

Is The World Getting Worse? Matt Ridley Doesn't Think So | The Show | Dad Saves America

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SUMMARY

The discussion centers on the pervasive culture of fear in contemporary society, particularly regarding climate change, public health, and social issues, and how this fear is often exaggerated or misrepresented. Matt Ridley, a biologist and journalist, argues for a rational optimism grounded in empirical evidence, emphasizing that many aspects of life are improving despite the doom-laden narratives prevalent in media and politics.

- The fear industrial complex exploits human negativity bias, leading to widespread anxiety and misinformation.*
- Many claims about impending disasters, such as climate change and societal collapse, are exaggerated and not supported by evidence.*
- Historical patterns show that pessimistic narratives have consistently sold better than optimistic ones, creating a cycle of fear.*
- Ridley highlights that innovation and progress are driven by optimism and ambition rather than fear.*
- Vaccines and other technologies have significantly improved public health, yet skepticism persists due to past misinformation.*
- The narrative around climate change often neglects the successes in reducing poverty and improving living standards globally.*
- Parents should encourage children to embrace opportunities and solutions rather than succumb to despair.*
- A growth mindset and internal locus of control are essential for fostering innovation and resilience in future generations.*

- At the turn of the 19th century, American humorist, Josh Billings famously said, "It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that ain't so." By this measure, we're in a lot of trouble today. Our times seem to be defined by memes and movements whose claims are, shall we say questionable, at best? - We are in the beginning of a mass extinction. - Human beings have overrun the world.

- There could easily be 30 million illegal immigrants living in this country, or more. - The world is gonna end in 12 years if we don't address climate change. - In America today, what we are seeing is the richest people becoming richer and almost

that everybody
else becoming poorer. - The list of things people
know that just ain't so is long and getting longer by the day, but it all shares a
common theme, catastrophe. It's apocalypse now, or apocalypse soon.

It turns out the reason
disaster sell so well is because we're actually
hardwired to find it attractive. Psychologists call this
phenomenon, negativity bias. - There is a well documented phenomenon that people dread losses
more than they savor or anticipate gains. - This fact of human nature is getting exploited on a monumental scale
thanks to the tsunami
of digital information we're all being drowned in
and a fear industrial complex, dedicated to exploiting
our fears for its own ends.

If it bleeds, it leads, facts be damned. - More than a hundred San Diegans are preparing for the end of the world.
- Violent crime is way up. - Officials are warning
against real life terrors as kids hit the streets for Halloween. - This is get out alive,
another week, stranger danger. - A simple ride down the slide could mean a trip to the emergency room. - No
creepy clown sidings yet, but that doesn't mean it couldn't happen.

- Is it any wonder that we're living in an age of negativity and nihilism? All of this has devastating
consequences for public policy, but more importantly for
our families and our kids who are suffering from daily anxiety over terrible things they're
being told that just ain't so. Well, my guest today is probably the world's foremost optimist grounded in reality. -
I'm not here to say
everything's getting better, but I am here to say a lot
of things are getting better.

And why don't we tell the
young people about that? - His book, "The Rational Optimist", lays out all the ways in which our world has been
dramatically improving across virtually every
metric, right under our noses and contrary to the stories
we're told day in and day out. - There's a competitive
auction between people to sound more catastrophic,
more apocalyptic, because they were more likely to get attention in the media that way. - He's a PhD, biologist,
journalist and member of the House of
Lords of the UK parliament.

But most of all, he's a relentless pursuer of the empirical truth. And thankfully the empirical truth has never
looked brighter. That's a lesson we as dads need to learn and pass on to our kids,

especially in times like these, when the truth is harder to find than ever. - The only thing we have to fear is fear itself. (upbeat music) - I first wanna start off, by saying that you are actually one of my favorite authors of all time.

This book right here, "The Rational Optimist". - Thank you. - This actually changed the way I think about the world in a lot of ways, I still call myself a rational optimist. - Well, it was a lot of fun writing that book. The more you looked into it, the more incredible it is what human beings have achieved in the last few hundred years. And how much reason there to think that it can go on getting better.

- I wanna to talk about how important your system here, this notion of being a rational optimist, I think, is for dads and for parents because we live in an age that feels like it's dominated by fear. But before I get to that, I wanna just get a little more about your background. You've written 10 books, not all of which I've had add the opportunity to read, but on just a couple of them that really, I think are especially important for the stuff we're concerned about here.

One is the "Evolution of Everything", which we've got a nice stack of here, which I think was such a great, in a way, sequel to "The Rational Optimist". The origins of virtue from an evolutionary perspective, which we like to say at Emergent Order Foundation that we care about classical virtues and that freedom is underpinned by virtues. So I hope we get a chance to talk about that. You've also written a genome and you've got a new book coming out called "Viral".

So you've really touched on this wide range of subjects. How have you actually done that? How have you managed to cover such a great area in your work? - I am trained as a scientist, as a biologist, and I spent a long period being a professional journalist, mostly covering science, but then also covering politics. And at a certain point, I started writing books and I just go where curiosity takes me.

I get passionate about the topics I look into. And there is a sort of continuous theme through all my books, I think. And it's about wanting to understand how the world works in a rational way. Not letting my instincts and emotions tell me what's right, but letting the facts tell me what's right. So I just love digging into details. I mean, I wrote a biography once, it was a biography of Francis Crick and you're just finding

out what he got up to in World War II, or whatever.

It's great fun. I can't believe I'm lucky enough that people pay me to sit down and write books about the world and satisfy my own curiosity, but I'm lucky enough for that to happen. - When I think about what I'd want from my son, as a career path, it's hard not think, well, if you turned out like Matt Ridley, that wouldn't be so bad. To get paid to explore new things, to be a lifelong learner. Were you always curious, even as a kid, were you good in school?

How did you develop this sort of lifelong curiosity? - It's hard to tell where things came from. I had a fabulous upbringing, I had a great education and went to a wonderful school, went to a very, very good university, Oxford University. I was always passionate about natural history. I mean, that was really the hobby that dominated my youth, it was bird watching and other forms of natural history. I was always out there in the countryside doing that kind of thing and therefore wanted to get as close to natural history as I could.

And that turned out to be a course called zoology at Oxford. Well, actually that was quite an interesting time to go and do zoology at Oxford because Richard Dawkins had just written his book, "The Selfish Gene, which was this eyeopening way of looking at evolution in a slightly different way. And he was one of the people who taught me and so on, and he's now he's still a good friend. So what I say to my own kids is there is a fantastic, great world out there of extraordinary things happening and just enjoy it.

Just find out what's going on, find things you're good at, find things you enjoy learning about and indulge your passion for topics. Because you're only on the planet once, as far as we know, and you might as well fit a few different things in while you're here. - I'm thinking a lot about kids and about the way fear is taking hold in our kids' lives, in particular, is something that I think is very upsetting, very distressing and I think it threatens the future of innovation.

And I have a couple stats here that I think are pretty interesting. So in 2018, the American Psychological Association did a big survey on generation Z, so the born after '95. They were the least likely generation to report that they had good mental health, basically, lower than all the other categories. They were the most likely to report that they were being treated or have been treated for mental health issues. And they're the highest rate of suicide of any generation.

In fact, between 2007 and 2017 in the United States, people age 10 to 24, it was a 56% increase in suicide. I bring those stats up and I have them written down because when we talk about, oh, kids today, they're all so anxious and they're all so afraid, and they're all so worried, you can make these assertions, but the actual numbers are pretty real and pretty stark. Why do you think this is happening? What's your perspective on this culture of fear that's taken hold?

- I don't think it's as new as we think. I think it's really bad at the moment, but I think it's always happened. I think there have been periods in history when we have sold doom and gloom to the young on an industrial scale. Doom mongering, fear mongering, the word mongering means selling, doesn't it? And this is what's been happening. And if you think about the millennial prophecies a thousand years ago, about how the world was gonna come to an end and you read the kind of stuff that people were saying then, there's been a lot of it about.

And in fact, one of the things I found when I wrote "The Rational Optimist", that is, if you go back in history, pessimistic books were bestsellers at almost every episode of history, at almost every period. And I found a wonderful quote from Thomas Bevington McCauley, the historian, writing in 1830, and he was reviewing a pessimistic book by Robert Southey who was the poet laureate, who was saying this industrial revolution, it's gonna end badly. It's all horrible, it's nothing but smoke and dirt and misery and people are getting poorer, not richer.

And McCauley disagreed. He thought that actually some of these mechanizations and technologies that were coming in were gonna improve people's living standards and maybe stop them dying at the age of 15 or something. And so he said, why is it that with nothing but improvement behind us, we're to expect nothing but deterioration before us? What is it about us that we assume that just cause things have gone well in the past, they're about to go horribly wrong?

And I then began looking for what I call turning-pointitis which is the tendency to believe that your generation is at a turning point. Yes, things have gone fine up to now, but they're about to go horribly wrong. And I found that it was a common phenomenon in every generation. And when I look back to when I was young, I was born in 1958, so I was a teenager in the 1970s. And 1970s were full of doom and gloom, particularly on the environmental front.

I was told by the grownups, very solemnly, and with great certainty, by the way, that the future was incredibly bleak, that the population explosion was unstoppable, famine was inevitable, pollution was gonna shorten lifespan because it was gonna cause a cancer epidemic. The rainforest was disappearing, ice age was coming back, the oil was running out. The future was bleak in all sorts of ways. Diseases were gonna ravage human kind.

Honestly, I do not remember any reading, anything by an adult about a bright future for humanity. - With perhaps the exception of Julian Simon, right? He's maybe the only one- - And unfortunately, he wasn't enough of a best seller to reach my ears. Paul Ehrlich who was writing the opposite, was a much bigger best seller. So the doom and gloom has sold well for a long time. And there's no doubt that there's a certain cynicism here.

People say, oh, if I wrote a gloomy book, I could sell more copies, if I made a doomy projection. Yeah, there's a competitive auction between people to sound more catastrophic, more apocalyptic, because they were more likely to get attention in the media that way. - It's funny, I've been increasingly calling the whole super structure, if you will, the fear industrial complex, the political class, the news media in particular. If it bleeds, it leads, is this phrase, but it really is the business model.

You mentioned doom scrolling on our phones and that obviously plays a part of it. But I suppose one way to think about it is that fear and anxiety, well, we do need them, right? I mean, they're part of how we survive. Like how do you think about fear in terms of evolutionary psychology? - Well, I'm not here to say that there's nothing wrong with the world. Nuclear war was something we should fear. The ebola epidemic was something to worry about.

There are plenty of things that are scary in the world and things that could go wrong and can go wrong. And we have to find a

way to tell young people, yes, there are scary things, but not to leave out the good news. At the moment, good news is no news. I mean, it's literally impossible to get any air time for the fact that the world has got greener in the last 30 years by about 14%, partly because of the extra carbon dioxide in the air, partly cause of reforestation.

You try and say that or you tell people that, when I was young, there were 5,000 humpback whales left in the world and they were thought to be on the brink, they were heading for extinction and now there are 80,000 or 16 times as many humpback whales. - Humpback whales? - In the world as there were when I was in the 19- - See, I didn't know that. I thought the oceans was sort of one of the areas where doom and gloom was a little more warranted.

- The whale population boom is the reason you don't hear about whales these days. In other words, the better things are doing, the more they drop off the news agenda. I mean, think of countries, you hear about a country, Syria, right? Was in the news of lot in the last decade. It's not in the news today. That suggests to me that the war in Syria must have come to an end, at least to some degree. Not in a good way, I'm sure, but at least it's not as bad as it was five or 10 years ago.

Our news agenda is dominated by that. - I guess that is the phrase, right? No news is good news. I mean, we say that in our daily lives all the time. - No news is good news, but also good news is no news. I tell you the godfather of all us optimists, the godfather is Hans Rosling, alas, no longer with us. And Hans Rosling did something very clever. He went out and asked a thousand people the same question.

He said, "Do you think that the percentage of the world population that is in extreme poverty has doubled, halved or stayed the same in 20 years?" And 65% of Americans, similar number in Britain, most other Western countries, said that it has doubled. The percentage living in extreme poverty has doubled. Only 5% thought it had halved. The true number is that it's halved, okay? So only 5% of people are right about that.

But Rosling then said, if I wrote those three answers on three bananas and I threw them in to a

cage with a monkey in it, the monkey would pick up the right answer, one third of the time, 33% of the time. It would do six times as well as human beings in answering a question about human society. It knows more about us than we know about ourselves. And what this suggests, the way I put it, is that it's not, actually, there's a rather good quote from a guy called Josh Billings who was a 19th century wit, I think.

He said, "It's not what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that ain't so." And so we've got a huge problem here. We simply cannot get the facts across to the younger generation cause there's this great big wall of myth surrounding the truth on a lot of these things. And I'm not here to say everything's getting better, but I am here to say a lot of things are getting better.

And why don't we tell the young people about that? - I think one of the things you just said is really important, which is that when what we know isn't so, how do we make good progress? And I say we in a big sense, but I think when it comes to these issues that involve public policy, that really becomes kind of a disaster, right? Because you have widespread belief in things that aren't true. And so you have policy makers responding to a public and actively even promoting things that are incorrect with the public.

And that seems like a negative feedback loop, which is a great segue into topic number one right now when it comes to fear, which is COVID. So, I remember we actually had a conversation in the spring of 2020, because you had written an article in March saying Coronavirus is the wolf on the loose. And it was when I read your article that I said, oh no, when Matt Ridley is saying, this is the wolf on the loose, not the boy who cried wolf, I was worried.

That was when I first got the sense that maybe this is gonna be a bigger thing than my inclination towards optimism led me to believe. If you can just go back to that moment for a time, what was it about that moment and what you were seeing then that led you to write that piece and that made the rational optimist be concerned? - Yeah, well, over the last 20 years, there've been a lot of scares based on new infectious epidemics.

So we had swine flu, we had bird flu, we had ebola, we had the coming plague was a big thing. In the late 1990s, there

was a rash of books, "The Hot Zone", "The Coming Plague", things like that. And a lot of them were based on the idea that because of the damage we were doing to the rainforest, nature was gonna have its revenge and we were a sitting duck for that. And I became more and more cynical about that because I noticed that none of these things did turn into plagues.

And in the case of the swine flu scare of 2009, it really didn't take off at all. I began to expect that when someone said, oh my God, there's another virus, it's gonna sweep the world and kill us, that we should take that with a pinch of salt. SARS was a narrow escape. I mean, that clearly was a very dangerous virus. It was relatively transmissible, but not very, and it was very dangerous, it killed a lot of people.

And likewise MERS in the Middle East a few years later. Now if a SARS or a MERS like virus turned up, that was just that much more infectious, and it got out into a larger population then we were in trouble and we would indeed have a big problem. So around January, 2020, I was saying, it'll peter out, it's obviously just a minor thing. People are catching it from animals, cause that's what the Chinese are saying. There's no human to human transmission.

Therefore like SARS, it'll not go anywhere, they'll be able to get it under control. And the other thing that's happening is we've got more and more genomic knowledge. We can sequence its genome, we can get ahead of it. We can use antivirals and we'll manage to stop this. But it then became apparent that actually the Chinese hadn't been telling us everything that we needed to know that human to human transmission was occurring and that it was extremely infectious.

And while not particularly lethal, for most people, was pretty devastating, particularly for elderly people. At a certain point in February or March, 2020, I became aware that, yes, this wasn't a case of crying wolf, this was a wolf. I did not expect that we would endure two years of extraordinary interventions into society to try and stop it, many of which didn't work and that we would experience something that was close to being as bad as the 1918 flu pandemic.

I didn't expect it was gonna be that bad, but I knew by March that it was gonna be a problem. - When I saw what was emerging as the responses I was immediately attracted to what Sweden had been doing, which was to treat adults roughly like adults, to say, okay, we have a population that it appears is more affected by this virus, which is the elderly and people with preexisting conditions and health issues. Let's do what we can to protect them, but let's not lock down the whole society.

And we now have had waves and waves of these lockdowns and these mandates and then this sort of strange, again, coming back to it's what we know that isn't so questioned, which is, for example, my understanding is that six feet is actually not really enough distance. That it's actually more like 12. But that inside the CDC, the conversation was well, 12 is really hard. 12 means you can't really be in any kind of place.

So we should probably say six. So, if I'm in the public and I hear, well, six isn't actually safe enough, but they're telling us six because it's a kind of social engineering thing. The trust destruction that this all brings about, like how are we supposed to trust these people making these decisions when they don't seem to be actually based in the so-called science? I don't know if you wanna- How you think about this debate around COVID and the science it's hard to navigate just as a dad.

I'm like, I wanna put my kids in school, what do I do about this? Where do I turn to know what to do? - I think the pandemic has been a horrible episode for reminding us that we don't know as much about the world as we think we do. And in particular, authority is prepared to pretend it knows more than it does. So let's not forget that the official advice from the World Health Organization and from my government, and I think from the American government was that masks were useless and shouldn't be done.

And that hand washing was absolutely vital. And that this was gonna spread mostly on surfaces. Both of those were well, they were either wrong or there was simply a U-turn. And we now are told that masks are highly effective. Look at the evidence, it's not really there either way. Masks might work, they probably do help a bit, but they're certainly not a silver bullet. And the uncertainty is

enormous, we just don't know. So we've constantly been told things, with great certainty, by the authorities about how to control this pandemic, which have turned out to be either wrong or still uncertain whether they were good advice or not.

I think lockdowns do stop the virus spreading to some degree, but they are terribly blunt instrument. They cause enormous pain and misery to a lot of people. And they only work because there are people who are continuing to serve those of us who are locked down. Lockdowns are so that people who work on laptops can stay at home while people who deliver parcels, bring them parcels.

That's what a lockdown is. Frankly, that wasn't possible 20 years ago, cause there wasn't enough internet. You couldn't do video conferencing. So lockdown would not have worked then, but it became possible cause enough of us are working at home on computers. Then the rest, the mailman, the delivery man, the people getting stuff to the shops had to go on with their lives. And I felt very uncomfortable about that. It felt like an elite suiting themselves to some degree.

- One of the things that has been the most scary, again, as a parent is the impact that this has all had on kids and on an already fragile generation's mental health. My son goes to a school that's been incredibly bottom up. In fact it was up to his class to vote, whether they wanted to wear masks in class or not, we're in Texas and so we don't have our governor forcing us to do things quite to the degree that other states.

And they actually opted to all wear masks in school. They chose it as a group of kids. But if I'm a parent and I'm trying to understand what the truth is, I guess that's kind of a question for you. Where do you turn right now to know the truth, specifically around things like, well, is it safe to send my kid back to school? Does my kid need to wear a mask given that I watch the way they touch the masks and what they- I know that kids are gross.

So it seems like it might be a net negative, but I don't know that. And for me, I don't know how to go out there in the world and confidently arrive at a conclusion with Google and hours of time. - Well, just to tell a story, last week I went to a memorial service for a wonderful friend who died. And she was somebody that a lot

of people were very fond of. So there were several hundred people in one church.

And the organizers said, please take a test before you come, and that's good advice, I was in favor of that. And they also said, don't worry, we'll all be wearing masks. It's compulsory to wear masks, if you're coming to this event. And I thought, well, is that falsely reassuring? Are some of us gonna go along thinking, oh, well, cause he's got a mask, it's all right. We don't know that that helps at all, might not be helping.

And so we know there is risk compensation behavior in the world. People drive motorbikes faster when they've got helmets on than when they haven't. And so is it possible that people take slightly more risks with masks than when they don't wear masks and that results in slightly greater chance of catch the virus because the masks aren't as effective as we think they are. So there's all sorts of huge uncertainties here and navigating that is very difficult.

But the thing that's bothered me most, about the last two years, is the degree to which people in authority have been happy to grasp at thoroughly draconian and authoritarian measures and bring them in in not very democratic ways. And the general public has been quite happy to go along with it and actually sort of likes being told what to do. I mean, we got to a ridiculous position in the UK where at some point they said, you could go to a pub but you must only do so if you're gonna have a substantial meal, not if you're just there to drink and chat, because that will be more likely to result in you staying there longer and spreading the thing.

So what's a substantial meal? Okay, so, government ministers were being asked on television, is a scotch egg a substantial meal or a snack? I don't know if you know what a scotch egg is. - Well as an Italian American, there's no UK meal that's substantial enough. So, I'm sorry. - It's a particularly nasty meal that you can get in a pub. And I mean, we're getting government ministers deciding what you can and can't eat in a pub, is my point.

This is terrifying, it's ridiculous. We had policemen looking at people's shopping baskets on their way out of shops to see whether they were shopping for essentials during lockdown or whether they were buying luxuries. I mean,

what kind of society
were we getting into there? It's really not a good plan. - It reminds me of, and I think this is from an
English political comedy. The, we need to do
something, this is something, we need to do this, I'm paraphrasing.

- Yeah, it's almost, but
certainly "Yes, Minister". No, there's also one of
the political comedies about the first world war. A futile gesture is
required at this point. - The cynical person would say, well, this is just people who want power exploiting a
crisis. Are those PMs or in the
U.S. Congress people that are saying or governors saying, well, this is a substantial
meal and this isn't and oh, you can go here
and do this, but not that.

Are they just power tripping? What's the most charitable
thing you can say about what is obviously
kind of a ludicrous thing to be doing? It's obviously ludicrous to say, well, you can go to the bar, but only if
you're eating
a substantial meal. And I think they know it's ludicrous. What's your take on the
political psychology going on? - I think one of the problems is that people have been brought up to think that
the world
is run by somebody.

They think that somebody's in charge. Be it the government, or
be it the civil servants or officials or something. The world wouldn't work without people telling
the world to work, okay? And they assume that's true
of absolutely everything. And therefore, if you're
gonna defeat a pandemic, you have to tell people what to do. Now, the way to answer that is to use Frederic
Bastiat's example of how Paris got fed every day. I use the example of London.

There are 10 million people
eat lunch in London every day. They each choose what they're gonna eat, at the last minute, frankly. They go
into a restaurant
or they go to a cafe or they go to a sandwich shop and say, "I'll have one of those." And how on earth do we
make sure that the right quantity
of the right type of food is available in the right
place at the right time for those 10 million people?

I mean, it's an unbelievably
difficult problem, isn't it? Who is the guy in charge of this, the London Lunch Commissioner? He's a brilliant
person, I've met him, he's unbelievably clever. And he's got a really big computer. - The Earl of Sandwich. -

There is a guy called the Earl of Sandwich, actually. And of course, the point is, it's not a person, it's a market. It's a negotiation between supply and demand that happens in real time every day.

And the fact that you just didn't have quite enough avocados today means you order slightly more tomorrow, and so on. And that is an example of a bottom up system of a system that works out its own solution to the problem. And yes, you can nudge it, you can give it incentives. You can say, actually, we want people to eat less refined sugar or something, so we're gonna put a tax on it. - You can go full Bloomberg, if you want.

- Exactly, and likewise, we should have approached the pandemic like that. People are gonna wanna continue living their lives, but we want them to do less unsafe behaviors. Let's give them as much good advice as we can and let's encourage them, maybe even incentivize them to stay at home, to not go to things. Maybe, we can do some things by compulsory banning. Banning large gatherings, that probably does make sense, Sweden did that too.

But the idea that we should try and micromanage what happens in every part of everybody's life is just based on this top-down myth that that's the way the world works. It's what I call, I call it political creationism. It's like saying that the reason the rainforest is so beautifully diverse is because it's an intelligent designer who designed it, instead of saying it came from a Darwinian process from beneath. So it's a form of intelligent design, this approach.

- The intelligent might be going a little far. - Well, that's true, yeah, fair point. - On that point, that's such a great way to sort of summarize, I think in a way, the thesis of your book, "The Evolution of Everything", right? That we have, I mean, everything evolves, markets evolve, language evolves, what we eat for lunch evolves over time by individuals making choices. And the hard part is, how do we make good choices for ourselves?

How do we make choices that align with what we want for ourselves? - There's a wonderful line from a Scottish philosopher, 18th century Scottish philosopher called Adam Ferguson, which says there are things that are the result of human action, but not the result of any design. And what he's saying is something like the English language that is obviously a manmade thing, it's not a natural

phenomenon like a volcano. The English language is made by people, but there's no sense in which it was designed.

I mean, it has grammar, it has syntax, it has vocabulary, it has meaning, all these, it's unbelievably intricate. It's very clever and well put together. But there isn't a committee that decides whether a new word should be allowed or not. There probably is, but we ignore it. - It's only in France, I think. - Yes, exactly. So it evolves, it emerges from below. We're all in charge of the English language. We're all contributing to it, where none of us able to decide one way or another, it's kind of the market that decides.

For example, there's a rule that if you use a word a lot, you shorten it. We tend to use short words for things that we're gonna speak about a lot. We tend to find the shortest possible word. So we talk about COVID, we don't talk about SARS like coronavirus. Whose rule is that? Who thought up that rule? It's a good rule, but we all did and none of us did. And so that for me is a very important insight into how the world works.

The internet is another example. Who invented the internet? It's a meaningless question. I mean, yes, Vint Cerf deserves some credit and the guy invented packet switching deserves some credit and Al Gore perhaps deserves a bit of credit, though maybe not as much as he allegedly claimed. - It's not zero, it's above zero, but it's close to zero. - Yeah, exactly. But on the whole, we all reinvent the internet all the time. We find new ways of dealing with it.

Some of those ways work better than others and get kept and others are bad ideas and get dropped and so on. Even an airplane evolves, when you think about it. I mean, I flew across the Atlantic at the weekend on a 787, which is the newest form of aircraft. And I would hope that it was designed by an intelligent designer so that it doesn't fall apart in midair. But actually in what sense did he design it?

Cause he just took a 777 and changed it a bit. And that guy took a 767 and changed that a bit, all the way back to the Wright brothers and in each case, they kept things that were good and dropped things that were bad. For example, in early post war jets, they had square windows. Then they had a bunch of crashes and they realized that metal fatigue was spreading from the corner of square windows. So they made slightly rounded windows in airplanes.

That's an example of natural selection of evolution in the design of airplanes. It's the ocean creating the shape of the boat, right? - Exactly. - By sinking some, you're keeping others. - There was a recent survey, there was like 10,000 young people surveyed across 10 different countries. And some of the results of the survey are really quite disturbing. I'll read a couple of them. So 60% said they feel very worried about climate change. This is kids like my son, who's 16 years old, 45% say that their feelings impact their daily lives.

So they're having anxiety about this global phenomenon and its impacts on the future and in their daily life, it's impacting them. It's causing them to struggle. And it gets more disturbing, the further you go, three quarters say they agree with the phrase that the future is frightening. And then that manifests in another way, which is that four in ten say they are contemplating not having children or having fewer children as a result. So this is the big issue of our times probably more than any other, as far as just the sheer volume of catastrophic rhetoric.

As a parent or as a kid that's watching, what do you say in response to these things? Where is the truth? Is this where your rational optimism goes to die? How should I think about climate change? - Well, I have a number of responses on climate change and it's a gigantic topic and it's like wrestling with an octopus and I'm not succeeding very well in persuading people that we are exaggerating the problem and we're choosing the wrong solutions, but that is my view.

I think it's real, I think it's happening. I think it's manmade and I think we can solve it. I don't think it's as urgent as people think. The projections on how much it's going to cost us are that instead of being five or six times as rich in a hundred years time, the average human being will be four or five times as rich. It's that sort of impact, right? - So we're not all gonna be extinct in 10 years or 20 years?

- The intergovernmental panel on climate change and its various economic scenarios of the future, all have us much richer in 2100 even if we go back to using coal for almost everything. Then, nobody knows that, but that's what they say. It's the most extraordinary disconnect. The most pessimistic of those

scenarios, called RCP 8.5, says that we're gonna use 10 times as much coal in 2100 as today. That we'll use coal to make fuel for our vehicles by then, because we'll have run out of gas and oil or something.

And that there will be 12 billion people on the planet in 2100, even though that's way above the median projection of the United Nations and that trade will have collapsed, et cetera. But we will be richer, all the same. And that's why we're using so much coal cause we're so much richer. Now all these are bonkers assumptions. And if you talk to the people who devised them, they say, yeah, we wanted to do one scenario that was just a bit bonkers so to see what it looked like and what effect it had on temperatures, but we didn't intend it to be taken seriously.

But, and Roger Pielke has pointed this out, if you go through the assessments that governments and companies and others make of the future, they use that scenario again and again and again, as what they call business as usual. They say, that's what the trajectory we're on, if we do nothing, they use RCP 8.5. Check it out, they use it much more than they use any of the other scenarios. So I'm sorry, this is cynical exaggeration of the problem in order to scare people.

Now, a lot of leaders in the world say, people are not scared enough. You'll hear people at each of these great climate jamborees standing up and saying, "Why aren't we taking this more seriously?" - Greta Thunberg and the likes. - Exactly and teaching a council of despair to our kids and telling them it's insoluble, you can't solve this problem. It's disastrous, it's catastrophic. Doesn't really matter what you do, it's gonna get worse and worse and worse.

Let's not forget, this is exactly what they said about the population explosion in the '60s. They said it's unstoppable, there's nothing can be done now to prevent mass starvation in the 1970s, Paul and William Paddock said this in a bestselling book called "Famine in 1975". Paul Ehrlich said that in a book called "The Population Bomb" in 1968. Even at this late stage, we couldn't stop mass famine in the 1970s and '80s and onwards, right? What happened?

Famine went extinct,
famine is now extinct. - Wait-
- You don't believe that? - Yeah, help, so wait famine is extinct? - Yes.
- What does that mean? - What that means is that apart from one or two places like North Korea, where every now and the

government manages to produce wide spread hunger through some really stupid policy, you do not see mass starvation in the world anymore. The graphs show it, it is extremely rare now.

It just isn't happening anywhere. We're growing enough food, we're distributing it well enough so that there is hunger in the world, but sudden mass dyings, which were very common in the 1960s and earlier, they don't happen anymore. The kind of thing we saw in Ethiopia in the early '80s that was the last of the great famines. So when some of the extreme environmentalists talking about climate change saying it is inevitable that billions will die of climate change in the next few decades, they are simply exaggerating.

And they're not exaggerating, they're making it up, actually. It's not there in anybody's projections of what climate change will actually do. And as a result, I think we're teaching our children a counsel of despair that there's no point in them even trying, there's nothing they can do. Because when you talk to these environmentalists about the one technology that would make a difference, nuclear power. You could put nuclear power stations up and you could displace quite a lot of our energy system with a zero carbon system.

Very simply they say, "Oh, we don't want that either, we don't like that." - I still can't understand how that- Michael Shellenberger and others have been vocal about how nuclear is an important solution. France, right wing Paragon France has 80% of its power coming from nuclear, from what I understand. And they haven't yet turned into the China syndrome, I guess maybe it's right around the corner though, right? The China syndrome stuff's right around the- Even the example of in Japan and the aftermath in Fukushima with the tsunami, in a way, proves the point because it didn't cause the kind of mass catastrophe that we're being told.

I mean, that was a real stress test to have what happened happen. - The Fukushima disaster killed nobody. The tsunami killed a lot of people, but the explosion of the reactor and the resulting radioactivity has killed nobody as far as we can tell, okay? Now the reason that reactor exploded was cause it was an old design that should have been retired quite a long time before and it was a bad design cause it had the pumps in the basement where the tsunami was gonna get to them first.

And had nuclear power continued to be allowed to be improved and evolved over the last few decades, that design would've been got rid of as with the Chernobyl design, which was a really stupid design of reactor run by a really stupid regime with really bad incentives. And it still only killed a relatively small number of people. In terms of the deaths per kilowatt hour, nuclear is far safer than solar and wind. - I think it's far safer even than fossil fuels in terms of deaths.

- Yes, it is, definitely. - I feel like this is another example of the quote you said at the start of our conversation, which is, it's not what we don't know, but it's what we know that isn't so. So you have this fear mongering around nuclear power, and the movie, "The China Syndrome" and Three Mile Island in Chernobyl and then decades later, we're living with this nuclear atomic scare mentality where our fear about nuclear, there's no resemblance to the actual record of it in terms of safety or power.

- But not only that, but it's prevented innovation in nuclear that would've resulted in even more inherently safe designs. Because nowadays, if you want to design a new type of nuclear power station, you have to go through a generic design assessment that is a billion dollar project, basically, to get it approved. It takes many years, your investors lose patients along the way, and you are not then allowed to change so much as a screw or nut when you're building it, you've gotta stick to the plan absolutely.

So you can't learn by doing, you can't say actually there's a safer way of doing this or a quicker way of doing this, which is what we do all the time. So nuclear has been cut off from that process of learning by doing that is vital to innovation. And it's got stuck basically with the design that we allowed in the 1960s and hasn't been allowed to change much since. By now, nuclear should be producing next generation reactors that are inherently much safer, don't rely so much on water, which can turn to steam and that kind of thing, and produce heat as well as power in very efficient ways, recycle their fuel more efficiently, et cetera, et cetera.

And the process that's stopping that is the process of overregulation of the thing, allegedly to make it safer. But actually it's making it more dangerous. - This all reminds me of a quote that you used from H. L. Mencken, in one of your blog posts and I wanna read it because I think- And again, it speaks to this sort of fear industrial complex that has marred our ability

to make progress with nuclear, it's driving our kids crazy with their concerns about climate change and violence and disease and a whole host of things that is, I think, contributing.

Here's the quote, "The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed and hence clamorous to be led to safety by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins all of which are imaginary." Now that's H. L. Mencken who is as sharp as they come, but it does feel like we are being manipulated quite a lot when it comes to these major issues. You've talked about what's actually in the IPCC reports around climate change and how far the public discourse bears resemblance from them.

And I recently heard, and it might have even been a book, I believe it was from the book "Unsettled", which was a former Obama administration regulator. And he basically said, if I remember correctly, that there's a kind of de-evolution that happened, you have the report and then you have the summary of the report, like the front page, the lazy man's version. And that pulls on more alarmism than the actual report would suggest.

- And gets published before the report so that nobody actually looks at the actual report. The summary for policy makers is produced before the report behind it. - Which is weird. - That's a slight of hand that is frankly disgraceful. - So then you have this- Friedrich Hayek said the secondhand dealers of information, the journalists, the politicians, the pundits, the activists, and each step along the way, the hyperbole and the doomsday knob gets cranked. What is going on there?

Because you've observed this dynamic from the inside, cause you're actually reading the reports. Why is that happening that way? - It seems to be a human phenomenon that as we simplify, we exaggerate and we make more pessimistic with almost everything. I first observed it covering the story of acid rain. Now the acidification of rain by coal fire burn station burning is real, and it had some effect on some lakes and things like that.

But the idea that it was killing forests on a grand scale became a major moral panic in the 1980s, it was a huge story. It was on the cover of magazines and there were big international

meetings to discuss it. And you couldn't get know anyway, without people talking about acid rain and how we can lose all the forests. Half the forests were already dying, more and more exaggerated numbers. And at one point as a reporter, I was retelling this, I was passing it on.

I was saying, it's really scary. So and so says, we're gonna lose all our forests and here's another paper saying this and that. And then at some point I remember just sort of challenging one of these scientists and saying, look, can you show me the evidence for all these dying trees? And it began to fall apart, it began to fall apart through my fingers. No, you can't actually see these trees cause they're different. And anyway, they're losing some of their needles and well don't they always lose some needles?

Yeah, but probably slightly more than usual. And well, you know what? Show me these forests that are dead. Well, it's not really quite like that. And eventually - - It's dying of trees, but there are no dead trees or forests that have been dying. - Eventually, the U.S. government produced a thing called the National Asset Precipitation Program Assessment Project or something and NAPPAP, it was called, which was a major study of all this. And it said, actually we were wrong, trees weren't dying.

This wasn't killing forests. And by then, nobody wants to know, the problem had sort of gone away, they'd moved on to the ozone layer or global warming. Instead the environmentalists said they'd solved, I mean, they'd cut self remissions from power stations anyway. So everyone said, we've actually solved the problem, the trees have got better by the way, since we solved the problem. It just wasn't ever an issue. It was a completely made up fantasy story. Not that rain was getting more acid, but that forests were dying as a result of acid rain, that just wasn't happening.

And yet to this day, if you talk to people, they say, oh yeah, well that was an example of where we found a problem just in time and we solved it with big international meetings and all this kind of thing. So I became very cynical about these things. I started next time I was confronted with a scare, falling sperm counts, whatever it might be. I said, "Well, okay, show me the evidence." But almost nobody does say, show me the evidence.

Almost everybody, as you
say, relies on the summaries made by either reporters or activists who don't give data behind the story. And as a
result, you get
this megaphone effect of increasing the alarm and decreasing the accuracy of the story. - It's funny because
when
we were talking about COVID, your paper was that Coronavirus
is the wolf on the loose, referring to the boy who cried wolf.

And I think what we're
seeing in some respects, trust in all these
institutions is going down pretty much across the board, not just in the United States,
but in the rest of the world. And it sort of correlates with the rise of the information tsunami
we're being hit by. A friend of mine, Martin Gurri
has a great book on this, "The Revolt of the Public",
where he talks a lot about this. It does feel like there's only so much you can ratchet up the
fear without evidence before you just create a
generation of cynics who say, well, I don't believe you, I
don't believe anything you say.

Are we at risk of a kind
of weird feedback loop where you have people who
the fear industrial complex, constantly turning up the
temperature on the hype and then the great majority of the public increasingly saying, I don't
believe a word you say. Which has its own possible,
maybe that's on net healthy. Maybe it's also kind of bad
for having a singular society where we all feel like
we're part of a society. What's the balancing act here?

- I think one of the troubles we're having in getting people to take the vaccine is partly because they have
got so used to being lied to that they don't trust
anyone who says this vaccine is, on the whole, safe or at least safer than the
disease it's designed to prevent. So yes, I do think that a cynical reaction to the realization that you've been
overselling problems to me means that quite a lot of people say, oh, COVID is made up, it's just an excuse for
getting us in line and so on.

And the vaccine is an
attempt to control me. And well, given how much the government is trying to tell me what to do, you can see
why people
come to that conclusion. But I personally think the vaccines are, vaccination generally, is one of the most
incredible
inventions of human history. It's fantastically good. It's brilliant that this

speedier way of making vaccines through messenger RNA came along just in time through the dedicated work of a lot of people.

And investment in vaccine development and the speeding up of vaccine development had frankly been too poor in the years running up to the pandemic. There were people who were complaining about it just before the pandemic. A guy called Wayne Koff, who was the president of the Global Vaccines Institute wrote a piece in October, 2019 when he didn't know the pandemic was coming, saying we are too slow at making vaccines. It takes too long. The failure rate's too high, the cost is too high.

And actually this is the best technology we've got to make the world safe. Please, can we invest a bit more money in this instead of climate change. He didn't say that, but I would say that. That we were scared of the wrong things and not focusing on the right things. Cause the possibility of a pandemic was always there and it was a bit of an orphan, it wasn't given the attention that it deserved. Vaccines are fabulous technology.

It's a real shame if we've made the public so cynical that they're not prepared to accept them because of some of the things we've already done to show that we, as the institutions, are not trustworthy. - To sort of bring this back to a positive goal, a positive vision. Your book, "How Innovation Works", makes the case for the way we discover better ways to build the world, better ways to solve problems for each other, ways to make actual material progress.

And I guess my question is, when we look at the way fear is being used and the way it's having an impact on our kids in particular, and future generations, what does that mean for innovation? It does feel like there is a negative feedback loop problem. When you have a generation that is increasingly not just pessimistic, but has actual medical grade anxiety, is actually being treated for anxiety. How should we think about this relationship between our fears and the fear industrial complex and its narrative and the kind of innovation that'll actually make the world a better place?

- You'll often hear people say that you need to be worried in order to go out and innovate a solution to your worries. That the only reason we solve these problems is cause we're worried that they're gonna overwhelm us. There's no evidence for that. If you look at the history of innovation, it's not

driven by worried
pessimistic people. It's driven by ambitious,
optimistic people. Steve Jobs or Jeff Bezos or Thomas Edison or Edward Jenner, the
inventor of the vaccine.

They weren't saying, "Oh my God, the world's coming to an end, I better invent something." They were saying,
"You know what? I could go and invent something and maybe get rich along the way and maybe give humanity
a good new technology." It happens in relatively wealthy places, more than in poor places. It happens in Silicon
valley these days, in Renaissance, Italy in the 1500s probably the richest spot
on earth at the time. In Som, China, about a thousand years ago or the most prosperous
civilization of the day, et cetera.

So it's happening where people
are ambitious and successful and looking around saying, "You know what? I can make the world a better place."
It's not happening
where people are saying, "We're doomed, we're
doomed, we're doomed." I'm afraid the idea that you tell people, the world is doomed, there's
nothing you can do about it, and then expect them to go out and innovate better things in
the world is pretty stupid. They're not gonna do that, if you do that.

And a lot of the younger generation today, just aren't interested in new technologies, new possibilities, new
ways of doing things
as a solution to problems, cause they keep being told, "There's no point, it's all
gonna end in disaster anyway." And at least that's my reading
of the psychological problems that we're inflicting on people. I personally think with
respect to climate change, what we should say to young people, is yes, this is a problem. Yes, we need to solve it.

The way we're gonna do it,
is with inventing something, whether it's a new low carbon technology or a way of cheaply
burying carbon underground or a way of screening
off the sun on hot days or whatever it might be or growing plants faster in the desert. I don't know, whatever it
might be. - All the above. - Get out there and invent, get out there and try new things cause it's fantastic
and exciting when you do and look at what
innovation has done for us.

It has caused child mortality to collapse, to extraordinarily low levels for the first time in human history. Now,
that's the greatest measure
of misery I can think of, having to bury a child. I can't think of a worse thing than that. And isn't it rather
wonderful that through vaccines,
nutrition and hygiene and water purification, we've got that down to
incredibly low levels.

Africa is seeing the levels of child mortality now that Europe had only a generation or so ago and that were thought to be uniquely low even then. But it's now, it really is happening and why not? Let's see if we can go even further and make life even better for people. Because if you'd said a hundred years ago, in 1920, there's a lot wrong with the world, there's a lot getting worse.

There's all sorts of horrible things happening. There's this new technology called radio and people are using it to stir up hatred, which they were, just like social media today. And there's new weapons called gas, that's gonna be used in warfare and has already been used in warfare. And we're gonna be able to bomb cities and kill civilians in the next war, which they did, et cetera, et cetera. So we should stop inventing stuff cause it's only making the world worse.

Then we'd have missed out on the destruction of poverty, the dissolution of child mortality, the increase in lifespan. I mean, lifespan has gone up in my lifetime by five hours per day, roughly. Average human lifespan, averaged over the whole planet. When I was born, basically the average person lived to 49, today, they lived to 71. That's unbelievable, no human being has ever lived through a change like that. When I was born, 50% of the world lived in extreme poverty that's less than \$2 a day.

Today, about 8% of the world lives like that. No human being has ever lived through a transformation like that. - It's funny because I had a mini version of this conversation with my son driving into school this morning, knowing we were gonna be talking. And he said the exact thing, he said, "Well, but pop, isn't the fear what we need to drive ourselves forward? And isn't it important that these activists are out there, even if they're sort of lying and sort of making things up in order to get people to get motivated?"

And I guess for me, it comes down to something that I think just runs through all of your work and it's sort of two mentalities. There are two mentalities that frankly, we're gonna be talking about all the time on this channel and that is having a growth mindset and having a sense of what psychologists call, an internal locus of control, having agency. I can make choices that affect the world around me. I am not a victim of circumstance.

I am not a victim of
the system or the world. And what I'm hearing you say, is that those are the two things that are the engine of
innovation. If think I have control, then
I can invent and I can build. Cause otherwise why
would I invent anything? It's not gonna matter, there's
nothing I can do about it. - There's a really interesting phenomenon, which is that if you ask
people about their own lives, they're not particularly pessimistic.

They think they're gonna get richer and on the whole, they do. They think they're better
drivers than they are. They think they're gonna stay
married longer than they do. People actually have quite,
almost unrealistic hopes, for their own lives. - Probably, especially Americans, I bet. - Yes, maybe, that may be
true, but for the planet or for the bigger the unit you talk about, they're quite cheery
about their hometown too. But if you start talking
about their country, they say it's doomed.

And once you talk about the globe, they say it's all over, it's a disaster. So there's this strange disconnect that
people are quite
optimistic about their own life and extremely pessimistic
about their planet. Why is that? Well, because in their own life, the news comes to them from them. They find
out what's
happening in their life, they know they're in control
of what happens next, they know how things are going. Whereas for the planet,
they're relying on some media telling them what's happening.

- And they don't feel
like any control, right? - They have no control, yeah. - Do you have any parting
words for dads in particular? You're dad, we're called
Dad Saves America. And the reason is I
believe that we as dads, have a unique role we can
play in the lives of our kids. What is your advice for dads, especially dads who might be
seeing some of this anxiety take hold with their kids
about climate change and COVID and school shootings and violence and all the things that are being abused,
from a facts perspective, to
make our kids scared to death?

- I think it's just to tell your kids, "Don't despair, be ambitious,
grasp the opportunities." There are incredible opportunities. Look at the lives of people
all around the world today and for generations past, the number of people who've
been able to improve their lives and have happy lives and have more happiness than unhappiness. There has
never been a

better time to be alive. You wouldn't have wanted to be compared with 200 years ago, would you really want to be there with no anesthetics?

Imagine the dentistry 200 years ago. - I was just gonna say the dentist. The trip to the dentist alone is reason enough to be happy and be alive in the 21st century. - So just try and imagine how much better it might be in a hundred years from now. I mean, if you think how far we've come in a hundred years, since 1921, in terms of human living standards around the world, imagine that we do that again.

The life will be incredible, I mean, just literally incredible, we can't believe it. And that's easily possible, there's no reason why that couldn't happen. So why not have a go at making it happen and be part of it? You are so lucky to be alive now, kids, have a crack at making it better for yourselves and other people. This isn't just about you, the point of the world is to help other people because then they can help you.

I mean, the big theme of human history is getting narrower and narrower at what we produce so that we are wider and wider at what we consume, in my view. Cause we work for other people. What you do in your job is you supply other people with things they need in the hope that they'll supply you with things you need. And that way we get more and more efficient, we get better and better at looking after people.

And we're all leading nicer lives. It's easily possible. Yes, there's gonna be horrible things go wrong. Yes, you are gonna have miserable moments, but you're also gonna have some great times. - Well, I can't think of a more solidly rational optimist eloquent than that, Matt. So thank you very much. - Thank you, John, I've really enjoyed the conversation. - I hope you enjoyed conversation with Matt Ridley. The biggest thing I've learned from Matt over the years is that we must consciously train ourselves and our kids to seek out the actual data and not allow our negativity bias to lead us to being manipulated by the fear industrial complex or anyone else for that matter.

Because when we do the work, it turns out there's plenty to be rationally optimistic about, even today. And it's through that optimism and growth mindset that we naturally develop solutions to the very real challenges America faces. Be sure to check out Matt Ridley's excellent series of books, we'll link to them below. If this has been valuable to you, please share it with the people you know, and the best

way you can help us is to like subscribe and hit that notification bell.

We believe that dads are heroes and play an important part in saving America from the challenges we all face together. And now we leave you with a dad out there on the internet doing something positively awesome. - Here we go. - You do your dance, do your dance, do your dance do your tooth dance, do your tooth dance. Okay, here we go. Okay, wait a second. Okay, are you ready? Let's do it now? - Are you ready for the finale?

- Ready? Five, four, three, two, one. - It came out. - Oh my God, it's bleeding. - Give me money, I'm getting money.