

## **The Garrison Institute Presents: The Common Good Podcast Transcript Jeremy Lent: Ecological Civilization and the End of Extractive Capitalism (Episode 15)**

[Please note: Although the transcript is largely accurate, in some cases it may be incomplete or inaccurate due to inaudible passages or transcription software errors.]

[00:00:00] **Jeremy Lent:** An ecological civilization is built on fundamentally different principles. The way to understand it is simply, it's designed to set the conditions for all beings to thrive on a regenerated earth. And if you just pause for a moment and think about that phrase, probably if you suggest to almost anyone in the world really.

[00:00:26] What would you think about that as a way of organizing our society to set the conditions for all beings to thrive on a regenerated earth? Pretty much almost everyone would say, well, of course we should organize our lives like that. And that's what's so critical to understand about this vision, is it's actually relates to the basic common sense of our evolved humanity of what we want.

[00:00:58] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Welcome to the Garrison Institute presents the Common Good. I'm your host, Jonathan FP Rose. In this series, we explore how Interep transformation, science, and collective wisdom can help us navigate our civilizations crisis and nurture more compassionate and life-affirming future. Today I am joined by Jeremy Lent.

[00:01:18] Who's an author and systems thinker whose work investigates the deep patterns of meaning that have brought our civilization to a brink and the pathways that could lead us towards an ecological civilization. He was described by the guardian journalist George Monbiot as one of the greatest thinkers of our age.

[00:01:35] He's an author and speaker whose work investigates the underlying causes of our civilization's existential crisis, and explores pathways towards a life affirming future. His award-winning book, the Patterning Instinct, a Cultural History of Humanity's Search for Meaning, which is a great book by the way, examines the Way humans have made meaning from the cosmos to the hunter gatherers times to the present day.

[00:01:59] His more recent award-winning book, the Web of Meaning, integrating Science and Traditional Wisdom to Find Our place in the Universe offers a solid foundation for an integrative worldview that could lead humanity to a sustainable, flourishing future. And taking that forward. He most recently has written Eco Civilization Making a World That Works For All, which will be published by Melville House in May.

[00:02:23] That's gonna be the main subject of our conversation, and the book lays out a fundamentally different world system and eco civilization that is based on the life affirming principles rather than principles of extraction, exploitation, and wealth accumulation.

[00:03:00] So Jeremy, welcome and we look forward. By the time this is over, our audience is gonna completely understand how to transform the world.

[00:03:09] **Jeremy Lent:** Well, thank you. That's, uh, that's something exciting to look forward to together. I, hopefully, we'll all we can come away with this, with a sense, sense of the kind of direction we might be able to take together to make that happen.

[00:03:21] Thank you, Jonathan.

[00:03:22] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Your book, which is a really deep exploration of the many, many different factors, governance, economy, law, the common good, the many different layers that are, I don't even call them layers 'cause that implies separateness, but the waves that together will make the ocean of the common good.

[00:03:40] So we're gonna dive into that, but first, let's dive into you. So Jeremy, how did you become Jeremy? What? How did you start out and how'd you get into all this?

[00:03:51] **Jeremy Lent:** Well, I mean. It was interesting that your podcast looks at that sort of Interep transformation that leads to that sort of external transformation that we need in the world.

[00:03:59] In a way, my life kind of patterned itself on that in the sense that the first part of my life was actually spent in the business world, in the very world that I am critiquing quite extensively. In this book, I did an M-B-A-I-I am. Started an internet company, took it public during that first dotcom craze back in the nineties, and then things kind of crashed for me.

[00:04:23] My wife at the time, who passed away some years back, got very sick and I left the company to look after her, left the company too quickly. So we went from the one of the dotcom booms to one of the dotcom crashes. Basically, they'll combust. But I went through a real crucible of just deep investigation into what's meaningful in life, and I spent years actually looking after my first wife until she passed, but I was very much alone in this place.

[00:04:51] In fact, she even went through a period of borderline dementia. So I was kind of totally alone in this world in a way, and really started to ask myself deeper questions I'd never asked before. Discovered things like whatever, Buddhism and Taoism, and did a lot of intellectual questioning. Where did these ideas that I just grew up with believing and where did they come from?

[00:05:13] So that led to those books that you mentioned earlier. At a certain point I was going, God, I really, it would be so great if somebody. Could write a book that mapped out all these years of this investigation I was trained to do. And so I wrote the book myself. That was the patterning instinct, looking at the different ways in which cultures make meaning outta the universe and how that led to our present day and this really crazed world we live in right now.

[00:05:37] But then that second book was almost like a sequel to that 'cause it was around. Having done that investigation, I'd formed my own path of finding my, my own sense of

meaning, which was one, it was about true integration, integrating both a sense of my intellectual understanding, like I wanted to make sure whatever I believed in was something I could really buy into.

[00:06:00] So things like neuroscience and cognitive science and evolutionary biology is part of it, but also how that integrates with. Buddhism and Taoism and indigenous wisdom really coming from a place of deep interconnectedness. And that was what the Web of Meaning is about. And that led to this vision of what would it look like if the world was actually organized according to that sense that that worldview of really recognizing that deep interconnectedness of all things and all of us.

[00:06:28] And that's where where I came across this vision of an ecological civilization, which. Expanded by others. I got so inspired by it that that led really five years of research and writing that led to this book today.

[00:06:44] **Jonathan FP Rose:** And where did you come across the idea? So let's talk about two things, how you encountered the idea of ecological civilization.

[00:06:51] But it's been around for, uh, some time and there's been an interesting American branch to it and an interesting Chinese branch to it. So let's do those three things, how you came across it, the American tradition and the Chinese tradition.

[00:07:05] **Jeremy Lent:** Well, I can thank David Corten for first turning me onto this idea who, somebody that I'm sure many listeners already know about.

[00:07:15] He's somebody who's been writing for decades on similar themes about a critique of corporations and capitalism and how we can turn to like the Great Turning, in fact is the name of one of his books. So I reached out to him because. I referred to some of his work in the patterning instinct, which he really got enthused by, and he introduced me to this institute for Ecological civilization that had been founded by John Cobb Jr.

[00:07:41] Another great ecological thinker years earlier. And for me, when I came across this concept, a light bulb went off in my mind, and what it was was this recognition. That the, the word civilization, to me, what it meant to me in this context was this recognition that it's not just one thing needs to change.

[00:08:00] It is not just a matter of changing our outlook or changing our economics, or changing how we grow food or whatever. There's all the different aspects of what we call civilization has to be transformed. That's a big and big scope, right? And then that word ecological was equally inspiring because it gave a sense of what we mean by that transformation.

[00:08:21] It's not just transforming it into, oh, we've got some good ideas. Let's try it this way or that way. But it's looking to life itself and the principles of how ecosystems evolved to be healthy over millions of years, and how the human niche then evolved within that, those ecosystems for flourishing and looking at those deeper principles and saying, how can we organize our entire world around that?

[00:08:45] That's what got me so inspired.

[00:08:49] **Jonathan FP Rose:** That's fantastic. And now by the way, that's been a theme in this podcast series. So we've had Janine Bennis and we've had Suzanne Ard. Mm-hmm. And, uh, John Fullerton. So I think we're building a web of people who are, have the same, uh, instinct. So now talk about the Chinese lineage to this and maybe give our audience a little bit of understanding of Daoism and Lee.

[00:09:12] **Jeremy Lent:** Oh sure. Well, yeah, the Chinese lineage of this term ecological civilization is actually fascinating. And as of course, people following all your podcast series knows there's been this great series on the Chinese perspectives on ecological civilization that's been recently airing. And Mary Evelyn Tucker is somebody else I've had the pleasure to interact with deeply over the last few years on these topics, who's really, really.

[00:09:38] Um, got deep connections with the Chinese version of this vision of ecological civilization and, you know, she is one of the greatest experts and to how it goes back to these core Chinese principles. And so deism, as many people will know, is really this deep-rooted Chinese way of making sense of the world that I discussed at some length in my earlier books too, which is really recognizing that we are not separate from the world.

[00:10:08] Fundamentally different from the sort of western dualistic way of looking at humans here and nature, quote unquote there. But the Dao sees everything as being this way, this unfolding path that we are part of, and rather than try to control it, a true sage, a wise person recognizing this, tries to go with the flow of it.

[00:10:31] Now. Now that doesn't mean you just give up and just follow wherever the ways take you. 'cause you can influence how you are with the flow, but not try to fight the flow. But actually going with that in that way, in that skillful way, and this concept, Lee, that I got very excited about. And wrote about again in some detail in these earlier books is a great word that came from a group of neo Confucian thinkers from about a thousand years ago, who actually, what's fascinating about them is at that point in China, there were three.

[00:11:03] Great traditions that were kind of, uh, really in, somewhat in conflict with each other, but all equally sort of powerful. There was Daoism, which is more like a, a tradition coming almost from the peasants and traditional Chinese villages or whatever. There was Confucianism, which was very much the sort of state way of looking at life from a.

[00:11:27] Whereas Daoism was more about the individual giving their individuality up to be with a flow. Confucianism is very much about being in society and doing what is the morally right thing to do. And then there was Buddhism, which had become so it. Part of China. The many people in China just assumed it must have been actually autonomous to China because it just seemed to fit so much with their ideas there.

[00:11:51] And the neo confucians, they actually ended up integrating each of these three traditions into one. That was kind of a comprehensive way of understanding the universe and

what was fundamental to them with this concept of lead, which has to do with. If we, most of us know what she is, right? It's like energy or matter.

[00:12:11] But Lee was equally important to them. Lee was the way in which energy or matter in the universe actually manifested. So it was like the connecting principles. So some of that energy or matter might connect into like forming Earth or rock. Some might connect into forming wind or fire. Some might connect into forming an animal or a human being.

[00:12:32] And that's the lead that determines those organizing principles. And what's amazing about that concept is that when you look at complexity science and systems biology and many of these modern sciences, the things they focus on are exactly those principles of organization that connects things that oftentimes more meaningful than the things themselves.

[00:12:53] So this was to me, a great realization that actually. The, the Lee is a way of, it's almost like a Rosetta Stone between these traditional wisdom, insights, and modern science. And through that, Lee, we recognize that modern science doesn't actually look at a separate reality than those traditions, but it's actually all about those interconnecting principles.

[00:13:15] So to answer your question then, this is where the, when there's a Chinese vision of ecological civilization. This is really a natural outcropping of these thousands of years of Chinese tradition looking at the connecting principles, looking at the flow, and recognizing that humans are part of an unfolding nature and not trying to conquer nature in, if you will, which is the the sort of typical western dualistic way for the last few hundred years since the scientific revolution.

[00:13:47] And so you might go, well, this is great for the ecological civilization, for China's. Got it. They know what they're doing, and in some ways, there's some truth in the sense that, you know, we see, like Xi Jinping, the Chinese leader, talks about the need for an ecological civilization, which. It's wonderful.

[00:14:07] And if you compare that to our leaders who like basically say climate change is our hoax and we'll, we are gonna just dig for more fossil fuels and all that stuff. Well that seems like an incredibly beneficial relative approach. Part of the challenges though. Is that what we see? You know, China, of course, is trying to make its place prominent in a very dangerous, unraveling militaristic, capitalistic world, and they've made the decisions over decades.

[00:14:36] And it's not for me or any of us, I think, to second guess their decisions in this respect. But they wanted to make sure that they gain enough strength to be able to hold their own against these forces that are working against them. So they've of course, as we all know, doubled down on capitalism. Doubled down on a lot of the same extraction and exploitation that we see elsewhere.

[00:14:57] And because of that, you could accuse them. When they talk about ecological civilization, sometimes they're doing the same sort of greenwashing that we often accuse corporations of doing when they say, oh yeah, we want a green future, when actually it's

ExxonMobil or. Shell corporation or whatever, who's actually saying that, and you know, they're saying that because they know it's popular, but are they really doing it?

[00:15:19] So my point is there's, we have to be really aware of some of these questions. And this is not to say something's right or wrong, but to be in that kind of complexity is I think part of what we have to explore and we're thinking about. But what is a true, a true ecological civilization going forward?

[00:15:40] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Right, but what's interesting is that at least the Chinese have the potential, the, the cultural propensity towards this worldview, this fully integrative worldview. Uh, I wanna begin with that because what we're seeing in the West, by the way, I'm seeing a rapid rise in interest. You know, if, if we had talked about indigenous wisdom and seeing the whole instead of the part, and being part of the wave, instead of the particle, even.

[00:16:09] 10 years ago, or certainly 20 years ago, there would've been a much smaller audience that would've understood this. And we're feeling a wave actually, of understanding. And, um, in some ways, to me, that's why your book is so timely, because we're not quite at the point where we're implementing new solutions, but we're beginning the more and more people are looking for them.

[00:16:30] And so first I want to talk about this just briefly 'cause I think our audience mostly understands it, but let's just talk about the global paradigm of extraction and exploitation and also that it's based in promoting the self versus promoting the common good. And that's the first chunk of your book, actually beautifully tells this story.

[00:16:54] **Jeremy Lent:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Thank Thanks Jonathan. And, um, yeah, I think a key takeaway from that first part of this book, which really looks at, you know, why, why do we need to transform our entire civilization? Why can't we just make things a bit better? And maybe we can sort of turn around and what it does show is that something really world changing happened.

[00:17:15] In really late medieval or early modern Europe in the sort of roughly latter, the sort of 17th century or so, and what you see coming from that time is a lot of different things. One is this dominant worldview that we have right now, this worldview of sort of scientific materialism of the worldview that from people like Descartes and Galileo and Francis Bacon.

[00:17:38] This notion of seeing the world as a machine and we can conquer the world. And by seeing the world of the machine and humans is fundamentally separate. It leads to this. It's very easy to really see all non-human as being just therefore extraction and exploits users, resources, however you want. And that's fundamental to this dominant worldview, but right at the same time.

[00:18:00] Is we see obviously the rise of colonialism and in a way, the Europeans, those white Christian Europeans at that time saw not just the rest of non-human life as material for exploitation, but all other human beings, which led to this the first time in all of history. This notion of like white supremacy, this notion that just because your skin is white.

[00:18:24] You came from Europe, you were somehow naturally superior to the vast majority of other human beings. And along with that, interestingly, this was the same time that the Limited liability corporation first began. And that's no coincidence because those colonial powers, they wanted to take their financial resources and invest them in basically that extraction and exploitation.

[00:18:51] And they did that by creating. These legal instruments that essentially allowed what's called moral hazard were allowed you to cause all the destruction you wanted and the profits accrued to the shareholders, but the liabilities didn't. So it was kind of this, this link breaking the link between the upside and the downside.

[00:19:11] And that's is really the foundations of modern global capitalism. So in fact, there's a chapter in this book called The History. They didn't teach you at school, and it kind of draws the different points from the enclosure movement in England all the way to the rise of capitalism, the rise of colonialism, and then the rise in more recent times of like financialization and globalization, and really ends up in this place where we realized that say, of the hundred largest economies in the world today.

[00:19:42] Roughly 70 of them are not actual nation states, but corporations that really dominate virtually any significant policy decision made in the world today. And that is a crucial thing to understand because as long as that's the case, we are not going to be able to actually transform where we go. We can try to make things a bit better within that system.

[00:20:04] But until we realize that's the system that kind of devours everything for its own consumption, we have to recognize that and start looking at how that can be changed from within and from without.

[00:20:16] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So let's just talk a bit about the devouring and the, uh, indigenous American word of win dingo or with teko.

[00:20:22] Yeah.

[00:20:23] **Jeremy Lent:** Mm-hmm. So that's with something that I feel is a critical thing to understand back in the first days of colonialism. There were tribes in the Central Lake area in North America who had this myth of what they call the Wendigo or Wetico monster. And this monster would terrify the kids where they talk about the monster around the campfire.

[00:20:48] And basically it was it, it was a monster with an heart of ice that was ever, ever hungry, had to consume. But this was the thing about this monster, the more it consumed, the hungrier it got. And the worst thing about this, we go monster. The reason the kids were terrified is that if it found a human being, it would bite you to try to consume you.

[00:21:11] And as soon as you got bitten by it, you got turned into a win to go monster yourself. So terrifying myth. But then the Europeans came and the Ojibwe and the other people who, uh, had this story looked at the Europeans and they said they are wendigo. Because this is basically the whole notion of what global capitalism is about.

[00:21:32] The, the more you consume, the more you extract, the more you need to. This is never ending what's also known as the hedonic treadmill. So in the book, I coined this term. Wendigo Incorporated, which is almost like this weticos sort of virus, if you will, became this pandemic that spread around the world and has been metamorphos into the corporation, and that is the world we live under right now.

[00:21:57] Is this never ending? And desire of when Togo ink to suck anything up and use it. And that's why, you know, anytime we develop, you know, great technological enhancements, whether it's the internet from a, a few decades ago, or AI now, whatever it might be, people say, well, this could be used for so much good.

[00:22:17] Look at renewable energy. Wonderful. Like. Take the, uh, place of fossil fuels. The problem is that anything that is developed within the world of this wingo ink pandemic will inevitably get sucked in and used for further exploitation and extraction by that same system. And that's why it's so crucial to understand.

[00:22:39] That's not to say don't try to do things better and come up with greater developments, but fundamentally the question becomes different then how can we organize things? How can we set things up so they become somewhat immune or like, or less vulnerable to that wendigo pandemic.

[00:22:59] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So I'm gonna start leading you through some of the solutions, but before we do, one more thing I want you to put on the table was explain the three horizons.

[00:23:10] **Jeremy Lent:** Yeah, sure. Well that's, that's actually so, um, kind of significant the way this whole eco civilization book unfolds. You can think of, you know, really in a way that the reason the three Horizons is important is something that probably somebody listening to this conversation already might be coming into their minds is well.

[00:23:32] A lot of these ideas and this different civilization sounds wonderful, or maybe almost a little bit utopian, but it's so far from where we are today. How is it even. Relevant. You know, like right now we're fighting ice in the United States or trying to stop militarization, like destroying anything that's left of the world order.

[00:23:51] Like, isn't that what we need to focus on? What's all this stuff? So the Three Horizons model helps us to understand how all the different ways in which we're relating to the world relates to other ways in a way that each one, it stays valid, but relates to something bigger. And the way to understand the Three Horizons model is really just kind of imagine it.

[00:24:12] It's a model by the way that was developed actually by business consultants, but then transformed for planning purposes and is used a lot when people are coming up with trying to think long term about where they're headed. And imagine like, say you're traveling. And a wilderness kind of thing that you, you have no map.

[00:24:30] You don't know exactly where you are in that wilderness, but you kind of, you know, roughly where you're trying to get to. You're not absolutely sure, and the first horizon relates to

what is right in front of you. And you need to kind of be looking at your next step on the next few steps ahead. You wanna make sure you don't trip over or end up getting stuck in a bog or anything like that.

[00:24:52] So that's the first horizon. The second horizon relates to what is visible as you're looking out there. So it might be those sort of mountains you see in the distance and it might look attractive, but it's not quite where you want to get to, but it's a pathway towards something. And the second horizon, when we think about this in terms of our world, if the first horizon is more about things like just keeping the lights on and trying to like make things that little bit better, second horizon might relate to something that is truly disruptive.

[00:25:23] But still exists within the same paradigm of this wingo ink that we've just been describing. So an idea, an example of a second horizon that is kind of looks like it's attractive but then doesn't actually get us to anywhere beyond that is something like, for example, Tesla. Great example. Renewable vehicles transformed their auto industry in many ways, but still done within the same global capitalism system of selling more cars.

[00:25:51] You know, one owner becoming, trying to become the next, the first ever trillionaire and tons of extraction happening to make this happen now, third horizon relates to what we don't actually see in front of us, but is out there further beyond, beyond those mountains that we can see there. And the third horizon relates to this ideas of things like an ecological civilization.

[00:26:16] A truly transformed potential for where our society could end up. And the reason why this Three Horizons model is so valuable is because when we're making these steps, one at a time, we are not, we are still a long way from that third horizon. But what's so important is that we need to avoid getting attracted to second horizon pathways that might actually look attractive, but lead us away from that third horizon.

[00:26:43] And so it's very important for us to know roughly where that third horizon lies. So as we're taking these steps going forward and we are looking at where, where is first horizon leading towards a more beneficial second horizon, that might just have a pathway that actually goes through those. Mountain passes toward that third horizon.

[00:27:04] So the three Horizons thinking helps us to establish a direction of where ultimately we may wanna go. Maybe it's not even within our own lifetimes that we'll get to that third horizon, but the thing is, we can be moving there and you know, just to add one, one layer to that, the beautiful thing around that is we realized we can actually begin to create some of those third horizon ways of living and being even right now in these first steps we're taking.

[00:27:31] So it's not like we have to give up on the third horizon for some the future generation, but we can actually be living into that kind of vision of what's available out there in the distant future.

[00:28:03] **Jonathan FP Rose:** All right, so take us into the third horizon. Let's dive into an ecological civilization. So describe it. What are, how would it work? What, what did it feel like?

[00:28:14] **Jeremy Lent:** Yeah, well, well, I guess a simple way to think about what. That ecological civilization actually means is to really contrast it for a moment with what we were just talking about in terms of how our dominant civilization is actually built on layers of extraction, exploitation, right?

[00:28:33] And wealth accumulation and an ecological civilization is built on fundamentally. Different principles. The way to understand it is simply it's designed to set the conditions for all beings to thrive on a regenerated earth. And if you just pause for a moment and think about that phrase, probably if you suggest to almost anyone in the world, really, what would you think about that?

[00:29:02] As a way of organizing our society to set the conditions for all beings to thrive on a regenerated earth. Pretty much almost everyone would say, well, of course we should organize our lives like that. And that's what's so critical to understand about this vision is it's actually. Relates to the basic common sense of our evolved humanity of what we want.

[00:29:24] And there are certain then sort of next level principles that come around with that. And then I'll, I'll talk specifics in a moment. By the way, these principles are really crucial to understand. It means like instead of that human supremacy, we were talking about the values of valuing the intrinsic value of all life.

[00:29:43] And instead of everything based on the capitalism and the dominion of capital, it values the primacy of the dignity of all people. And then in rather than the commoditization and homogenization that we see in the world today, it values diversity and heterogeneity. And sometimes people who are really focused on these issues say, why don't we even like the term eco civilization?

[00:30:07] Because it's too singular. Because there's so many different ways in which cultures can be. Absolutely valid, crucial point. But the thing to understand about this vision is that that's the very basis of the vision, is the diversity, the heterogeneity, that all these different cultures and individuals can pursue their own path to flourishing.

[00:30:26] Another core difference is like we have hierarchical structures, whether it's electoral democracies that vote for presidents or dictators, or even corporations, CEOs, everything in our life is basically structured around hierarchies in an eco civilization. We're structuring around subsidiarity, pushing power down to the lowest feasible level in the system.

[00:30:49] And along with that things is moving from the structural inequality we have today to a sense of equity, giving everyone a fair chance to flourish in the world, which means looking at the injustice, the historical injustice we've had over hundreds of years, and really moving to transform that, that has to be transformed before we can even think there.

[00:31:10] And finally, rather than incentives for selfish behavior like capitalism, you know, the more selfish and greedy you are, the more successful you tend to be. There's ways to organize our societies around cooperation, so people actually get rewarded for what has evolved in us to be pro-social and work together in communities.

[00:31:28] So those are fundamental because we can look at different aspects of an eco civilization in different industries or different parts of what our whole system is, but in all cases, those are the kinds of things that underlie what we're talking about.

[00:31:44] **Jonathan FP Rose:** And what a wonderful world those would be. It's so interesting to me that.

[00:31:50] People saved with pride that they're capitalists today. And capitalism is the ism of capitalists. Like it means that we're, when you say capitalism is prime, then you're saying you're subservient to it. And all of life is subservient to it and joy is subservient to it. And, and the things that many people value.

[00:32:08] So this is a side note, but capitalism can serve all of life, but for all of life to serve capitalism is just backwards.

[00:32:16] **Jeremy Lent:** That's right.

[00:32:18] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Okay. So we had these wonderful,

[00:32:20] **Jeremy Lent:** well, in fact, yeah, sorry to interrupt you there, but. Really, I guess my perception when I think of what capitalism actually means, it's almost like the economic system of extraction and exploitation.

[00:32:33] So I'm not even sure. I would agree honestly that capitalism, conserve all of life really capitalism, there's this, um. Writer called G Brilliant Novelist, uh, who's written a lot about these topics. And he f he coined a term, omnia side. Basically like, you know, we, we come across the term eco side, like how corporations destroy EC colleges.

[00:32:55] His point is that that Wingo ink monster will not stop until everything is destroyed. So it's not just that it will or will not serve life, it is actually designed explicitly to suck the life out of everything and ultimately destroy life.

[00:33:11] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Right. What I meant was that money and capital itself, if put in the right place within a much larger system.

[00:33:20] Yeah. And have a role. You also write a chapter about financialization. So we don't wanna financialize everything. And in fact, one of the key things that we see in your work and others is this idea of a care economy in which relationality is what enriches us. So, so all I'm saying is there, there can be a role for money and capital, but not the dominant role.

[00:33:46] And in fact. We already have an enormously caring society in which people take care of their children and their parents, and many, many relations You described, you open this by describing, taking care of your wife, and yet we have a society that doesn't value that. So part of it is just designing a society that values care.

[00:34:05] Hmm. Yeah,

[00:34:07] **Jeremy Lent:** exactly, Jonathan. Exactly. And actually I think one of the people who's done a wonderful job. Of exploring what that means is what she calls herself, a renegade economist, Kate Raworth, who wrote this wonderful book called Donut Economics that I feature in this book. And part of her, it's almost like a reconsideration of what economics is about.

[00:34:30] And part of what she does is this very point of saying. There's a role for capital and for markets in a world that actually stays within its limits, and that gives basic levels of care to all people. But it's not, it's just one aspect within something greater, which is exactly, to your point, Jonathan, the care.

[00:34:50] Economy and also the commons and of commons is a hugely important concept. This notion of how we organize ourselves in groups, but not for one person to like get hierarchy over the others and get power and extract, but actually to work together within our common good essentially. And. Basically make life happen on that basis.

[00:35:15] And there's also a role for the state in her model. It's not like it has to be the state versus markets like, uh, we've seen in the last century or so, but there's a way in which you can have certain organizations, however they might evolve, whether they're nation states like they are now something largest thing.

[00:35:32] But there, there is some level for centralized allocation of resources at the same time along with. Those commons based and care-based structures too.

[00:35:42] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So, um, you know, this podcast series is called The Common Good. We're very into the Cummins. And so, um, I'd love to hear thoughts about, so how do you bring a more common focused society and civilization into being?

[00:35:56] What are some of the things you have to do?

[00:35:58] **Jeremy Lent:** Yeah, well, probably the first thing we really need to do is to actually remember. Who we actually are as human beings. How we evolved, because the, the beauty of this vision of the Commons is that it's not about how, you know, sometimes people look at basically how things look so screwed up in the world today and say, yeah, humans need to evolve to a next level of consciousness, which is a beautiful idea.

[00:36:26] And I'd love to see that happen. But you know, maybe that won't happen anytime soon. Like, um, but the wonderful thing about the idea of the commons is what we really need to do is connect back with who we actually are as human being. And if you look at basically the prehistory of humans, we spent 95% of our human history as nomadic hunter gatherers.

[00:36:52] And we organized ourselves basically, according to principles of the Commons, where there wasn't one big leader who everyone followed. But quite the opposite decisions got made in groups. We listened to each other, we respected each other. People were free to do what they wanted to do as part of contributing to society, and that was just taken as a given.

[00:37:13] And the Commons is really almost like the evolved way. In which people have continued to organize like that over the thousands of years, even during these years of empire and capitalism and stuff. There are many groups around the world that stayed organizing according to the Commons, and there was a wonderful analyst called Eleanor Ostrom who won the Nobel Prize for Economics.

[00:37:38] She was the first woman to do so. Who basically studied these traditional commons groups all around the world, and she identified certain principles of the commons that caused these groups to stay very successful for generations upon generations, not exploiting the resources around them staying stable and working together.

[00:38:00] One example of these principles is, for example, the notion of. Uh, what's called ratcheting sanctions. So if somebody breaks one of the rules of the commons, you don't immediately like put them in jail or something, right? You basically, you just give them some level of sanction that's appropriate to what they did wrong.

[00:38:19] Maybe it's like, Hey, you, you kind of shouldn't have done that. And most people, because they care about their belonging in the community. Stay within those realms. And so if people continue to do something wrong, the level of sanction goes up. That's one example of many principles and the brilliant evolutionary biologist, David Sloan Wilson, who's one of the, really the leading thinkers of evolution in the world today.

[00:38:45] Took these ideas of Ena Ostrom worked with her to turn these ideas into the actual principles for pro-social behavior. So the thing to understand about the Commons is we're not trying to do something that is against our human nature. It's actually a return to how we evolve as human beings, which means that we can really flourish in a way that capitalism and these other systems don't let us do that.

[00:39:10] So an example of what the Commons is right now. It's not something that just has to be happening in traditional places. Think of something like Wikipedia, which is an example of one of the greatest intellectual breakthroughs in decades. Like this notion of, uh, collective human knowledge. It's available for all free.

[00:39:30] That whole brilliant sort of institution is one that, that is based on the commons where people basically work with each other. There's no. Great leader making the decisions. People manage, they police each other, they work with each other. They, they build on each other, and that's an example of what the Commons can do.

[00:39:47] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Hmm. I want to give another example of the commons in this idea of progressive sanctions. So imagine that one of the things that Eleanor Ostrom studied is a fishery and all the fishermen come and realize if everybody fishes to the max, there's gonna be no fish left. So they collectively agree that they're going to.

[00:40:06] Sustainably harvest the fish so that there's enough fish to grow and, and create more and more fish. And so there's a healthy fishery, um, and they have a system then they all agree

on as to allocating who gets so much fish to be able to fish. And if it turns out that one person takes more than their share.

[00:40:25] In the beginning, they may just say, you know, like publish on the group chat, Hey, somebody like took too much and like, tomorrow you gotta take none or less because you gotta balance this out. And if that works, great. But if that person continues to, they may say, you don't get to fish in May, or whatever the prime month is, or something like that.

[00:40:46] **Jeremy Lent:** Mm-hmm.

[00:40:47] **Jonathan FP Rose:** And if they still don't behave well, they may say, you can't fish here at all, and if you come here, we're gonna. You know, disconnect your engine or

[00:40:56] **Jeremy Lent:** mm-hmm.

[00:40:57] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Sink your boat or whatever. I mean, the sanctions, they start out really nice and collaborative and educational and stuff. But what Eleanor Ostrom learned is that.

[00:41:07] Humans have, uh, both very generous, caring parts of their behaviors. And as we've seen, we have other kinds that are not so good and, and strong signals that say this is unacceptable are also important. This actually ties to the idea that you brought down earlier of subsidiarity.

[00:41:24] **Jeremy Lent:** Yes.

[00:41:25] **Jonathan FP Rose:** You shouldn't have to get all the way to the Supreme Court to have somebody tell you that you're overfishing, you know?

[00:41:31] That's right. So justice, so subsidiarity and the Eleanor Ostrom principles also say that justice also through subsidiary permeates society, that, that you feel it at all levels, and you actually have a phrase for this, which you call fractal flourishing, that

[00:41:47] **Jeremy Lent:** mm-hmm.

[00:41:48] **Jonathan FP Rose:** You feel things at every level. And you begin with.

[00:41:52] So you, you also, uh, spoke about us recognizing the historical injustices.

[00:41:57] **Jeremy Lent:** Mm. Yeah.

[00:41:58] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So you can't really build a just society unless you do that. And so there's a reparative justice.

[00:42:04] **Jeremy Lent:** Mm-hmm.

[00:42:05] **Jonathan FP Rose:** There's a restorative justice that is all needed, but if those don't work, you need a regulatory justice, sir. Mm-hmm.

[00:42:15] And you need to weave these different levels of justice together. So tell, talk about how you see justice permeating the ecological civilization.

[00:42:23] **Jeremy Lent:** Yeah, this is great. I love where you're going on all this, Jonathan. Yeah. And so really as we think about this whole concept of justice to riff on your point there, it's absolutely right.

[00:42:34] The, the way that the way Eleanor Ostrom said commons works is that self-policing. So there is not actually some external authority. Some police that come and say, we're gonna take you to jail if you do this. But it's actually the people police themselves, which gets to that point of subsidiarity again.

[00:42:53] Again. So it's the, it's not like an external power that is in charge, but it's what you do yourself. But the other key thing about the way a commons works is there has to be a relative equality, relative shared justice within the group. And when there's an injustice beginning to happen, people come around that they don't allow that to happen.

[00:43:15] Now in the world we live in today, we are looking at the results of 500 years of, you know, brutal colonialism. And genocides and an entire system that is designed even to the state to continue to suck wealth from the global south, from the majority world to the global north, and even within that to a tiny elite within that.

[00:43:38] And so. One of the things that we have to look at really clearly to get to that ecological civilization, to get to true commons forms of self-governance is to transform those structures of injustice, which is what, yeah. Everything from the way that trade agreements exist, from the way that global governance exists, from the way.

[00:44:02] That basically ownership works in the way that just small groups can own so much capital that they essentially get to buy the land of others and control others leading to millions, millions of people actually ultimately not even having a way to make their own subsistence and just having to sell themselves to whatever is available.

[00:44:24] Those are the kinds of things that have to be looked at and transformed to get to that eco civilization.

[00:44:31] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Okay, now we live in a different, a new world of extraction. In the old world of extraction, by the way, which is her first horizon, is still there, is we extract rare earths and not so rare earths for, you know, copper stuff from the world and disrupt it and harm its ecologies.

[00:44:50] And we extract labor from people in ways that often are unjust and, And so there's a huge amount of extraction, but there's a new horizon world, which is the technological world, the social media world, which is extracting our attention.

[00:45:05] **Jeremy Lent:** Yeah, and

[00:45:06] **Jonathan FP Rose:** interestingly, whether we want it or not, we're losing our choice more and more.

[00:45:11] I'm finding just to be able to do anything, I have to sign onto an app, which is just gonna send me more stuff that I don't wanna look at. I mean, like the TCO Adverseness is, is endlessly seeking to dominate our attention. And yet these are very important tools too. So, two questions. Number one, how do you see the ecological civilization interfacing with the technological world?

[00:45:39] And then take it into the world of ai.

[00:45:41] **Jeremy Lent:** Yeah. Right. Uh, it's such a critical question there, Jonathan, and I think a couple of things to understand is that, first, as I was mentioning before, even the best, most hopeful innovations will. Inevitably gets hijacked, just like you were describing how the internet sort of got hijacked by Indigo Inc.

[00:46:04] Unless they are developed outside of that system, when what that basically means is any approach to technology. Somebody comes up with this great idea, let's do something this way or that way. The first thing to look at is how can that be organized from the outset? Away from a for-profit corporation structure where the more successful you are, the more likely, even with the best of intentions, the more likely you are to get taken over by global capitalism.

[00:46:35] And interestingly, you know, we look at open AI right now, which started out with very good intentions. They started out really trying to be there for the good of humanity, and they even set themselves up structurally. Looking at some of these issues to say, okay, we have to have another, almost like a board of trustees that has a real power so that we don't just do what we're doing in order to make lots of money.

[00:47:01] But because it was so successful, the very structure they put in place to try to be the safeguards against this window, Togo Inc. Basically got demolished. So that now. It's really an absolute leading paragon of that. So I think what we've gotta understand is there are ways to organize things in a different way.

[00:47:19] A fundamental way is this notion of decentralization and distributed ownership of information. And so, um, rather than right now, uh, as technology develops, the big, whoever's sort of the first player gets to benefit from what's called network effects, where they get to be bigger and bigger and bigger.

[00:47:39] Whether it's Facebook or Uber or Google or Amazon or whatever it might be. But there are other ways you can actually organize the same kind of high tech ways of MO changing information where the information itself is owned by the people. Who are right now getting, getting sort of consumed by that information.

[00:48:02] So for example, you could have a version of Uber where the drivers themselves have access to their own information and they get to determine their own terms. And so rather than

40% of the value they're creating, getting sucked into the pockets of a few billionaires, they actually get to share that themselves.

[00:48:19] A version of Wikipedia essentially, but applied. To drivers, for example. And that's the kind of thing where you can actually, if you say, if you've been driving there for five or 10 years and you've got this great record of five stars from people who have liked your driving right now, if you leave Uber, you lose that.

[00:48:38] So it's almost like you've lost 10 years of all the work you've put into getting a reputation. But there's a notion of portability of that. So you can have it where people who want to change from one service to another can actually port their own reputation to their next service. And this can be applied all across the board.

[00:48:57] And there are wonderful concepts like fab labs or uh, fabricated laboratories where people develop. New innovations all around the world. And rather than try to own them and mint money out of them, they share them in a common space network throughout the world so people can build on each other and then apply them in their own unique ways in wherever they lived.

[00:49:18] And this is really something that I hope comes through in this book. These examples of distributed ownership, these examples of actually subverting that sort of wingo ink approach exist all around the world. It's a matter of finding them, helping them to strengthen, and you know, each of us really putting our energy into supporting them and becoming part of that alternative way.

[00:49:44] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So I just wanna for the audience to make a little bit more visible, this FAB Lab thing. So these are places that have cutting machines and lasers and CNC machines and all kinds of cool stuff. That it's like a library. You can just check in and use it, and then they'll have patterns. So I can't remember the name of it, but somebody put together the top 50 machines used in the world, like a tractor and a, you know, a generator and a pump, and what are the most useful things, and then you can go to fab lag and make one yourself.

[00:50:13] So you don't have to buy a tractor from an expensive tractor. You could, uh,

[00:50:18] **Jeremy Lent:** in fact, it's called, I think, the Global Village Construction Sets.

[00:50:21] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Yeah,

[00:50:22] **Jeremy Lent:** that's right. And it's, yeah, readily available. And there's plans for houses called Wiki House, um, and plans for farmers to manufacture their own equipment called Farm Hack, whatever.

[00:50:32] So all these things are out there, but they're just, they're just like tiny little glimmers in the wealth as it is today.

[00:50:39] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So another one are seed libraries where

[00:50:42] Yes,

[00:50:43] **Jonathan FP Rose:** people, you know, by the way, when we grow seeds, we can collect, you know, we grow plant seeds and grow plants. We can actually collect them, except we're not allowed in the capitalist world.

[00:50:52] **Jeremy Lent:** Mm-hmm.

[00:50:52] **Jonathan FP Rose:** The big companies like Monsanto, that actually they don't give, you don't buy seeds. You are licensing the seeds and they say when you're done, you can't save. The seeds that come off your Cornyn plant are replant them. You have to buy more from us. So there are these things called seed libraries where you can use the seeds and when the plants are done and they put out new seeds, you have to return some to the library.

[00:51:16] So other people get them and then you can keep them and just regenerate just the way nature does. So there are all these beautiful ideas. They're, they're all in this wonderful book. I wanna close by asking you to give our audience some sense of, to get from here to there. Requires envisioning where to go, finding those places and beginning to shift one's own lives.

[00:51:45] I mean, we can read all these wonderful books, but unless we're actually doing something different, we're not gonna get there. So what are some practices that you would recommend? So what's the next?

[00:51:59] **Jeremy Lent:** Hmm. Yeah. So, so important. Jonathan. Thank you for that. And well, I think maybe the first place to begin when we ask this question is around orientation.

[00:52:09] And you know, we're having this great conversation about what's possible and sure. Many people, when this is over. They'll turn off this and go to the news and hear about some new unfolding disaster that's taking place as our whole world unravels. And there's a way in which it's easy to feel, and I tell you, I feel it also within me every day.

[00:52:30] So I'm not talking about anybody else in my own experience. You can so easily feel despair like, God, it's things are looking so bad, and. One of the things I feel is really important to understand is that actually this system needs to basically unravel in order for an alternative system to actually be formed.

[00:52:52] It's a little bit like, imagine like a weave that is very tightly woven and you want to kind of change its patterns and you can take your hand, but you can't even begin to even pull anything. You could. No way to begin, but imagine that we've suddenly. Mysteriously begins to weaken and unravel in front of your eyes.

[00:53:10] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Become spacious.

[00:53:11] **Jeremy Lent:** Yeah, exactly. And then you have the opportunity to kind of reweave the fabric. So what we need to do is not then, this is by no means encouraging the unraveling

and the pain and the fear and the disasters that are happening all around us. Absolutely not. But it's a realization this is happening because of the internal contradictions within this system.

[00:53:34] But when that happens, rather than it leading us to a sense of despair, we can recognize that that unraveling gives these degrees of freedom to, or to actually begin to create that alternative potential society within the ruins, if you will. So that's, I think is a crucial thing to understand and absolutely fundamental around that is this notion of how we act now is absolutely formative in what that new future is going to be around.

[00:54:05] You know, there's this old adage from the old days of communist revolutions and stuff like, you know, the end justifies the means and. My approach to that is almost the opposite, which is that actually there is no end. Um, because we live in an unfolding reality. If something happens, the next thing happens.

[00:54:23] We're always unfolding unless we hit some total civilizational collapse or whatever, which we're all, uh, wanting to do everything we can to. Not get to that point. But what that means is that the means becomes the end. And if that's the case, it means like those actions that lead us to where we wanna go are the things that become the foundation of that next phase.

[00:54:44] Which means that if it's turns out that it's violence that leads to the overthrow of those bad guys over there, it's gonna be violence that then sets the parameters for the next generation of what happens too, which is why it's so crucial to lead from what we know. Is our foundational core sets of values lead from our sense of shared human love of others around us, lead from our sense of what we know is right within ourselves, within our care and community, within our love of the earth.

[00:55:17] And even when we see people who seem to be acting as our set of opponents and doing things causing oppression and injustice, and absolutely we need to allow righteous anger to respond to the actions of what is taking place and to stop harm. Absolutely. Not saying that That's okay. But we also need to not objectify and turn those people into the other that we need to beat as if it's some sort of battle between the good and the bad and all that stuff.

[00:55:45] Because that will only lead to a next generation of the same layers of polarization and depression of one form or another. So leading with the heart and leading with what we know is right, and I think the beautiful opportunity to all of us is, you know, I talk about that third horizon. Being out there in the distant future, which, uh, is, you know, where if we think of the entire world system, that's probably the case.

[00:56:12] But we can be creating those third horizons right here within our own hearts and minds, within our own communities and within different groupings within society, like commons based groups and others. And that's what I think is the beautiful opportunity that we have. We can actually turn to ways of living that feel really alive and be helping to build towards that future.

[00:56:36] That notion you were just describing earlier, a fractal, flourishing. It's not like I have to suffer in order to sacrifice to make the world better in the future, but I can find the ways where I can be doing things that are good for my heart and soul, for those around me. That are good for the system as a whole at the same time.

[00:56:57] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Hmm. So Jeremy, we're gonna end with that. That's a beautiful way to end and it's beautiful advice for each of us as to how we move forward. Thank you so much for joining me today, and thank you so much for writing this wonderful, wonderful book, which I encourage everybody to listen to. And you know, in your view about loosening the weave so that we can rethink about it.

[00:57:20] One of the ways that the Garrison Institute helps do that is with contemplative practice. Mm-hmm. And so. Audiences. We have these amazing teachers who come and lead retreats on how to create more space in the tightness of your weave. And I encourage you all to check that out too.

[00:57:36] **Jeremy Lent:** Yes. Thank you. Thank you, Jennifer.

[00:57:38] Thank you for all you do with the Garrison Institute and for this great conversation today. Thanks.

[00:57:49] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Thank you to our guest, Jeremy Lent. The Common Good is a production of the Garrison Institute and is hosted by me, Jonathan FP Rose. We'd love to hear your thoughts about the podcast. Please send us a note at [podcast@garrisoninstitute.org](mailto:podcast@garrisoninstitute.org) and let us know what you think. If you've enjoyed this episode, please consider leaving a positive review on Apple Podcasts.

[00:58:13] This show is produced by the Garrison Institute with Production and Marketing from the Podglomerate. Its theme music was composed by Jonathan FP Rose, and performed by Jog Blues. We look forward to being with you again soon.