



56. Understanding Fear

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Future Sense is a podcast edited from the radio show of the same name, broadcast on BayFM in Byron Bay, Australia, at www.bayfm.org. Hosted by Nyck Jeanes and well-known international futurist, Steve McDonald, Future Sense provides a fresh, deep analysis of global trends and emerging technologies. How can we identify the layers of growth personally, socially and globally? What are the signs missed; the truths being denied? Political science, history, politics, psychology, ancient civilisations, alien contact, the new psychedelic revolution, cryptocurrency and other disruptive and distributed technologies, and much more.

This is Future Sense.

Nyck: And a great welcome to my co-host Steve McDonald. Morning, Steve.

Steve: Good morning, Nyck.

Nyck: Lovely to see you here. You've been down in Adelaide, my hometown, over the weekend.

Steve: Yes. Just a very quick trip down to Adelaide to screen the documentary *From Shock to Awe*, which went very, very well on Saturday.

Nyck: Yes, so that's the third screening. We did one here, first up, in Byron a few weeks ago, one in Brisbane last weekend, and Adelaide, just gone.

Steve: Yes. Enjoyed Adelaide. Made some good contacts down there—therapists and scientists and the like—got lots of interest.

Nyck: Fantastic. Now, on today's show, we're looking at, well, a couple of things, but what's the sketch?

Steve: Well, it's all about fear today. So it kind of puts us in line with the rest of mainstream media, I guess, doesn't it?

Nyck: FEAR: False Evidence Appearing Real. That was the old sort of New Age quote, but it's not a bad message.

Steve: I think obviously fear is growing as we move into this very significant period of global change and the uncertainty rises. Most people don't know what's going on, why things are changing, where we're headed, and, of course, there's always talk about the sixth major planetary extinction and climate change being a major threat; and how do we deal with all that? What do we do with it?

Nyck: Well, that's right, and we are encouraging you, as always on this show, to perhaps, as you do in your particular way from where you come from, to look at these things perhaps in a different light and to look for the positive. I think one of the things we're thinking about is how fear can sometimes quell the natural light of a person—the natural ability to radiate, if you will, without getting too cosmic about it.

Steve: That's right, and sometimes it can be really useful as well.

Nyck: Right, so fear can be useful. That's the other side of the equation here.

Steve: So don't be afraid to text in if you want to join the conversation.

Nyck: Deeply afraid? Text in immediately. You can do that, of course, and you should. We always like to hear from you, that's for sure.

Nyck: Here on *Future Sense* on *BayFM*—fear! It's a big topic.

Steve: It is. There's lots we can say about it. Let's start by just mentioning that it is a normal aspect of human nature. It's one of the most basic human emotions that's

shared by all humans; and not just humans, of course—all sorts of organisms seem to feel fear as well. I think in the First Tier of consciousness, which is looking at humanity overall from Hunter-Gatherer times through to now, and just beyond now into this emerging Postmodern paradigm, it's still a key driver right through our existence—how do we survive in this world in different ways? In each one of the layers of consciousness which equate to the human paradigms, eras, there are key fundamental questions like, for example at Layer 3, if the world is a jungle, how do I survive in the jungle? How do I fight for my own survival? The nature of the question changes as we move through the different paradigms or eras but the fundamental focus on 'how do I survive?' is still there.

Nyck: I'm thinking as you speak, that, of course, as we come in as babies, we probably don't have direct fear, but we very quickly learn to be afraid, I guess, from our parents or caregivers having their own fear about our wellbeing and the wellbeing of the surroundings, and trying to make that safe; and natural primal safety that we all need as creatures, as biological beings. Interesting that we probably don't come in with fear, or do we?

Steve: I would argue that we do. I guess it depends how you define fear, but if you think of fear as a survival-driven alarm system that alerts us to some kind of threat, whether it be threat of harm, or threat of not surviving—I mean, if you stop feeding a baby, sooner or later, the baby is going to be alarmed, right? So you could see that as a fundamental kind of instinctive fear of not surviving. And then, of course, we do learn from our life conditions, and people around us and our experiences, to associate certain things outside of us with fear. For example, I can remember being taught to be afraid of snakes when I was a kid. Those sorts of fears that are taught at a very early age can be very, very strong and difficult to get beyond.

Nyck: That's certainly true. I think it's pretty clear, too, that we probably impose, if you will, or lay upon our children these days, a lot more fears than we're used to. I mean, that's arguable as well, of course. There have always been fearful things in life, if not nature, something that we've created that's dangerous—don't stand on the edge of a ledge, don't touch the hot stove and so forth—so those things we learn. But it would seem today that there's a lot more to be afraid of.

Steve: I think there's some truth in that. We are living in a more complex world and so the greater complexity brings more things to potentially be afraid of, but it's also interesting just to look back at the similar patterns in the past. One of the things that comes to mind is this fear of exposing children to screens like computer screens, phone screens and those sorts of things, and then if you look back to the time when wireless

radio was first invented, you can see exactly the same lines being used—this is going to ruin our kids, we can't let them listen to the radio, those sorts of things. So it's also good to be mindful of repeating patterns—you know, same old, same old.

Nyck: And all that, of course, is indicating how we are afraid, essentially, of change, whatever that change may be.

Steve: That's a really interesting thought, actually. Fear of change and also fear of no change. For example, in most religious belief systems that talk about hell or its equivalent, hell is a place where nothing changes. It's like you go there, it's not good and it doesn't change.

Nyck: Right. My Latin teacher at school, when he was mad at us or me or somebody, would say 'you'll be going down the slippery slope into the eternal bonfire.' That notion of the eternality of hell—that it will never change; it will be nasty and awful forever—that's a pretty scary thing. That's been a very successful message that's been perpetrated by religions, in particular, for a long time.

Steve: Absolutely, and in our present time, the media plays an enormous role in spreading fear, and I guess partially, at least, because there's a demand for it, right? People have this fascination with things going wrong.

Nyck: It just supply and demand! If you need some fear, we'll give you plenty of it. You want more? We'll give you more.

Steve: That's right. Take a look at the kind of media that gets put out by Hollywood and how much fear is built into that. It's almost like they've got a checklist of things that they must include in a movie—you've got to have a gunfight, you've got to have a car crash—there's always got to be these things going wrong just to fulfil the quota.

Nyck: Even more-so these days—and there's always been the notion of the end times—eschatology is the study of the end times and eschaton is like an end time. We had the end of the millennium, or 2012, the end of the Mayan calendar, or even 1999 and Y2K was a bit of an end-time sort of moment that we feared, so we continually put these places ahead of us where everything is going to change, everything is going to fall apart—or not change. It's amazing how we simply bow to that notion inside ourselves, largely. Why? Why do we need the fear, then?

Steve: Well, I guess we need it as an alarm system, first and foremost. It's a basic survival mechanism, and I think it's important not to forget that. We don't want to lose the capacity to be fearful, otherwise it could literally threaten our survival, so I think it's useful to understand it in that respect.

My personal experience around this has been an interesting one, having served in the military—that business is all about facing death in some way—and then suffering from post-traumatic stress as a result of serving in the war, and then coming back and having to deal with that anxiety disorder, and eventually getting to the point where I can understand what was going on and regain some sort of control over my body system instead of letting it run off without any sense of being able to control what was going on. I guess that's taught me to understand fear for what it is—to respect it as a very, very useful alarm system, but also to realise that for various reasons, it can also run off the rails.

Nyck: Well, you say that when fear becomes instinct and overrules thought—so that moment where fear as an understanding of a danger in an area of something that may or may not happen, that you need to be aware of on that level of survival, perhaps; of literally survival of the self—but where instinct takes over too much, that can perhaps be the wrong way of actually solving the challenge that you're faced with.

Steve: It can be. If we think about the three zones that humans grow through—this comes from Integral Theory—which is the pre-rational zone to start with, which we're born into when we're fully operating from urges and instincts and immediate needs; and then we grow into the rational zone where the rational mind finishes developing properly, and then we have the capacity to rationally consider our fears and perhaps control them or moderate them in some way.

Nyck: Or use them effectively, as you said. I mean, it is a tool to use where appropriate.

Steve: Yes, it's like 'take notice of this'. When we're faced with some extreme fearful thing, we can have that freeze-fight-or-flight response, and when that happens, there's a biological reaction which puts priority on our survival mechanisms and takes blood flow and attention away from things like the frontal lobes, which are the moderating mechanisms. Again, just going back to my military experience, a lot of military training is aimed at allowing people to face very, very fearful situations, but not dissolve into unthinking behaviour. That is a critical thing for a disciplined and well-intentioned military force—to be able to face fear of death and act rationally in that situation so that you still follow rules. And of course, we hear terrible stories from time to time about situations in war where soldiers break rules and they commit war crimes and those sorts of things, and these things do happen, but as a general rule, in a well-disciplined

military force like Australia's that is primarily focused on defence, people are trained to be able to face those extremely fearful situations, yet maintain the rational capacity to know that there are rules and rules that should be followed, and act according to the rules.

Nyck: I'm thinking, as you're speaking, particularly of the Vietnam War, or other wars—certainly earlier missions of the Australian and other militaries—where many of the soldiers were 19, 20 years old, which means, in fact, their prefrontal cortex is probably not fully developed, and so it might be much more difficult, arguably, for a younger soldier to find a considered approach to fear that's facing them and not to flip back into excessive amygdala reaction, and then from that excessively primal response which can lead to mistakes.

Steve: It takes a lot of conditioning to allow people to operate in a very disciplined way in those circumstances, that's for sure. Of course, in those sorts of situations, the commanders are usually older people who have, perhaps, a stronger rational capacity.

The other interesting thing is, looking at that pre-rational, rational and then the trans-rational zone as we evolve or develop as individuals, that there is a point in this First Tier-Second Tier transition, which is the boundary between the rational zone and the trans-rational zone, where there's a massive reduction in fear. We move into the trans-rational space and fear is no longer a major driver of behaviour, and that's a very, very significant thing, and something that augurs well for the future of humanity, because the more people who are operating beyond fear, then the more peaceful and harmonious the world will be.

Nyck: And we'll be looking at those elements of how fear drives us and why, and perhaps, as Steve has been saying here, in some cases fear is a useful motivator—it's necessary—but other times, if it gets out of hand, it's not. Perhaps to solve the challenges and problems that we have on the planet currently, we are going to require a much more considered approach than coming from a place of fear and despair and the like.

We'll be back shortly. Here on *BayFM*, you're tuned to *Future Sense* with Nyck and Steve.

Nyck: You're tuned to *Future Sense* here with Steve McDonald and Nyck Jeanes on *BayFM* 99.9. Today we're talking about fear, we're talking about progress, we're talking about what drives us at this time and how we can perhaps best be aware of what is driving us, and to become as conscious as possible about those motivations behind our actions.

Steve: Yes, we're going to talk a little bit about the fearful things that are around at the moment, like, for example, climate change, and also the use of fear as a manipulator—a tool for manipulating people—and that certainly happens as well. There was a really interesting article in the programme, *Future Tense*, about a week ago from *ABC Radio* that we will talk about just now (<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-08-29/humans-pessimistic-by-nature-but-future-not-all-bad/11452114>). It was quite a good overview, wasn't it, Nyck?

Nyck: Yes, well, basically, there's a lot in this article—really fantastic. It is from Antony Funnell, who runs the *Future Tense* show—that's the other show that's almost as good as ours. It's an article about losing perspective on the true state of the world and that fear is impeding our ability to make decisions and affect positive change—this is what we're focusing on a little bit here—and that most people, even in this relatively more enlightened bubble that we live in here, I think would argue that the world is going to hell in a handbasket in various ways; that things are getting worse and worse. This article is arguing on one hand that that's not really true.

Steve: That the world is not getting worse.

Nyck: The world's not getting worse; that there are actually many indicators that the world is getting better. A simple fact I pulled up this morning, for example: 100 years ago, literacy rates overall in the world were about 23%—that's pretty low. Now, 100 years later, literacy rates—and there are different estimations—but estimates are around about 85%, which is extraordinary. I found that a little hard to believe but it looks like it is true. That's a vast improvement in the world in a century, that's for sure. And there are many other indicators that show that in many ways the world is actually a better place.

Steve: That's right, and there's a wonderful website that we often mention on this show called www.humanprogress.org, which has all the data on that, if you want to cheer yourself up and just go and see how things are really getting better rather than looking at the mainstream media, which might convince you otherwise.

Nyck: And that's what the next point of Professor Pinker who is quoted much in this—Steven Pinker—we are familiar with him; we've talked about him a little bit before on the show, I think. He argues that our media culture, itself, shoulders much of the blame for this negative idea—the idea that "the only serious journalism, and the only serious intellectual commentary, is one that points to what can go wrong and with forebodings of doom", and we've certainly seen plenty of that at the moment. That is, itself, a very

interesting psychological posture that we humans have adopted at this time, through media.

Steve: It is, and during times of change, as we're in right now, because things become a little unstable and the future is uncertain—because for most people, they don't have any map or a real indication of where we might be headed, so they just look at what's happening day to day—the normal human response when we don't have a map is just to think that whatever's happening now is going to keep happening. Of course, this comes back to our fear of things not changing. We can then—and we normally do in times of change, as we often speak about on this show—we start this regressive search where we go backwards, looking for something that might help us explain what's going on and help us cope with what's happening, and in the process of doing that, there is a reduction in the complexity of our operating system, you could say; or you could call that a dumbing down, to be blunt about it.

Nyck: Yes. Ignorance is bliss, they used to say, and it sort of has a new meaning in this day of social media.

Steve: Exactly, and in these days of instant media, of course, these things can be very easily amplified because as soon as one small group or community of people start regressing and thinking that things are really bad, then it's very easy for that fear to spread in a viral way.

Nyck: It becomes a meme itself—a new meme of reconfigured old fear, you could say.

Steve: It does. We're coming out of a Scientific-Industrial era where the worldview was one of opportunism and people who see that another group of people are afraid of something can sometimes use that fear to manipulate people to whatever ends that they might desire—and there's certainly some indicators of that kind of thing going on at the moment, particularly through the mainstream news media.

Nyck: Absolutely. It's very interesting, this idea that he's bringing together in this article, that even a positive report—I really landed on this a bit, too—that a positive report in media will be seen often as a kind of scheme or that someone's trying to sell you something; things that are uplifting, 'oh, they're just trying to sell us something'. Curious that we've been manipulated in a way into responding to the positive in that way, and to the negative in like, 'oh, we're concerned now, we're engaged because it's negative, it's difficult, it's proving how wrong and difficult and troublesome and fearful these times are, and that actually somehow resonates more with me than the positive story over

here.' Thinking about this subject, I personally find this really extraordinary because you go through a list of news stories on any news service and basically just one thing after the other is horror and terror—and not to deny these things, that they're not happening; that's not what we're saying here—but how do we respond to that? What is this indicating about the human condition itself right now?

Steve: It's true, and I guess there are many, many reasons why the people who control the media might want to spread that fear. Sometimes it's simply about, as you said, selling things—it's about getting the readership or the listenership or whatever it might be, so that they can have a whole bunch of people listening to their ads, and so if there's some sensationalist, fearful story that they can run, then basically it's going to mean more money for their advertisers.

Nyck: Yes, I think, as you say, on commercial media outlets, especially free-to-air commercial television and radio and the like, the negative stories are immediately countered by this glossy, glamorous advertising that can pop up in the next five minutes or so and flood you with all these brilliant, beautiful, amazing images of cars and fashion and amazing places around the world. That's sort of counter to the supposedly hard news stories that have just come before, for example. But the hard news stories themselves are now highly contested because it's very difficult to know what's actually true, number one.

Steve: One interesting connection there is that, as we mentioned earlier, when we respond to fear, we can descend from the rational operating zone down into this pre-rational zone where we're driven by our basic urges and instincts, and if you want to sell something like ice cream or perfume, then it's actually not a bad idea to have the audience operating from their basic instincts. So there's definitely a strategy there.

Nyck: Oh, yeah, we shouldn't mention alcohol or tobacco advertising, though, wherever that is still technically available.

Steve: That's right. Feeling fearful or worried? Have a smoke.

Nyck: It's interesting that part of this article, too, quotes Carter Phipps from the *Institute for Cultural Evolution*, a US-based, not-for-profit organisation. He says that "pessimism has become part of the 'modern human condition'." He says that it's stripping people of both their focus and resilience. We talk a lot about resilience on this programme, actually, and it's a word that is out and about a lot at the moment. It's a very good word, something we clearly need to develop more of on this planet to survive, if you will, or to

certainly solve the problems we have here. I found that really interesting, that this pessimistic view—the dark, fearful view—actually deprives people of focus and resilience. Do you think that's true? I mean, again, it's arguable. People who are involved in *Extinction Rebellion*, for example, would probably argue, 'no! We're really focused and we're battling for resilience', but ...

Steve: I think it depends on the circumstances. It can be true. If you're looking at it from the point of view of a regression in our rational capacity—regressing that back to that pre-rational zone—then it does deprive you of the capacity to think rationally and to plan in detail, but in small doses, where it's not enough to cause that regression, where you can still maintain that rational coping capacity, then that kind of tension can drive focus, and that is really what's behind the evolutionary trajectory that we follow when we need to go through change. We build tension and that's just a natural thing; and that's exactly what's happening in the world right now. That is what we call 'the slingshot effect', where we're descending back into old values which are less appropriate, actually, to deal with what we're facing, but what they do is they very effectively increase tension, just like increasing the tension on an elastic band on a slingshot, to give us the momentum to actually move forward and evolve and develop as individuals.

Nyck: Carter Phipps, from that *Institute for Cultural Evolution*, then goes on to say—and I wonder if it fits into what you just said there—he says: "I have friends who say 'maybe it's all over for the human condition, it's all over, we have to mourn the Earth, that's the main job now.'" That's what we've got to do because it's all over. I mean, that's a bit different, isn't it?

Steve: Yes, it's very much a surrender, isn't it? It's a self-sacrificing perspective, and that fits with the values regression, because we're moving from what has been the dominant worldview, which is a self-expression, Modern Scientific-Industrial perspective, and the natural trajectory of change is taking us backwards into the self-sacrifice of the old Authoritarian way where we give ourselves up to a higher authority—that was very prominent in the Agricultural era. And I guess in a sense, that kind of statement is a surrender to Mother Nature. It's like, 'I can't cope here, I can't change things, I just give up.'

Nyck: I guess the question is, what is the higher authority to somebody? Because if you've gone back in that regressive search, to say religion or to old institutions and structures in your life or in your family or in your nation or your culture, that's one thing, but if you're slipping back ... I've just lost my thread! My goodness! That's because I've got a big text in and I was halfway through reading it.

Steve: Do you want to read it?

Nyck: I'll read it: "Fear is the most fundamental emotion and that is why fear campaigns win elections over compassion", and we've seen plenty of that. "Love, joy and all other emotions that connect us to others come secondary in relation to the innate need to survive, which includes the fear of not being part of the social group. Unfortunately, the reptilian brain kicks in before the rational brain, and that's why fear-based politics is winning over compassion-based politics. Great topic, guys, Max." Thanks, Max.

Steve: Yes, thanks, Max. That's absolutely true in this First Tier of consciousness. As I mentioned before, and we'll talk a little bit more about this later, it does change when we go through this massive leap—this "momentous leap" that Clare Graves talked about—where we move beyond the rational way of operating into this trans-rational zone and we have a major, major reduction in the amount of fear that we feel. So, yes, very, very interesting.

Nyck: You're here on *Future Sense*, and thanks for joining us here today. Please text in if you wish and join the conversation.

We've been looking at fear and pessimism and more; and we've been looking a little bit, just in the last segment, at an article in the ABC recently, called *Why We See the Past Through Rose-Coloured Glasses but Not the Future* (<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-08-29/humans-pessimistic-by-nature-but-future-not-all-bad/11452114>). Just expanding a bit on pessimism again, Queensland University psychologist, Roy Baumeister, argues that "there is a straightforward evolutionary explanation for our pessimism", and that is basically to avoid disaster, that being the first job that we had when we were at that early stage of evolution. But also, it's the case that when the fear of the future becomes replaced by a kind of romantic vision of the past—the past was better than the future can possibly be—that feelings of disempowerment and absolutism arise; the view that society is broken rather than simply facing challenges and difficulties. Then we start reaching for populist leaders or messianic ideas, and that seems to resonate pretty much right now on the planet.

Steve: Yes, I think that reflects this regressive values search back to Layer 4—the old Authoritarian kind of religious thinking—and I really think there's a lot of truth in the evolutionary thinking you just described there. If we look at how and why we broke out of Layer 4 into Layer 5—so I'm talking now about out of the Authoritarian-Agricultural era into the Modern Scientific-Industrial era—we went from a time of believing that all truths came from a higher authority, and in many, many cases that was some kind of

spiritual authority, like a God within a religious setting. Then, through a series of scientific discoveries in the Scientific-Industrial Revolutions and those sorts of things, we realised that, okay, those old values don't quite fit with the reality now; we're seeing things that contradict what we were told. So these new Modern values emerged and they were, by definition, critical and cynical, because those revolutions generated critical thinking or were the result of critical thinking, which made us rethink all of our values and rethink the way we understood the world and reality itself.

I might just read a short segment from the notes of Dr Clare W. Graves, who's a developmental psychology researcher that we often talk about on this show. He's talking here about people who are living according to the Modern Scientific-Industrial value set. He says: "They are critical and cynical, delivering cold, quantitative evaluation and often harsh feedback to others. They have a disdain for empathy and, as opposed to the egocentric system ...", he's talking there about the third layer, which is previous to the Agricultural-Authoritarian layer, "... as opposed to the egocentric system, they will do odds calculations and realistic probabilities, not brash risk-taking", so going back two operating systems, to that Egocentric which is back in the pre-rational zone. That's where you certainly see a similar kind of behaviour, except it's very, very raw and brash and there's no real calculation of risks—people just act according to what they need to satisfy their needs and desires and those sorts of things—whereas in the Scientific-Industrial, we get this rational capacity emerging where we can stop and think about the risks of doing what we're going to do and then do it in a calculated way. I guess the key thing there is that we evolved this critical thinking and cynical attitude in order to help us break out of those rigid authoritarian/religious ways of seeing the world, and that certainly, I think, is a big contributor to this pessimistic sort of worldview, particularly displayed by the media.

Nyck: We've also related this to Machiavellian politics. Niccolò di Bernardo dei Machiavelli, of course, an Italian diplomat, politician, historian, philosopher, writer, playwright and a poet of the Renaissance period—you could call him a Renaissance Man—but he's also been called "the father of modern political philosophy and political science". Of course, he represents a kind of lack of moral code—a movement away from that Layer 4 moral value system—to an open-ended Postmodern view that, well, basically anything goes. If it works and you can win from whatever you do, it can be justified in some way or other.

Steve: Yes. Just to correct the language, that's a Modern view, not a Postmodern view.

Nyck: Sorry, yes.

Steve: And what we see in these systems is that because these operating systems are worldviews or paradigms, they alternate between a focus on the individual—in other words, 'me'; a focus on me—and a focus on us, a communal focus. We were in a communal focus in the Agricultural era with the authoritarian system, which is very much about conforming to group standards, and it's within those communal systems that we actually construct our moral systems. When we break out of those into the individual I-me-mine oriented systems, then we break the rules. That's what it's all about. It's about busting out of the rigidity, the conformity, into diversity once again.

Nyck: And one sentence, of course, the well-known phrase, 'the end justifies the means', kind of sums it up, doesn't it? But that's a very problematic statement when you really, really look at it.

Steve: That's right, depending on what your role is in the play.

Nyck: Right.

Steve: Graves himself called modern values Machiavellian. In fact, I'll quote from his notes here. He says: "One could propose with descriptive design that fifth level values be called the Machiavellian system, an ethic of might is right." He also says that the acceptance of Machiavellian principles as an ethical system is somewhat difficult, but it is essential to understanding the modern life conditions, so he is quite clear about that Machiavellian nature of Modern Scientific-Industrial values. Just flicking quickly to the dictionary, for those of you who aren't familiar with the character of Machiavelli, the dictionary says: "Machiavellian is characterised by subtle or unscrupulous cunning, deception, expediency, or dishonesty."

Nyck: Absolutely.

Steve: And that's, of course, what's being uncovered now as we're at the end of this Modern Scientific-Industrial era. We've had quite a successful spin—quite a successful corporate image—plastered over what's been going on, but our social media, the transparency that we now have within our social systems, means that those veils don't work anymore and so everything's being uncovered. We're going through this great uncovering and we're starting to see all of the cunning, all of the hidden agendas, the deception, the expediency, the dishonesty, that has been, and still is, going on.

Nyck: One of the quotes I do like from Machiavelli, which is relevant right here, is: "the first method for estimating the intelligence of a ruler is to look at the men (or women, I guess) he has around him", and I guess if you look at some of the world leaders right now that we have on the world stage who are perhaps particularly Machiavellian, you can also see the kind of people that they have around them. You just have to look at the President of the United States and some of the characters who are still surrounding him, like John Bolton, for example, and others.

Steve: Exactly.

Just to step back a little bit, what's happening here in this discussion today is we're painting a picture, and the picture is showing that we're going through a values regression as a result of the increasing complexity in the world, and the fact that the old ways don't work so well anymore, so people are looking backwards for answers. That is absolutely an evolutionary dynamic, because by looking backwards, that increases the tension for change. In this time, where people are being more and more driven by fear and they have a tendency to think in simpler ways because of the regressive values, and the dominant paradigm is one of acting out of cunning and expediency, you've got a wonderful recipe there for chaos. You can perhaps start to imagine how people in positions of power would see this regression happening socially; perhaps even want to feed it, perhaps even want to feed the fear and then take advantage of the fact that people are more easily manipulated when they're fearful to achieve self-serving outcomes. That, I would argue, is certainly the case globally at the moment.

Nyck: Referring to the article in the *ABC* again, also regarding this, it is saying that future doom-saying is especially corrosive, especially when it's linked to a romanticised past and nostalgia for the past. That factors in right here, doesn't it? Because that's also encouraged in a way, by those forces that we're talking about that seek to regress or take us back. It was in the past when we were like that—when things were great, the halcyon days of existence—which essentially isn't true, though. It depends on your individual life, your perspective, your culture, everything about that. But essentially, we are sold this idea that the past is better and we should return to some of those elements there, because that's where we were safe, we were secure.

Steve: Yes, and that is a great example of this regressive values search and we hear it so often from politicians: 'let's get back to the old ways'.

Nyck: "Make America great again."

Steve: Exactly—those sorts of things. The wonderful opportunity amidst all of this is to use the kind of approach that we take on this show, and that is one where we're basing our discussions on developmental psychology, a research-based understanding of human nature. We can look at the patterns that actually reveal the kind of thinking that's going on—the kind of strategies that are being used—to hack these attempted manipulations. So we can look at, for example, some of the linear stories that we're being told around stuff like climate change, we can see that that kind of linear thinking is actually not accurate when we're talking about complex systems, and it's actually characteristic of the old Agricultural way of thinking, which was very rigid and linear—that there's only one thing that could happen; there's only one likely outcome and unless you get afraid and act, then you're going to be damned to hell forever. That's the kind of language that we're hearing from global spokespeople at the moment around climate change.

Nyck: And "you're either with us or against us."

Steve: Exactly, and there's no in-between; it's black and white.

Nyck: Problematic. We will come to some of those topics in the second hour.

Steve: Yes, so the key thing is that we can look at that and we can say, okay, something's not right here; there's quite likely some hidden agenda going on.

Nyck: Yes. We'll take a break here on a *Future Sense*.

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