim: [00:29:02](#) So yeah, I agree with what you said 100%. I think that that's... Well, actually 99%, because I like to think probabilistically as opposed to deterministically. The challenge that I found when I... I work with younger people in my field and try to help them along and talk about things like this with them.

Jim: [00:29:28](#) And what I realized, to one of your earlier points, was I literally had to change my language because when I talked about your belief system, shields went up automatically. And that happened so often that I stole the term from Brian Roemmele, who we had on the last episode of this, which is human operating system.

Jim: [00:29:56](#) And what I try to do is completely remove us, me and you, from the conversation, because what I've found, it's like Anthony de Mello says, if you want to know what your shortcomings are, look at what irritates you in other people, right?

Tim: [00:30:11](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jim: [00:30:12](#) So we're horrible at self-reflection. We're pretty good at seeing other people's faults and failures.

Tim: [00:30:18](#) [inaudible 00:00:30:21].

Jim: [00:30:19](#) And what we normally see. Yeah. What we normally see, of course, are the ones that we ourselves have. So let's talk about the aggregation because I agree with you.

Jim: [00:30:31](#) I think consensus reality is what the term I use, which is your 50%, right? So if consensus reality is that the world is round and let's say 60% of the people are part of that. There's always going to be a subgroup, right, that doesn't believe that.

Jim: [00:30:55](#) And as you say, you will not reason... An ounce of emotion equals a pound of facts. And so when I see people trying to rationally and using reason and logic to try to dissuade people from these beliefs, I know that they've lost already, right? Because they're just not going to get through. They're just not going to make their way through that perception field.

Jim: [00:31:23](#) It's a force field, right? And you literally cannot penetrate it.

Tim: [00:31:26](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jim: [00:31:27](#) And what you say will actually, if it's used at all, it will be used as, in your example, as evidence that they're right, right?

Tim: [00:31:37](#) Oh yeah.

Jim: [00:31:38](#) You put me me up on the spaceship, but you drugged me. Now talk about, if you would, so aggregate this up for me.

Tim: [00:31:46](#) Well, there's actually something called the backfire effect, which is that, yeah, you try to convince someone determined to believe something that they're wrong. They often end up coming out feeling even more sure of themselves-

Jim: [00:31:58](#) Yes.

Tim: [00:31:58](#) ... because the fight or flight mechanism that activated in their brain when challenged went into furious survival mode and strengthened the beliefs and probably in order to do so, they probably had to diminish their opinion of you as a human.

Tim: [00:32:18](#) So even if it's a good friend, even if it's someone in your family, not that they'll think you're a bad person, they'll come out and say, oh, he's really changed. He's really gone down a weird path.

Tim: [00:32:27](#) Or for someone doesn't know you that well, wow, he's just, what an asshole. Or just like, oh, he thinks he's smarter than he is, my God. You'll find that they will start to, and it's... Look, it's not that you're always right. Not that they're never right about something. And sometimes you are being an asshole, but you'll find that sometimes when you're pretty sure you're not, and that you're trying to be quite reasonable and that you're pretty

sure you know a lot more about this than they do from just the amount of time you've spent with it, that you will get unfairly demonized.

- Tim: [00:33:03](#) And, again, they're not being bad people. There's a mechanism in their brain that's doing this. And so anyway, so the scaling up aspect is when this got really interesting for me, because I looked out at society and I started to...
- Tim: [00:33:23](#) The concept of emergence, maybe an overused term, but it's a really important term in my view, which is that the idea that a bunch of small things can combine together into something, a different entity that's bigger than the sum of its parts.
- Jim: [00:33:38](#) Yep.
- Tim: [00:33:38](#) So I think of this, you can go to even just as small as two people, business partners just say. And one of them is good at X, Y and Z, and the other one is better at A, B and C, but together, they actually build something that is more than double their efforts.
- Tim: [00:33:59](#) And you could then scale this up to a bigger group. If you're in a good conversation... So I like to think about text threads, okay? And I have a few, and they are all a little bit different as far as they are in this thinking spectrum, I think.
- Tim: [00:34:20](#) So I think of this as, the terms I use, I bring a vertical axis into everything. And this vertical axis is this higher mind on top, this primitive mind on the bottom, and at any given point, your state, your thinking, your intellectual state, your emotional state is somewhere along that axis, and that changes throughout the day.
- Tim: [00:34:36](#) But my epiphany is that I think groups also form a larger organism that is also on that vertical axis somewhere. So at the top of the axis for an individual, you have what I call a scientist. It's your thinker is my scientist. Same idea.
- Tim: [00:34:56](#) At the bottom of the ladder, I have maybe a zealot, which is someone who they are determined not to change their mind, just say. Now, when you scale that to a group, a group that is all... Where the culture of the group. The group's culture is the group's personality or the group's thinking style.
- Tim: [00:35:17](#) The group culture is when it's high rung, as I think of it as a ladder, when it's high up on that axis, you have what I call an idea lab. So an idea lab is a group that's behaving like a scientist,

as a thinker. And what that means is, it doesn't mean that there being actual scientists doing actual science, it doesn't mean that their geniuses or any smarter than anyone else.

- Tim: [00:35:43](#) It just means that as a group, the culture is such where disagreement is cool. And that when someone says something and someone else, almost for sport, will just disagree. And that people will get into a heated argument and it never gets personal, or rarely gets personal.
- Jim: [00:35:58](#) Right.
- Tim: [00:35:58](#) And that the heated arguments, because the core is that they understand that ideas and people are different, so ideas in an idea lab are little toys to play with, to kick around. It's a game, try to break the other person's idea.
- Tim: [00:36:10](#) It's hilarious if you can break their idea. And if you can't, that's interesting too. When someone has a hypothesis, they throw it out in the group thread, and a bunch of people try to break it. Now only good outcomes happen here.
- Tim: [00:36:23](#) Because if it's breakable, then everyone learns, including the person who held it, that idea is flawed. Okay. We all just got a little smarter, we all just learned something. Don't hold that idea with conviction anymore.
- Tim: [00:36:33](#) If you can't break it and they try and try, oh, wow. This idea is good. Wow. Okay. We just learned something. So now everyone can adopt it into their head and continue to work on it. And so what happens is you end up with, through this game of argument, everyone ends up smarter. Everyone ends up learning. Everyone's everyone ends up humbled too, because if you're in an environment where you're constantly being told you're wrong, you're always simplifying, you're biased, you're whatever, you're being a hypocrite.
- Tim: [00:37:03](#) You are being those things. And you realize that and you just now always are assuming I might be doing something dumb here or [inaudible 00:37:10] that's the idea. You get that in your head, which I think is healthy because, remember, our brain is meant to be seeing in water, not on land. And here we are with a brain that is going to be messing up a lot. So we need to know that.
- Tim: [00:37:22](#) Now, you go to the other kind. So that group to me is high up on the ladder, high up on that vertical axis. It's a high rung culture.

And that happens when the people in the group, even if some of them are naturally lower rung thinkers, the culture is bigger than them. And the culture of this group says, we do it this way.

- Tim: [00:37:38](#) Now the other kind of group at the bottom, we had a term for it, [inaudible 00:37:43] I didn't make it into the new one, which is just an echo chamber. And an echo chamber, people think of it as this, I don't know what they think of it is, but to me, it's a culture.
- Tim: [00:37:49](#) Echo chamber is an intellectual culture. And it's the opposite kind of culture. If a zealot humans were scaled up to a group, you end up with an echo chamber. And so the thing about the idea lab that's cool is that it has emergent properties. It's bigger than the sum of its parts.
- Tim: [00:38:08](#) Five people in an idea lab creates a super brain, their brains wired together into a super brain that actually is way smarter than any of them could be and way better at figuring out the truth and getting to knowledge. And of course, you scale this up to hundreds of people at a science, at some kind of academy, there's a reason that scientists do peer review and collaborations.
- Tim: [00:38:29](#) They're forming a super brain looking for truth. So this is this magical thing we can do as humans. But if you go down to the echo chamber culture, which is the opposite. Disagreement on the certain sacred topics, you can disagree about movies in an echo chamber, but an echo chamber has certain topics, maybe political, maybe religious, maybe something with culture about the clothes we wear are cool, and these people are saying our music is cool.
- Tim: [00:38:55](#) Whatever it is, whatever it is, there's certain sacred tenets in that group. And it's the prover's burden that we've talked about. Now, the group has this burden. And what that means is it is not okay... We're all middle-schoolers, we all want to be cool. It's not cool in that group to disagree on those.
- Tim: [00:39:14](#) In fact, it's so uncool that you'll probably be abused for it, and insulted, and people will lose respect for you. And you may end up kicked out of the group-
- Jim: [00:39:22](#) Yep.
- Tim: [00:39:23](#) ... if you keep going. And so what happens is you lose the emergent properties. This group becomes a group that, by

being in it, instead of everyone getting smarter and more humble, it makes everyone feel more sure of themselves and more zealot-like, and it strengthens this belief and it strengthens the idea in your head that your identity is attached to this belief because it's attached to the group.

- Tim: [00:39:43](#) And very quickly, the whole group is just held in this downward magnet to the bottom of this thinking ladder on this topic. And so that's this level two thing I thought about.
- Tim: [00:39:55](#) And then I brought it up to a level three. Well the whole society is this. So you have these giant political echo chambers reinforced with the certain newspapers or journalists that are basically... Or TV stations, obviously. Their job basically is to help reinforce, to strengthen the beliefs within an echo chamber.
- Tim: [00:40:16](#) And you have this happening on a mass scale, and you have the absolute, most clever people at articulating something, they come up with a wording that is so good, so good in order to confirm this belief and it spreads like wildfire, and that becomes now everyone is saying that in arguments, you can't have an argument with someone without hearing this thing that someone thought of that is now really good in an argument.
- Tim: [00:40:37](#) And it's a mass produced, it's an industry, an echo chamber industry. On the other hand, you have these idea labs. You have these, whether it's on social media or whatever, you have communities of people disagreeing and comparing each other's notes with the internet is actually a revelation for both of these things.
- Tim: [00:40:59](#) So that's where I took it. I realized this thing scales up the emergence tower as I call it, and the same battle between the primitive mind and higher mind is going on in these big groups. And clearly there's a winner in different groups, and you can see what it is if you look.
- Jim: [00:41:16](#) Absolutely true. And, I think the the switching point was when movies, when that kind of thing started coming, because I think that certain levels of communication and propaganda, delivery systems matter, right? So movies where you're passive, right, and watching them, or TV, they slip in a lot easier than the idea lab, right?
- Jim: [00:41:49](#) Because they're not asking you any questions. They're just presenting you with very cleverly thought out propaganda,

really. And I think you call it a fog of uncertainty, but you're diluted, right? But you think you're right.

Jim: [00:42:07](#) And so I think Bernays is famous for, what a fucker this guy was. I mean, he thought of humans as a herd of cattle and that they were easily manipulated. And the unfortunate thing is, he's kind of right, right?

Jim: [00:42:25](#) He was a master at propaganda. Even his techniques from the '20s work today. And your point about the people who are so clever coming up with the really clever wording, bang. Absolutely true. I often say to people, the people I worry about in what I do... So I'm in the asset management, right?

Jim: [00:42:45](#) And so we have to deal with a lot of beliefs about investing, about money, about things that. So I jump down those rabbit holes, right? And one of the things that I've found, was that the smarter you are, the, in many cases easier it is to deceive you because deception starts with you deceiving yourself.

Jim: [00:43:10](#) And if you're really smart, guess what you're going to come up with? You're going to come up with almost a bullet proof narrative about why you're right.

Jim: [00:43:20](#) And then that's going to be a meme that propagates very easily, right, through your network. And because you're smart, it's going to be very difficult to get you not to believe that.

Tim: [00:43:35](#) I love that.

Jim: [00:43:36](#) And so when I tell that to people who are obviously intelligent, I mean, at first it's like, they look at me like, why are you insulting me? And I'm saying, I'm not insulting you. I'm saying we're human beings. We all share human operating system, right?

Jim: [00:43:53](#) The primitive as you call it is optimized to 50,000 BC, an environment that no longer exists. The higher mind built the entire world that we see around us. But what you've got to understand is that most of your beliefs are wrong.

Jim: [00:44:11](#) That's the other thing that I say that now, and people lose their shit. So much so that I changed it from beliefs to models. So I did this shift, you know Charlie Munger with his latticework of mental models? I started in my writing no longer saying, "I believe," but rather, "I have a model that posits this."

Jim: [00:44:37](#) When you make that shift internally, what happens is, you release the ego from having to cling to that belief, right? And so models should prove things, I think. And models also need to be tested, right? Because you always want to see if you're right or not.

Jim: [00:44:58](#) Lichtenstein's model, look for use, not meaning, right? So when you change your structure to saying, hey, I have a latticework of these mental models, and I always want to test them and it's easy for your ego to say, yeah, okay. That model, that's outside of you, so I'm not worried.

Jim: [00:45:18](#) I'm not having my very being challenged here. And when you do that, it's like a superpower because you no longer are wed to those beliefs, that wed to emotion and create the you, you think of as you. And when you try to go against that person, you're going to lose.

Tim: [00:45:42](#) It's the super power from the bar. It's the same one.

Jim: [00:45:45](#) Exactly.

Tim: [00:45:45](#) It is the same one because you're realizing that something very crazy is going on in my brain when I say, "I believe", and it doesn't make any sense, and it's not good for me as a thinker and it's not helping me do anything. So I'm going to shift that perception.

Tim: [00:46:01](#) I'm going to train my primitive mind to stop thinking that way. And so this is not dangerous to go and approach that stranger in the bar. And this is not a threat to me for this model to be wrong. And so when you call it a model, you're doing a very... You're reframing to actually, and you're not tricking yourself, you're actually unpacking yourself. You're reframing to bring your relationship with that idea to where it should be, to where it makes sense.

Tim: [00:46:35](#) It's not you've spent your whole life building up this idea and this is the thing that defines you at all. The point is, I think a really good thinker is wrong a ton of times because you're a scientist. So when you say model, immediately, I'm thinking, you're talking about a science experiment.

Tim: [00:46:49](#) If you're a scientist and you're working on an experiment, or you're an inventor and you're working on a machine and someone comes over and they say, "Hey, there's a flaw here. This is going to be come loose. The screw's going to come

loose." No one's going to say, how dare you. You're an idiot. [inaudible 00:47:09]. Okay. That's not a good inventor. The inventor is going to say, "Thank you."

- Jim: [00:47:11](#) Exactly.
- Tim: [00:47:12](#) Oh, wow, wait, what else? Tell me more, what else? And then you're going to want them to... A good thinker, when someone disagrees and says, "Actually, I think you're wrong", it's not that it feels good in that moment. The inventor is hoping that that the thing is good, right? It's a bummer, but it doesn't have to go beyond that.
- Tim: [00:47:30](#) You're saying, oh man. Yeah. [inaudible 00:47:33] feeling, you know they're right. Now accept it, because what you're upset about is that the idea is not that good. Okay. But the answer isn't to pretend it is good, now I can feel better. No, the answer is to, okay, well, I'll be happier once I get the idea better so let's work on it.
- Tim: [00:47:52](#) The other thing I loved what you said is the smarter people, because there's a little attorney in all of our heads, right? Like you said, the prover, the smarter the person, that attorney gets really, really good, right?
- Jim: [00:48:04](#) Really good. Really good. [crosstalk 00:22:07].
- Tim: [00:48:05](#) That attorney. We have Alan Dershowitz in your head when you're really smart.
- Jim: [00:48:09](#) That's right.
- Tim: [00:48:12](#) What happens is the higher mind, and this is where you get to a little overlap with some of Daniel Kahneman's ideas. Again, I try not to compare because mine is much more basic and metaphorical, but the higher mind is this powerful machine. But when you get low on the ladder, you get this primitive fog in your head, I think of it as.
- Tim: [00:48:32](#) You lose your consciousness to this software. And the higher mind's still there, with all of its power, but it's working for, mindlessly working for the primitive mind now, right?
- Jim: [00:48:40](#) Right.
- Tim: [00:48:40](#) And so the higher mind is in there being a genius, trying to prove the primitive mind right. When you rise up in the ladder,

the fog goes away. The higher mind can think for itself. The primitive mind relaxes. And now the higher mind can say, wait a second that's not where it makes sense. And you have your consciousness back. So I think that it's interesting.

- Jim: [00:49:00](#) Yeah. One of the insights that helped me the most was understanding that I am just as likely to fall for all this shit as anyone else.
- Tim: [00:49:15](#) Maybe more so.
- Jim: [00:49:16](#) Maybe more so, actually. Actually. Probably more so, right? So I was like, okay, so how can I correct this? Well, as I dove into that rabbit hole, I saw how we create our persona and we link it to our emotions.
- Jim: [00:49:33](#) And then we link our beliefs to that, which makes them unchallengeable, right, to our super attorney in our head. But if you reframe it, make a model, suddenly it becomes far easier.
- Tim: [00:49:49](#) Well, but also what you're doing, which is really clever, I think, is =what you're really doing by doing this, because you're telling this to me with pride, because it's a great trick. You're making that trick and that style of thinking part of your identity, which is that I am a humble thinker, which is the one thing you should do.
- Tim: [00:50:07](#) This is a great thing to attach to and get your primitive mind like a little kid, obsessed. Yes, we're humble. Look how humble we are. Look how open we are to changing our mind. We're so good at changing our mind. Great. That is a perfect thing for your primitive mind to become attached to, because it's going to protect you from the primitive mind becoming attached to something that's a burden instead.
- Tim: [00:50:25](#) And so, the fact that you can start to think I'm the person, I'm the kind of awesome thinker who thinks of my ideas as models. That's great, right? And actually, that's why it's good to even talk about it.
- Tim: [00:50:38](#) Publicly, you start to proclaim yourself as this kind of... And you will start to defend that in your own head. And when you're being a zealot, it'll now conflict with your primitive mind's identity, and you won't let anyone... So it's a good trick.
- Jim: [00:50:50](#) Yeah. And it's self-reinforcing, right?

Tim: [00:50:52](#) Yes.

Jim: [00:50:53](#) So when I started doing this and just started saying, "I don't know. I don't know," when people would ask me a question, "I don't know." Because I didn't, right? And people in our profession, the challenge that we face is we want to believe the people who seem the most certain, and they're the very people we should not pay attention to for the most part, because thinking that you're certain is you're on that lower rung of your ladder. If you think, I know with 100% certainty that this is right, you're wrong. You're an idiot.

Jim: [00:51:27](#) And when you're up here, you're like, ooh, I don't know, right? There's all these various things. So by attaching that yourself, as you quite eloquently observed, you create a self-reinforcing mechanism.

Jim: [00:51:46](#) And then, when you spring on people, when you say, when I was still calling what I was adhering to beliefs, right? I would say to people, well, most of my beliefs are wrong. Ooh, wrong thing to say to people. I mean, just immediately, they shut you down and whoa-

Jim: [00:52:03](#) I mean, just immediately, they shut you down, and "Whoa, whoa, give me some proof." And I'm like, "Sure, I'll give you tons of proof. Look at what the most educated people from just like 200 years ago believed, and most of it was pure bullshit." And they're like, "Whoa, give me an example." And, "Okay, Copernicus vs Ptolemy." "Who are they?" Well, then you describe it to them and they're like, "Okay, so one guy." No, it's the whole history of our emergence. I love that term. I'm going to steal that from you, because it is us coming together.

Jim: [00:52:38](#) And it's like, I have a theory about Twitter, for example, which most people disagree with. I'm probably wrong. So right now Twitter is more noise than signal, right? It's the echo chamber, and groups don't interact for the most part. If they do, they're just shouting at each other and working themselves up. I believe that as this continues and people are able to curate it so that there's a lot less noise and much more signal, then that global distributed intelligence network becomes a super thinker, like you talk about groups. Because it is not bound by geography, right?

Jim: [00:53:31](#) So you, Tim, can be a super thinker who lives in Kuala Lumpur. Doesn't matter. If we are connected and we get enough like-minded people connected who love the give and take, who are like, "Thank you for pointing out that my idea was shit," I think

you're going to see something really special. Now, of course, look at what's just recently happened. I don't know whether Jack crossed the Rubicon and then Apple, Google at all, Facebook tumbled after him. And so we'll see. I guess the jury is still out. But I think if the network is allowed to just keep percolating, that what you're going to see is that emergence.

Tim: [00:54:25](#) And emergence works both ways. So when the primitive minds conquer a place, it now emerges into a giant set of algorithm-enforced, hideous, echo chambers of where the absolute most brilliantly articulated confirmation of those gets retweeted a trillion times, where the thing that binds them together is hatred of the common enemy, dehumanization of the common enemy. So it's just scaling up something awful, right?

Jim: [00:54:55](#) Yes.

Tim: [00:54:56](#) But, so this is interesting. There's a great book by Jon Ronson, *So You've Been Publicly Shamed*, and he talks about how Twitter started actually as a radical de-shaming platform. People don't realize this who haven't been on it a long time. And the idea was at the very beginning, Twitter was a place where, and I still try to use it for this, but it was a place where you would admit embarrassing things about yourself. You would say, "Oh, like, I totally..." Everyone would act really human and then they'd get all these people saying, "I totally do that, too. Oh, my God. Yeah. Like whatever." And it was this place where it was this really, really safe place to just be a human. And it was this kind of modern Silicon Valley culture of like, hey, we're all super human or we're very human and whatever. And so then there were a few moments when Twitter, through a big group wave of activity, was able to actually expose something bad going on in some corporate boardroom or someone who was doing something bad, and Twitter could expose it and bring it to the surface and actually fix the thing, bring the person down, and get rid of the bad thing.

Tim: [00:56:10](#) And it was this incredible power Twitter had that people realized it had, which is really great, except it was too exhilarating. It was so exhilarating when this happened, that people started to say, "Okay, who's next?"

Jim: [00:56:21](#) Right.

Tim: [00:56:22](#) And it started to become... So the primitive minds in their heads of the people on Twitter started to wake up and say, "Wait, maybe when you're being radical de-shamed, that primitive mind is thinking it's a little fun getting retweeted." But once

you're a crusader taking down evil and you can feel like a protagonist and you have this evil enemy to bind with others, the primitive mind knows that language wakes the fuck up and starts saying, "Okay, who's next?" So the primitive minds got hooked.

Tim: [00:56:49](#) And once they get hooked, when just going on Twitter starts to bring you down on the ladder because the culture on Twitter starts to be very low rung and it's contagious, and just going on it brings your psyche down. And what happens is now the higher minds that were trying to be open and honest and humble, they leave. They get scared. They disappear. And you have almost like the wolves have conquered. You have a bunch of primitive minds on the heap, howling they've conquered it. And that's what's happened.

Tim: [00:57:17](#) Now, what you're pointing out is that Twitter, everyone says how bad it is, but it has ridiculous, ridiculous potential to be the greatest super brain ever created. Whether it's Twitter specifically or something like it. But right now, every one of these platforms, the primitive minds conquer and take over. It's a cultural thing. And so what I think is if we can start to make that... The best way to change behavior that is happening naturally is to publicly shame it and to make it uncool.

Tim: [00:57:50](#) So you think about littering on a camping trail. I don't know whether maybe a hundred years ago, I'm sure it seemed like not a big deal probably. I don't know. But today we are all raised where if you're on a camping trail and you throw a piece of plastic trash, you're the worst person that's ever lived. Right?

Jim: [00:58:04](#) Right.

Tim: [00:58:04](#) So no one would ever do that. Right? Even though it's just kind of minor thing you actually step back. It's like culture has made a very serious rule about that, so we all are in line. No one does it now. And you can say that for a lot of things. No one's going to make a lewd comment to the barista in a coffee shop in New York, because everyone in the coffee shop would turn and start screaming at that person and they would be banned from the shop. Culture has made a very clear rule there, right?

Tim: [00:58:32](#) So right now culture is not penalizing incredibly awful, juvenile, tribal, mean, bullying, nasty, dehumanizing behavior on social media. In fact, it rewards it. When you do that, you get retweets. And so there needs to be an awareness about this that spreads, which is the exact point of my book is trying to just have people see this vertical axis so that we can start to treat

acting really low on the axis a little like littering on a camping trail. Like you're being... And by the way, in person, we do have these rules. You don't want to act this way in person, but it's the wild west of social etiquette on the internet. And we need to have that mature quickly, because once it does, it can switch all these things into positive forces.

Jim: [00:59:23](#) I completely agree. And, in fact, that's the way I model it. Right? Of course, the lowest common denominator is going to win when all you got to do is start shouting and you've got your echo group and you've got your gang. Right?

Jim: [00:59:39](#) And so I did a podcast with Alex Danko and he made a great remark, which is about Twitter and the social hierarchy therein. And his remark was, "Every day, someone is it on Twitter, and your goal is to never be that guy," which is kind of like the... And so I started thinking about it like junior high, right? Twitter right now is junior high. And there are some university students hanging around over here. And if you try to... I'm still there. I'm not going to leave because I think it's potential is massive. But I love the idea that you're going to have in your book, and I love this idea that we can make it uncool, because that really at the end of the day, that's it, right.

Tim: [01:00:35](#) That's it. People will make something cool and it will override all of our primitive things. I mean, look, there's legit celibate priests, because it's cool in that particular world to go and be... That's the most overriding thing you can do. This is like a Harari point. In the end, and again this makes sense, I think what our brains are programmed to do.

Tim: [01:00:59](#) In that world, the most important thing was acceptance of your tribe by far. And the more popular you were, the higher status you were, the more safe you were, the more likely you were to mate, the more likely you were for your kids to have plenty of food. And likewise being uncool, being publicly shamed feels so awful to us. When again, it's not that rational. It feels so awful to us because back then, it's the end of your life. If everyone hates you in the tribe, you're done. Right? From lots of reasons.

Tim: [01:01:26](#) So it's all about what's cool. Now, how do you get something to be cool? Well, it has to be an awareness campaign, right? And right now there's a lot of forces that are trying to keep the bad behavior cool. And the incentive's you talk about someone's it everyday. Well, what does that incentivize? It incentivizes... Look, people, we can all try to be brave, but in the end, we're all human. And it's a lot to ask people to endure unpopularity, rank unpopularity in order to have integrity right now, or to be

humble, even being humble about the wrong political view. You're in trouble saying you don't know, saying, well, you get immediately accused of, "Oh, well, that's a code word for you're on the other side. You're one of them."

Tim: [01:02:17](#) And remember, in the idea lab, those ideas are all experiments, but in the echo chamber, ideas are people. They're the same. They're stitched to your identity. So if you secretly hold that idea. You're not wrong. You're not someone who holds an idea. No, no, you are a bad, fundamental human being. You are someone that's not worthy of being humanized. You are one of them. I hate you now. That's insanity. Nothing about that makes any sense at all. So yeah, we have some work to do, but the switch could flip. It could be so good.

Jim: [01:02:47](#) I think so. I think so. And we didn't even get into it, and I just want to keep on some of the ideas I want to chat with you about, so you have a big section about the United States. Right? And I always had thought about the United States that it was the first country that was formed as an idea, rather than like the sun king who gets his power directly from God. Right?

Jim: [01:06:17](#) Money. The term credit comes from credo, which means I believe. And when we got money, man, we went from the hunter-gatherer tribe where the alpha male is the boss man, and it's all primitive mind, and if you fuck up, they exile you, you're dead. You're dead in a couple of days. So you never fuck up. Then you graft that onto people starting to farm and they need to start protecting, right? And so the groups get weapons, and then the sun king takes over and he derives his power from God. And it all makes great sense to the primitive mind.

Jim: [01:06:58](#) And then money emerges, right? And money is the key, in my opinion, to unlocking the modern world. Because before money, you'd have to give me chickens for my wine or whatever. And barter worked only on a tiny, tiny level. When you introduce credit, which, amazing, and currency again, amazing. But all of these things are collective delusions, right?

Jim: [01:07:37](#) So this dollar bill is a piece of paper, and it's a promise. And I used to joke with the Bitcoin people. I have no position on Bitcoin, by the way. I don't need them attacking me. I do have a small experimental position, but that's it. But when I would joke with the Bitcoin people, they're like, "The U.S. dollar is in fiat currency." And I went, "Well, I think the U.S. dollar is a currency backed by the most powerful military in the history of the world that takes its direction from politicians who have continually demonstrated their willingness to use it." They're like, "What?"

Jim: [01:08:16](#) But the point is, Lewis Carroll, who's best known as the author of Alice in Wonderland, was actually a very gifted logician. His real name is Charles Dodson. And he wrote a very brief thing called, What the Tortoise Said to Achilles. If you really want to peel back the onion, read this. It's very short. But what he does in it is he step-by-step shows you that even logical systems, if you keep peeling the onion, you get down to the bottom, and what do you find? You find a basic believer axiom that some human beings simply decided this is right. There's no proof for it, but you got to start somewhere. Right?

Jim: [01:09:09](#) So the more that we can take on that idea of, hey, it's all ideas anyway. Right? So why don't we look at this in a... Let's try to maximize being right. So that's another thing that I try to do when I'm working with people. It's like, "No, it's not called beliefs, but wouldn't you like to be right more often than you're wrong, like in investing?" And they're like, "Yeah. Yeah, I would." And I'm like, "Okay." So there are certain models that are more right than other models. It doesn't mean they're right. All the time. They aren't. Nothing is right the time. But again, if you are able to extract them from that primitive mindset... And by the way, I have it, you have it. Everybody has it. I always clarify that because they're like, "You're saying you don't have a primitive mind." No, quite the contrary. I've got a very active one.

Tim: [01:10:08](#) Yeah. It's an every day fight.

Jim: [01:10:11](#) Yeah.

Tim: [01:10:11](#) It's an everyday struggle. Yeah.

Jim: [01:10:12](#) For all of us.

Tim: [01:10:13](#) Right.

Jim: [01:10:14](#) But when you remove it and start talking about it in terms of efficacy and base rates and what happens in aggregate as opposed to what happened this time. Right? So if you and I had 100 conversations, there's going to be 10 that suck, for whatever reason. We didn't sleep well. We were drunk the night before, whatever. But in aggregate, my guess is that there's going to be 10 that are unbelievably good. And then there's going to be 10 that suck, and then most are going to be in the middle. Right?

Jim: [01:10:47](#) And that's the idea of base rates and what I do. And so it's all based on logic, but really on the ability to test. But what happens with people is we're still deterministic thinkers, in my opinion. And we are deterministic thinkers living in a probabilistic world. And then I normally append, hilarity often ensues. Right? And so getting people to think probabilistically is like... I've failed. I have failed, because the primitive just does not accept that.

Tim: [01:11:26](#) It's like trying to get people to be less scared going up to a stranger in the bar, right? You are fighting against a whole lot of evolution.

Jim: [01:11:38](#) Yes.

Tim: [01:11:39](#) But it is possible. Right? But the first thing to crack that allows this maturation to happen is humility. The crack is that moment when you realize that your primitive mind is not very smart and it's doing a lot of your thinking. When you truly believe that, now you're suddenly open. Someone says, "You're actually doing it wrong." You suddenly say, "Oh, oh, shit. Okay. Well, tell me why. Oh, no. Is this one of those times?" But if you don't have that cracked yet and you think I'm extremely evolved, you don't realize you have this dumb part of your brain, you just think I've been around for awhile. I know what I'm talking about. Thanks, buddy. And that person that hasn't cracked it yet, that person is not able to grow.

Jim: [01:12:24](#) Yeah. And beginner's mind. Right? It's like, so here I'm holding up. I'm showing you one of the things that I wrote. Mistakes are made, and, yes, by me. And I like your idea. I'm crafting that as a positive. I'm reframing that as a positive. I like the fact that I write about my mistakes and that I make a bunch of them because it frees me to understand that, okay, that was a bad idea.

Tim: [01:12:52](#) It's a liberating super power. It's taking off the ball and chain. You're not putting yourself down. You're freeing yourself to be nimble. And-

Jim: [01:13:06](#) So, question. We agree on this. How do we as people who want that emergence, because how cool that can be, I don't think many people understand. I think that that world ruled by the higher mind emergence and test it, test it, test it, reiterate it, continually upgrade it, it's going to be a really cool world. How do we convince people that, yeah, I'm going to embrace that and not this kind of echo chamber? By the way, where I'm safe and comfortable in the average person?

- Tim: [01:13:52](#) Yeah. Yeah. Well, I think when people understand that they're in a primitive echo chamber, that when they see how lame that actually is, I think most people want out. Even if it feels bad, they start to realize like... And so I think just first of all, just helping to build awareness, these terms are helpful. But I think also not just... So looking at the worst things in history to me are just echo chambers when they've gotten to a really bad level. Right? You keep scaling an echo chamber and you get to really, really nasty places. Dehumanization eventually, suddenly violence seems not just justified, but the only way, and desperate times suddenly are everywhere. So desperate measures. And before you know it, you have a genocide, right?
- Tim: [01:14:43](#) This is the natural progression of echo chambers made of people that are no worse than anyone today. So that's one thing that's pretty scary. We don't want to be doing that. Look at all the nasty things in history. We are capable of that. And it starts with echo chambers, which fosters madness. Einstein went to Nazi Germany or left Nazi Germany and he has a famous quote that says, "Nazi-ism is a psychic illness of the masses." Which is what it is. It's not evil people. They're not evil. They're not more evil than I am. They fell into his group madness, which is what can happen anywhere. So that's one half.
- Tim: [01:15:22](#) The other half is how good things could be. Look at the fact that the technology around us is so much more impressive than anything a human mind can make. But a huge group of human minds, where each brain is a neuron in a larger system and ideas are not sacred, so the best ideas end up rising to the top and they're always being challenged and ideas are treated like models, like hypotheses. And that system is like a super intelligent AI. It's like a super species on this planet that can create the iPhone, that can create skyscrapers, right? That can create a vaccine in a very small amount of time.
- Tim: [01:16:06](#) Try having one human in a lab make a vaccine, especially forget that this is already standing on the shoulders of the giants. Imagine a caveman who's really smart, but knows nothing other than... And then there's some virus, have that caveman create a vaccine. Of course, how far that is. That caveman's not even going to understand that microbes are a thing. This is the product of only group, magical thinking.
- Tim: [01:16:28](#) So what people have to understand is that I think is how bad one... I do see it like we're heading to a fork in the road, because this is kind of the big thesis of my book that I'm talking about. The big zoom out is it's this quote that I've pulled from a book, which is I did my own little version of it, which is, "Hard

times create wise people. Wise people create good times. Good times create foolish people. Foolish people create bad times or hard times." Right?

Tim: [01:17:06](#) And I worry that we are right around the foolish people stage. Too much good times, foolish people on our way to creating very bad times. And the thing that's extra scary is that the good and bad times... Technology exploding like it is. It's exponentially growing. More tech doesn't mean good or bad. It just magnifies whatever's happening. So the good times in the 20th century were better than really any of the good times before, as far as it goes for poverty and for freedom and for rights and everything else, prosperity.

Tim: [01:17:40](#) The bad times were about as bad as anything has ever happened. The world wars, the threat of nuclear annihilation, that's badder than anything was bad before. Right?

Jim: [01:17:50](#) Right.

Tim: [01:17:52](#) There's been a lot of genocides. Like the Holocaust, next level, that's next level genocide. Right? So if you think about the 21st century, tech is going to be maybe a hundred times more powerful than it was in the 20th century, which means-

Tim: [01:18:03](#) It was more powerful than it was in the 20th century, which means the stakes are now so high. The good times could be so much better than anything we can even imagine. With something that would seem like genuine utopia to us, a time when you only die voluntarily. Where all of our bodies are now replaced with things that can't die, that can't age, that can't feel pain, but we're in a golden age of wisdom and exploration and freedom. And things we can't even imagine, no poverty on earth, no cancer, no climate change issues, really, really amazing. That's a possibility with the tech we have.

Tim: [01:18:37](#) The bad times we could be heading towards is legit extinction level. I mean, at some point the bad times get bad enough, there is no more any times, right? It's over. So that's the limiting factor. What's scary is that if this oscillating good, bad thing just keeps growing in magnitude eventually the bad it's that tripwire and we're all gone. So it's over. So it's not a good trend. So we need to really work on getting to the right side of that fork, which starts with stuff like flipping Twitter from bad to good, which starts with cultural changes. So it's not that there's an easy solution, but there's so much incentive that if you can all get up on the same page, very quickly culture will start to make

the right things cool and the right things uncool, but we have to be aware for that to happen.

- Jim: [01:19:16](#) Yep, I could not agree more. Nick Bostrom, who came up with the first serious look at the simulation hypothesis actually had another one that I found even more interesting. And that was, you just referred to it, he calls it the great filter. And the great filter is when we don't make it past, right? When the echo chambers and the primitive minds take over, and it is a negatively compounding spiral down. And then shit happens and we're gone. It's an extinction level event. And his theory, which is very gloomy, is yeah, the universe was probably filled with other civilizations, but they were probably ahead of us and they're gone now, right? So it is not a very cheerful answer, but I do think that the more people do what we're doing right now and the more people that, or not people, the more platforms like this, a podcast, emerge as powerful.
- Jim: [01:20:29](#) Like Joe Rogan, I don't listen to his podcast. I knew him as a comedian. I've listened to a couple of them, but he gets 10 million downloads. You take every news program, by the way I think if you want to feel 100% better there's a simple solution, don't watch any TV news for a week and you will find the brain fog is lifting. And you're like, "Why the hell was I paying any attention to those people at all?" And by the way, that's for team blue and team red. It's not like when I give this example one of the first is like, "Well, yeah, those communists over at CNN" if they're conservative. Or, "Oh, Fox news is the only truth." It just wants me want to cry.
- Tim: [01:21:16](#) And I get a lot of that going the other way where I'll be trying to make a point and then people will be [inaudible 01:21:20] and I think they're on my page and then I realize they're thinking that this only applies to Fox News.
- Jim: [01:21:27](#) Exactly.
- Tim: [01:21:30](#) And to Trumpism and that's just simply not true. This is absolutely a widespread problem.
- Jim: [01:21:36](#) Absolutely
- Tim: [01:21:37](#) It has a little bit different kind of flavor, a different format, but it's the same thing going on.

Jim: [01:21:41](#) Exactly. I mean, if it were a product, right? And you were looking at the ingredients, you'd say, "I can't really tell that these two are very different, right?"

Tim: [01:21:51](#) Right. Yes.

Jim: [01:21:51](#) People don't do that. They don't look at things that way. So, what worries me, because I have three grandchildren who I deeply love, I want the world that they grow up in to be the one that we're talking about. To be the one where the higher minds emerge. And I like your idea. I hadn't really thought of it this way. It could be just as simple as making something really uncool, right?

Tim: [01:22:21](#) Yeah. Yeah. By talking about it, getting people scared of that bad future and excited about the good future and understanding the patterns. We can just look at history, you can see how echo chambers turn into catastrophe and censor it. This is free speech is the most important value because when free speech goes and that can happen because the first amendment isn't there, or it can happen because the culture is penalizing free speech. Either way, it doesn't matter. Humans are scared of the law, and they're also scared of being unpopular and so if there's a culture that is hindering free speech, that is our best safety. That's our life preserver in the ocean. And when you take that away, we could drown. And so, yeah.

Jim: [01:23:08](#) I hold to that opinion with all of my heart and soul. People are always like, "What team are you on?? I'm not on a team.

Tim: [01:23:22](#) I try to say that my goal is to be on the high rung team, my goal. And it's not that I always am. I'm trying, that's my goal is I'm trying to go up.

Jim: [01:23:31](#) It's an aspiration. That's all.

Tim: [01:23:32](#) Yes.

Jim: [01:23:33](#) And it's the only thing that I am like I tested this belief or model a lot, a lot, a lot and you are absolutely right. The most genius thing the founders ever did was think, "Wait a tick, we might want to add a Bill of Rights. And what do you think the most important thing should be, freedom of speech, right?" And the only thing I'm like dogmatic about, and I am is I'm fiercely anti-authoritarian and I'm fiercely against anyone trying to stop anyone else from saying things that aren't dangerous, right? The

whole fire in the building. But you see what's happening too, right? You see the clever people out there who really do want to curtail free speech, they begin through very clever arguments to make everything sound a bit like, wow, he's crying fire in a crowded theater.

- Tim: [01:24:34](#) Of course, desperate times call for desperate measures. So make everything sound like desperate times and suddenly you can curtail free speech. And it is in peril at the moment.
- Jim: [01:24:46](#) I know. I agree.
- Tim: [01:24:49](#) And I agree that that is the one thing I am a zealot about. And I don't feel actually, I don't apologize for that because I think that the alternative to being a zealot about free speech is once you say, "Well, no free speech, unless it's really bad." Right now you have whoever's in the most cultural power or legal power defining really bad. And they start to define it very quickly as stuff we don't agree with and there it's gone. So it's like the alternative to a hundred percent free speech is basically usually 0% over time. And that's why you have to be a zealot about it.
- Jim: [01:25:24](#) You really do. And the idea of zealotry does not appeal to me, but you got to be about that one thing, because that goes done, we're done. Especially given the level of technology that we right have right now, right? When we start, us versus them, when that takes over, right? We've always been at war with Eurasia, and then they change it to well, no, we've always been at war with East Asia. And they do this to create a paradigm where it's us versus them and that appeals to the primitive mind, right?
- Tim: [01:26:05](#) Of course.
- Jim: [01:26:06](#) And so they do everything they can to inculcate that, and free speech stands with it's shield and sword. And it's like the scene in Game of Thrones, where Jon Snow has got his sword up at all the horses, the 10,000 horses are riding at him, right? But so making it cool, making it the thing that people aspire to, I love that. I think that's such a great [crosstalk 00:08:36].
- Tim: [01:26:35](#) Curtailing free speech, whether it's through cultural pressure, through tech company policies, or of course through government violating the first amendment of any kind should be the new littering on a camping trail. Where we're all so sensitive to it that anyone does it, whether they're on our ideological side or not, it is immediately like, "That's bad form.

What are you doing? Just get out of here with that, right?" Like now, that's not what happens at all. In fact, if you defend it, you'll get screamed at by a bunch of people for a hundred reasons, but yeah.

Jim: [01:27:09](#) Well, yeah. I mean, people often ask me, "So what do you think about the current times?" I'm like we're living through an emotional virus, emotional plague rather, where mind viruses are taking over people. And mind viruses take over the lower functions of the brain, not the higher. And you're either for us or against us. Whenever I see that kind of language or just cringe, because it's very effective, right? If you don't say this, then you are the enemy and burn the witch at the stake, right? They assign you with your role here and your role is to be the villain. Go ahead.

Tim: [01:27:54](#) Yeah. And they wrap a lot of bad ideas or bad things in a very transparent, if you're looking at it, a Trojan horse.

Jim: [01:28:03](#) Oh, absolutely.

Tim: [01:28:04](#) Where whatever it is, I just think about this a lot, on the social justice world does this a ton with, they will wrap for example, anti-racism sounds great. Who doesn't like that, right? Who doesn't want that? What kind of asshole would not be on board?

Jim: [01:28:29](#) Right.

Tim: [01:28:31](#) Once you have that though, there as the term that now no one's going to disagree with, if we have a culture where once something is branded with something like anti-racism, where anyone who criticizes it now can be destroyed. Now the definition of what that entails, anti-racism, the bullet list of what anti-racism entails can suddenly start to grow and can start to be really defined by whoever's in the most cultural power.

Tim: [01:28:59](#) So you can say the same thing when the Iraq war was getting going, and the Bush administration started calling any disagreement with it treasonous, unpatriotic. Well, once you can't challenge that, suddenly the scope of what they want to do can just grow and grow unchecked. And so you see Trojan horses are everywhere. I remember back in the government shutdown, crazy times of 2011 when we were going to default, well, it was actually a bunch of real lunatics at this point on the conservative side who were wrapping what they were doing in

the Trojan horse, that principled fiscal conservatism. Which is not at all what it was anymore but now if you go against it, you're breaking the pledge. You're a liberal. And you see that you just look at any kind of hard-line ideology and they're always using Trojan horses.

Jim: [01:29:49](#) Always. And it becomes easy to deconstruct them when you model them that way. And again, I have a latticework and I'm stealing that term from Charlie Munger, I have a latticework of mental models and that frees you to say, "Huh, how's that happening?" And when you look at it that way, you're absolutely right. I love your Trojan horse analogy and metaphor, because guess what? We can build some Trojan horses too, and we should.

Jim: [01:30:23](#) And those Trojan horses should be in, "Hey, it is totally uncool for you to ascribe to me any of these, you're not dictating to me, right?" And what you're seeing, again I'm 60 years old, right? So I was born in 1960, and America has changed more in the 60 years that I have been alive than I think any other country in the history of the world. And mostly for the good, right? So in 1971, a woman could not get a credit card without her husband approving it. How crazy is that? I have two daughters and two granddaughters and a wonderful daughter-in-law, and I'm the youngest and all of my older siblings were sisters, so you're looking at a guy who was like beaten up in terms of [crosstalk 01:31:19] woman. But the point is we have changed more for the good. Gay rights is another thing. When Obama ran for election in 2008, he was anti gay marriage.

Tim: [01:31:29](#) Right. Oh, of course.

Jim: [01:31:30](#) Because he had to be, right? But my point is that we have changed tremendously. I agree with you 100% that we are at a crossroads here. And no, it's not going to happen in 2021 necessarily. But as you watch it creep along in its petty pace, it's not good. And it gets to a point where we got to talk about it a lot more. We got to figure out ways to make it cool. We got to figure out ways where people are I want to be that. That's what I want to be, right? Aspirational, I think. And if you can make things aspirational, you're still in the game at least.

Tim: [01:32:19](#) I see it as a two-part prescription here. First part is awareness. So this is what you're talking about. To have something be uncool, to reconfigure what's cool and uncool, you need first awareness, which comes from conversations. It comes from self-reflection. So first, your self-awareness, just what's going on in my head. How am I being a zealot? Look at my communities,

where am I actually in an echo chamber? What topics are actually sacred, now that I think about it in this group or in this classroom, or wherever? Where are the echo chambers that I'm actually being oppressed by intellectually without realizing it? And finally, on the biggest society level, what's going on with these big movements and these campaigns and whatever else it is politically or culturally? What are the trends here? Where's the primitive mind hiding? What are the Trojan horses? Okay, that's part one.

- Tim: [01:33:14](#) But that does nothing, a bunch of people who realize what's going on, which I think already a lot of people do and being too scared to say anything doesn't do anything. And I think that we have a lot of awareness, more than we realize. We are lacking the second ingredient, courage.
- Jim: [01:33:31](#) Exactly.
- Tim: [01:33:31](#) And it is real courage because the definition, to me of courage, is doing the thing that actually could hurt you. So doing something that people like to call, someone makes a brave political statement and everyone says, "It's so courageous." And I'm thinking it actually was incredibly popular thing to say. Actually, no one with power was mad at you for that. That's not courage at all, right? Courage is when the people who are the cool kids culturally or the people who are in power, when they hate what you're saying and you actually might get penalized for it, and you're going to be hurt by it. That is courage.
- Tim: [01:34:11](#) And the thing about it is the more people that speak up, the less courage it takes. Because when it's one person speaking up, they can be destroyed for it. When it's a million people speaking up, the movement flips and now it becomes easy. And you don't need courage to say it. So this is what we need is we need people to start saying what they think. And doing that little trick with the stranger in the bar and realizing a lot of the time, some jobs, some people will get fired for it, okay? But most of us, in the end, the sky's not going to fall. And to remember that, and to say your primitive mind is way more scared of this than it should be. That awareness can help you be courageous, which then begets more awareness because people are talking about it, which then begets more courage. So it can be an upward spiral if we can just start.
- Jim: [01:34:55](#) And but you also have to... One of the reasons I became so interested in mimetic behavior was because man, it really works. And your point about the first guy who makes it, or woman, they're the ones taking the risk. I used the metaphor

who threw the first stone, right? Sinner, stone him or her, unfortunately almost always a her, to death. And there's the crowd. And they're all looking around. Monty Python does this brilliantly as a joke. But in reality, you want to look at the person who throws the first and second stone, because man, that was brave because it wasn't right. It was very wrong, but it's a good metaphor because if you can understand what's motivating those two, because then every it's like everyone just flips. It's like beads falling off a necklace.

- Tim: [01:35:55](#) Well then all the sheep will follow. All the profiteers will jump in. So a lot of times there's self-aware people who are low integrity. And they follow wherever the profit and profit can be in financial or status is profit. It can be community and belonging. So what happens is once someone starts being brave, either in a negative or positive way, then it's the challenge to the culture. If you stand up to the culture, it's actually a moment when it's like in a courtroom saying, "Objection" and the judge has to rule it. Culture has to rule. If the culture destroys that person, that's the culture ruling one way in which now creates a lot more, makes it much harder to be brave, raises the bar and you get a lot more people being quiet and all of the profiteers, they want to stick on the side of the culture.
- Tim: [01:36:45](#) But if the person stands for the culture and then nothing actually bad happens to them. That's this important moment when it's like, "Oh, maybe this is how we do things here. Maybe we do things that way instead." And you see all these other people starting to stand. And then all the profiteers, all in like a big wave starts to shift because they realize its weight. I think it's cooler to be like this. And now you have this huge amount of, this tipping point has been hit. So you can see how it happens very quickly. And it just has to hit these right tipping points. It starts with these very few brave people.
- Jim: [01:37:13](#) Totally agree. And listen Tim, I could do this all day long. I could have you as my only guest and we could [crosstalk 01:37:23].
- Tim: [01:37:19](#) There's a lot to talk about.
- Jim: [01:37:24](#) But we're long already. We always end these with asking, Patrick has what's the kindest thing you did? And Patrick's got the big podcast. I get the experimental one. And anyway so we can't ask that, but we came up with, we're going to make you emperor for a day. You can't kill anyone. You can't do anything horrible, but you can promulgate two ideas or rules or whatever that is going to work the magic on the land and everyone's

going to go, "Oh yeah, I'm going to do it that way." So what do you got for me? You get to promulgate two things that you think are going to make humanity emerge.

Tim: [01:38:09](#) Well, the first would be that echo chambers are like intellectual oppression chambers, and that they're lame. And that they're silly and primitive and they're not what interesting smart people should want to be part of. And so that ideal ads are super cool, right? And so that's the first thing. Ideal ads in this culture of treating ideas like experiments is what awesome thinkers do. Get that into everyone's head and have it be the lamest thing in the world to try to pressure people to not descend from the sacred views or whatever.

Jim: [01:38:43](#) Yeah.

Tim: [01:38:44](#) That one. And then I think I would do a moral version of that. That's the intellectual version. To me, the moral version is there's also, we didn't get into it, but the same ladder has a whole, you can call it moral, but we talked about how the ladder deals with ideas. There's also a ladder that deals with people. And to me, the high rung culture doesn't dehumanize anybody. And realizes that everyone, us and them and me and you and all of us, we are all 0.5, not ones or zeros. We're all flawed, but worthy of compassion. If we're acting like shit, if we're being asses, it's for some reason. But we should also be accountable. No one's above criticism. That's how the high rung thing, but on the low rungs, it's the opposite. It's an I or we are perfect. We are right. We're morally perfect. And they or them, they're the problem. They're everything bad. They're zeroes and we're ones. And I would like to say the second thing is that people are not ones or zeros. Everyone is a 0.5 or 0.6 or 0.4. And so that's the second thing. And if you get those two things, I think very quickly-

Tim: [01:39:55](#) Yeah, I don't know what direction they should go, but they would start going in a direction that is better.

Jim: [01:39:58](#) That's what's so cool about that. You don't know, right? And that's the other thing that I always try to get people to understand. If you get a certain set of conditions, you can't say, "Oh, guess what? This is going to lead to utopia." You don't know because complex adaptive systems don't work that way, right? And so the direction of that arrow is a lot better than the one going this way.

Tim: [01:40:27](#) Yeah. Like if we're in a boat, on a river headed towards that fork I'm talking about, towards a really good future or really bad

future. I don't know exactly what those look like or how to get there. But what I do know is that we can get better at rowing in the right direction. A lot of people, good people right now, are putting their energy into rowing in the wrong direction without realizing it. They're rowing us in the wrong direction with their energy [inaudible 00:22:48], because they've been convinced that being a crusader in this movement is rowing in the right direction. So, yeah. It's yeah.

- Jim: [01:40:56](#) Totally. Okay. Well, I think we've solved all of the world's problems, now all we've got to do is implement them.
- Tim: [01:41:05](#) That's someone else's problem.
- Jim: [01:41:06](#) Yeah, exactly.
- Tim: [01:41:09](#) Yeah.
- Jim: [01:41:10](#) Tim, I've really super enjoyed this. I hope at some point you'll come back on because honestly looking at my notes, we covered maybe a quarter of what I wanted to ask you about. So I'd love to have you back on, but this has been amazingly fun. Thank you for all your time.
- Tim: [01:41:25](#) Yes. Thanks for having me on.
- Jim: [01:41:27](#) All right. Cheers, Tim.
- Tim: [01:41:28](#) Bye.
- Jim: [01:41:29](#) Bye.