

## **The Phases and Future of the Noosphere: Segment 5**

**Gregory Stark:** There's something that is consoling, or that is satisfying, that is reassuring, I guess, is what I'm looking for, is that, generally, when there have been these shifts in organizational level, from prokaryotic to eukaryotic, to metazoans, to this higher level entity, the prior levels have been incorporated and supported by, and protected at the higher level, because that organizational level arises in order to create homeostasis that can support and sustain the prior levels. And I think that that's much more likely to occur. I'm very optimistic, and I love technology and such, but I've grown to imagine that life, as it exists, 50 to a hundred years from now, might be extraordinarily satisfying for humans that are born into that environment. But our brains may simply not be malleable enough to comfortably adjust to those changes.

Just like right now. I mean, I'm very active with technology. Like the use of social media and communications technologies by natives...I have an 18 year old daughter, and to see her on Snapchat and interacting, and everything, it's a very different kind of sensibility than what I'm comfortable with. And I realize that my positioning and what I'm comfortable with is very different than my great grandparents, who would look at today in horror, and say, hmph.

**David Sloan Wilson:** The advent of writing was like that. Well, Gregory, a good way to sum up, I think, would be to ask the question, if you were to write a second edition of *Metaman*, what would you change from the first edition?

**GS:** I think that it's the biological insights, the analysis of the organism that I call *Metaman*, the superorganism, and the way it has cognitive structures that are involved, both computational, human components of that, monetary components that essentially organize and distribute our activity. So the view of the biology would not change very much. The sense of communications technology and our experience with that I am in the process of exploring much more deeply at this point, because I think that where that's leading us, and very quickly, in terms of transcending, most human activity that otherwise would be required for maintaining this structure is being displaced by the AI driven activity. I'm thinking very deeply about also, not just as an external viewer, observer of this, which is very satisfying intellectually, but I'm very caught up with, how do we maintain our quality of life within this evolutionary transition that's occurring? And how can we nudge this evolution, this transition in ways that support our wellbeing?

And that's what I'm doing. That's where we come back to *The Book of Questions*, where, to me, one of the biggest things that's occurring today is our social isolation and our lack of understanding of one another, which creates this fragmented society and a level of potential conflict that is very negative for us. I think we need to come back and find ways to reengage, to make these more humane, to feed our biology, rather than think that we're going to deny our nature as flesh and blood, as creatures, and plug into some metaverse, and that this is going to be a happy outcome for humans.

**DSW:** Oh, Gregory, I'm really glad that this is that this, as our conversation comes to a close, that it's taking this form. I want to tell you about one of our other conversations with Jim Coan and Garriy Shteynberg on this topic. Let me just tell you about this theory called social baseline theory that says this. Throughout our history as a species, individuals never lived alone. They always lived within small, and for the most part, highly cooperative groups, even when those groups were warring with other groups. So the one constant of our evolution, of our genetic evolution, has been to be a member of a highly cooperative group. What that means is that the individual mind and body has evolved to seamlessly integrate personal and social resources. When the mind and body makes its trade-off decisions, it is seamlessly integrating its individual resources with its social resources.

So when you isolate the individual and you take away the social resources, either in actuality or subjectively, then the brain and the body interpret this as an emergency situation. So the prescription is,

and it's a prescription that can be a low-tech, even a no-tech prescription, although technology can assist, is to get individuals functioning in the context of highly cooperative and nurturing groups whenever possible. The small, highly cooperative group is a cell of multicellular society. That's the missing link. Modern society pretends that the individual is the fundamental unit, and then there's large scale society. It is not recognizing this cell of the small cooperative group. So there's something that we can do right away, that will have a tremendous benefit, both for individuals and for large scale governance. That was the topic of that conversation.

**GS:** Oh, that sounds terrific. To me, it's very much in alignment with my thinking. Although to me, if we really want to preserve and enhance human wellbeing, protect it, essentially, it has to be very aligned with these very powerful dynamics of this evolutionary transition that's occurring. We're not going to divorce ourselves from technology. It becomes irrelevant, anything that does that. In other words, this has very powerful dynamics that are outside of our easy control. But what we can do is develop mechanisms that tie us together in larger ways and at scale, and that really bring together our humanity, our human qualities with the technologies, and allow those technologies to serve us.