

## **The Phases and Future of the Noosphere: Segment 9**

**David Sloan Wilson:** I'd like to finish up by just looking into the future. Now, everyone knows we need to expand cooperation to the global scale, that's not new with us. But we might have, I hope we have, maybe something to contribute knowledge-wise as to how that might happen. We now have the technological ability to create a global brain, for example. We're talking, for example, as if we were by each other's sides. So we have the technological ability, but that doesn't mean it's going to self-organize, surely it's not.

And so how can we use this knowledge as provisional as it is? We need to be humble about what we know, we've already said that, we know it's a story, it's not the story. But despite that, how can we use our provisional knowledge in order to build the scale of cooperation still higher to that final rung, basically, to global cooperation? Lesley.

**Lesley Newson:** So I think that something extraordinary has happened that we aren't really appreciating enough. And that is that people are no longer competing for reproductive success. Now, I don't think that humans ever competed as individuals for reproductive success because we're cooperative breeders. But what's happened in the last couple of hundred years is that people are no longer having as many children as they can afford. The family, which was the main driver, I think, of reproduction is now very weak and so individuals are choosing not to have very many children. So we're no longer competing in the fundamental Darwinian way.

So in the future, there's going to no longer be this competition, that we're still experiencing now, for resources. In the lifetime of today's children, probably the world's population is going to start to diminish. Not because of war, not because of toxicity, but just because people aren't having that many children. And I don't think that we've really grasped that. And we haven't really grasped what that means. What do you think about that?

**DSW:** I think that's a great point and the point that not many people appreciate. So, yeah. Peter.

**Peter Richerson:** Well, it seems to me that the history of the last century or so already points to a lot of progress on this project of creating a global social system. The necessity for this has been obvious to people since the creation of weapons of mass destruction before World War I. In the aftermath of World War I we created the League of Nations. Now, the League of Nations was a feeble thing by comparison to national political institutions. And even to this day, nation-states are the most powerful, single political force in the world. And they often have behaved very badly with respect to global commons problems, ranging from controlling nuclear weapons to global warming, to the extinction crisis and so on.

On the other hand, we've made a tremendous amount of progress and the United Nations is an improvement over the League of Nations. The United Nations has done really stalwart work with respect to the global climate problem. The IPCC for example, won the Nobel Peace Prize, right? For its contribution to turning basic science, basic atmospheric science into recommendations for policy. Now, this is all really great stuff. It's not good enough, but it seems to me that we just have to keep rolling the rock down the same road that created the IPCC. There's no magic in it, it's just plain brute political work.

So the world's biggest stumbling block, not the only one, but the world's biggest stumbling block to making progress on climate change is the Republican Party of the United States. And so if we're going to make progress on global warming, we've got to crush the Republican Party and Exxon oil company. It's just political work, right? It's just the same kind of thing that we've been struggling with for forever. But particularly, as problems that were once local have become global, the global commons problem, that really became manifest in the last century or so. We know how progress is made, we just have to do it and we need to push it faster because the rate we've been doing it in the past isn't good enough.

**LN:** But I think we also have to be patient because there's cultural lags, right? I think those require a certain amount of-

**PR:** Well, cultural lag is something to fight not to use as an excuse. Cultural lags should be a goad. We need to know how to reduce cultural lags not just use them as an excuse for doing nothing. So my thought about the future is the future is an adventure. We have no idea what the future will be, much of an idea about what the future will be like. And so it's just putting one foot in front of the other and trying to do the right thing and make improvements as best we can in the circumstances of the moment.

**LN:** But do you remember back in the 60s, the late 60s, early 70s, everybody was talking about the population explosion. And tons and tons of money was spent on trying to convince people to take birth control pills and things like that. And it turned out that none of that was necessary. It turned out that people... It was just a cultural lag in that within a half a generation or so people were reducing their fertility without birth control. They were actually choosing. You just had to wait until they kind of got it.

**PR:** That's fair enough. On the other hand, the decline in the birth rate has not resulted in a relaxation of the impact of humans on the environment because each individual aspires to affluence, that is characteristic of the west. And it's the number of people times their consumption that creates the impact. And consumption desires can increase without any known upper limit. I mean, we all might want to live like Saudi Arabian princes and princesses, and that would be extremely destructive.