

Welcome to *Entanglements*, the new podcast from the Jesus College Intellectual Forum. I'm so excited for you to join me, Noah, as we unpack and explore the human-nature relationship.

In the previous episode, I talked to Kate Raworth, author of *Doughnut Economics*. We discussed how modern mainstream economic theory has treated nature as external to the economy and wider society, and how this is unsustainable because it ignores the reality that in fact our economy and society are deeply embedded within the natural world.

To continue to explore how our modern practices are unsustainably exceeding our planetary boundaries, I took the train to Godalming to meet with Philip Lymbery, global CEO of the charity Compassion in World Farming and author of multiple books including *Farmageddon* and *Sixty Harvests Left: How to Reach a Nature-Friendly Future*. We spoke about how industrial farming and agriculture is not only cruel but damages the environment and damages ourselves.

With my previous conversation with Kate in mind, a key theme that I was interested in was the tension between thinking of ourselves as consumers or as citizens, as outsiders who try to manipulate nature to fit our wants and desires, or as participants in a wider ecosystem and web of life in which everything is interconnected and interdependent. As Philip and I sat down in his office with our cups of tea, I started by asking him to summarise what the goal of the charity Compassion in World Farming is.

**Philip Lymbery:** My name is Philip Lymbery, I'm the Global Chief Executive for Compassion in World Farming, which is an animal welfare environmental organisation. Our mission is to end factory farming and bring about a world that is compassionate and respectful to animals and thereby people on the planet.

**Noah Rouse:** You've written fantastic books, *Farmageddon* and *Sixty Harvests Left*, which I recommend to everyone. What has your work focused on? What have you done? Where have you been? What have you seen?

**Philip Lymbery:** Well I've been plugging away at this for more than 30 years and so I've literally been around the world on a mission to do as much as I possibly can to help people to help animals, to end animal cruelty.

It all started way back in the 80s. I was actually a teenage conservationist, I wanted to run a nature reserve. And then I found out about what was going on behind the closed doors of factory farms and other areas of animal abuse and I wanted to change course. I found my calling really to help animals, whether farmed or wild, and to end the cruelty.

I met the founder of Compassion in World Farming, an ex-farmer called Peter Roberts, in 1990. He interviewed me for a job which I didn't get. But he rang me up the next day and said, look I'm sorry you didn't get the job, but actually we kind of liked you, so we'd like to offer you another job, an entry-level job, being my assistant. So you'd be making the tea, doing the filing, what do you think? And I nearly bit his hand off. And that was in the

beginning of 1990, and here we are in 2023, and I'm still here, plugging away, no longer making tea for dear Peter who passed away in 2006, but nevertheless flying his flag for a better, more compassionate world.

Way back then actually, I also made it my mission to see as many of the different types of animal cruelty around the world first hand. I made it my mission because I believe that seeing these things for yourself makes you so much better at describing them, at articulating why they're wrong and how they must stop.

**Noah:** And I think something that comes across very strongly in your work is not only do these situations, do these conditions seem morally ambiguous, morally wrong, but they also seem to slightly defy common sense. I think one of the most powerful things I've heard you speak about and that I've read in your book is the slight absurdity of how the factory farming system works.

**Philip:** Absolutely, the big justification for factory farming, keeping animals caged, crammed and confined and feeding them grain, is that we need to do that to feed the world. We've got a growing population, how can we feed them without all of this factory farming? Well, the fact is that factory farming wastes food, it doesn't make it. You take animals out of fields and forest edges, be they hens, pigs or chickens, and you put them into cages in confinement, whether it be battery cages or farrowing crates for the pigs, where they can't turn around for weeks at a time, made to face the wall, or cattle into feedlots. You then have to reconcile the fact that it looks like a space-saving idea, but actually isn't, because you then have to use vast acreages of arable land somewhere else to feed. And we grow that feed, be it corn or wheat or soy, and we feed it to those factory farmed animals who then waste the vast majority of the food value in terms of calories and protein in conversion to factory farmed meat, milk. Now in that equation, we waste enough food to feed 4 billion people, half of humanity alive today.

**Noah:** But this isn't a new phenomenon, how we've been doing this and the waste involved in this process. You open *Sixty Harvests Left* with quite an evocative description of Dust Bowl America. Would you mind just encapsulating this intensive agriculture, this intensive factory farming, the conditions and the mindset it first arose out of.

**Philip:** Well it arose out of a genuine tragedy, the Dust Bowl of the US in the 1930s. It still is seen as the biggest environmental disaster to ever hit the US, to ever hit North America.

What happened is—well actually you can trace it back further than that. You can trace it back to the Midwest plains of America that used to be the most abundant grazing land. It was the domain of 50 million bison that would roam those rich prairies followed by all sorts of other animals in a fantastic tapestry of life. They were powered by nothing other than sunshine, rain and grass.

And then of course they were wiped out. They were essentially caught in the crossfire, and you can see how war and the infliction of suffering on people goes hand in hand with the suffering of animals. The bison were wiped out. Settlers were encouraged to go into those

Midwest plains. They were encouraged by government handouts and they ploughed those prairies. They took off the skin of grass, they found a beautiful fertile soil that had been created through millennia, hand in hand with nature. And so there were bumper crops, so much so that records were broken, and then broken again, which meant that the market in the US was flooded. And what happens when a market is flooded? Prices crash. But then you've got these people that are frankly out in the Midwest plains in the middle of nowhere suddenly finding that their crops that they rely on are only getting half the price. So what do they do? What can they do, if they're only getting half the price they need to produce twice as much? And so the whole thing spiraled out of control. It aided and abetted the financial crash in 1929 that sent the US economy spiraling downward, the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Where did it end up? It ended up in great waves of American Midwest being stripped of its grass, the winds of change, if you like, picking up that exposed soil and taking it in huge dust clouds that were as tall as a mountain range and 200 miles wide that would sweep across the Midwest plains, turning day into night, making parents fear for their children. And there are reports of people even contemplating killing their children rather than let them experience the apocalypse. Big, heavy problem.

Coming back to your question about the origin of industrial animal agriculture, the grain feeding of confined animals, well it started just there. Grain became so cheap and ubiquitous, so plentiful but worthless, that you may as well just feed it to animals. And then came in the companies that see the market for making confinement system, and for artificial fertilizers and chemical pesticides. And this new American way was born. We could go on. 1943, the US founded the UN, United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, at the Hot Springs Conference, essentially putting the US at the center of global food policy for the last human lifetime. And what we also saw is that the US way was exported to Europe, not least through American aid for war-torn Europe after World War II.

And now here we are in a world where the West has been a key driver of industrial animal agriculture, a key driver of the over-consumption of meat, milk and eggs that is now driving us towards planetary crisis.

**Noah:** Indeed, this push on planetary boundaries and the excessive consumption that is causing it is particularly striking, because in such a short amount of time, the effects that our diets are having upon the world are so large. For instance, the amount of chicken bones that we are leaving behind on this planet has become a geologically significant event, with an estimated 50 billion birds killed every year for meat alone, not to mention the number of male chicks and unproductive hens which are killed because they will not produce enough eggs.

I asked Philip how industrial farming and agriculture has changed the relationship with nature on both the side of the farmers and also the side of the consumers, who have become disconnected with the food cycles involved in stocking our shelves.

**Philip:** Well, I think the answer to that question really starts at that consumer end of the chain, in that if you go into a supermarket, you won't find meat and milk generally labelled as this came from animals caged in containers. For eggs, you will, in the UK and Europe, because we made it so. Compassion in World Farming and others led a campaign in Europe to get battery-produced eggs as having to be labelled as eggs from caged hens. That came in in 2004, and what happened is that consumers responded to the point now where most supermarkets and major restaurant chains don't use caged eggs. It had a big market impact.

So what we can see is that animals in factory farms, where it goes on behind closed doors so consumers can't see, and then they're not told because of the lack of honest labelling. What that means is there's a total disconnect. People respond to opinion polls time and time again saying how much they care about animal welfare, the well-being of animals and that they should be treated right. Yet so much of the produce that we eat comes from factory farmed animals.

It's not because people say one thing and do another intentionally. What they're doing is responding as the two parts of our consumptive selves. We are all citizens and consumers. As citizens, we answer opinion polls and we have an instinct of what's right or wrong. We elect governments to make it so. We trust companies to only do the right thing. And then we're consumers and we're rushing into the supermarket to get our kids tea. We want to get it and get out as quick as we can. We're walking in a supermarket aisle with this profusion of labelling that doesn't tell us how the food is produced. So, ah, I'll just go for the cheapest.

So, what this means is that our leaders, governments, those corporate policy makers and others, absolutely have to recognise their distinct role and be leaders, make changes that are in accordance with the aspirations of all of us as citizens so that when we come to consume, when we are consumers, we can match our consumer behaviour with our instinctive right or wrong beliefs as citizens.

**Noah:** That disconnect is fascinating and scary and we've talked about it elsewhere. Just the pure impact of thinking of oneself as either a consumer or thinking of oneself as a citizen has big impacts on how one acts and how one interacts with the world around us in everyday life. But increasingly we're pushed away from nature or we've chosen to live in cities or we've been born and raised in cities which are far away. It's strange how quickly you lose contact with nature when you're in a big city. And how on the flip side how strange it is that a connection with a dog or a cat is normalised. We've got *Charlotte's Web* growing up and we've got fantasy stories and TV shows.

However, connection with farm animals, who are animals just like dogs and cats, or connection with "non-cute" animals and nature is so strange. You've got a massive picture of a chicken on your wall here and in the front lobby you have a massive picture of a pig in mud. Can you just talk about the impact on connecting with animals which society might not always lean towards?

**Philip:** Yeah, well I think we can connect with animals, be they farmed animals or wild animals or domestic animals, and the great thing about connecting with animals is that give them a moment and you'll realise that they have their own individual characters, they have their own needs, wants and aspirations. They'll want something from you, or they'll want something that is near you.

For example, our chickens, we have rescue chickens at home and we open the gate and what do they do? They run towards this cupboard. They associate my wife and I coming through the gate with food, we're gonna get something, we're gonna scatter some corn or some flower seed or distribute something which they'll find tasty. But nevertheless, what you see is that each of our chickens has their own personality, their own take on life. Some are shyer than others, some are more confident and bold. And then there's our cockerel, our neighbor's favorite, who crows like you wouldn't believe.

But yeah, the great thing about connecting with animals—people listening will know this, if through no other means than domestic animals, their dog or their cat—they'll know that when you look into the eyes of another living being, they reflect back. They reflect back their life energy, their individual characteristics, and controversially, what I see is their soul.

**Noah:** And like we were talking about before we started recording, this recognition that maybe we too are just animals and we've lost contact with this. We talk about animals having feelings, making friends, having wants, having desires, and we could use the exact same definition to define a person. A person with feelings, wants and desires.

**Philip:** Yeah, you're absolutely right that we are all part of the animal kingdom. There are two types of animals really, human and non-human animals. Obviously there's many subtypes within that, but that's who we are and it's interesting.

I mean picking up on the soul thought, my wife and I just lost our dear dog Duke who featured in *Sixty Harvests Left*. He was a central character because I wrote that book, *Sixty Harvests Left: How to Reach a Nature-Friendly Future*, during Covid-19 times. I was due to be going around the world making new discoveries, but actually I had to find them at home. Duke and I would walk in nature around the farm hamlet where we live, and so he became a really central part of that, and what I always recall as very special was how he had a connection with our neighbours, the forty cows that graze along the riverbank near home.

And I'll never forget it, there was one time the cows had just been let out of their winter housing, and this was a new herd of cows so we'd never met them before, and they were right in the opposite field, the other side of the river. Duke and I were walking and then they started to gather at the river and then to cross the river and then come across the field, and Duke, I could see, was a little bit feeling intimidated as forty cows came towards him. He got nervous and then that nervousness subsided and I saw them come together, their noses touched and they started to lick each other in that age-old animal bonding of exchanging saliva, and in that moment the blur between dog and animal, a separate species, just was incredible. They were sentient beings, convening, communicating, being together. And I saw

this many times throughout and having seen those moments, having lived with Duke for more than 11 years, he's been a big part of our lives. He's been a privilege, and for me it's just obvious that we are all fellow creatures sharing this one planet.

**Noah:** You close *Sixty Harvest Left* with that tableau of Duke and the cows. It's quite powerful because the facts in the book are amazing and it hits home. But also the emotive aspect of it, that okay, this doesn't seem efficient, this doesn't seem sustainable, but also we're not learning from the animals. I think if we look at European landscapes, traditional paintings, you've got the house, you've got the pasture, and then you've got the field with the cows on. We've throughout history grown up and lived alongside animals and learned and lived alongside animals while we learn from them. I think we've lost not only the connection to livestock, not only the connection to nature, but learning from nature and learning from livestock. And I think watching animals do that and moving on to participate in that is really powerful.

And just moving from that, if we talk about you as a young naturalist, if you look back from then till now, personally, if you don't mind me asking, has your work affected how you interact with, how you connect with nature, not just animals but also the trees, the fields, the sun, the moon, everything around you?

**Philip:** An interesting question. I think that it's made me more appreciative of nature and what nature does for us. I think it's made me rejoice when I see fantastic sights. It's made me less technical in my approach to nature. I'm a big bird watcher. I've been a twitcher. I've been going around the country after the latest rare bird. I spent ten years with a side hustle taking people on wildlife tours abroad to places like the Seychelles and Costa Rica. A dirty job, someone's got to do it! So I've learned a lot of the technicalities and the specificity, but I think where I've gotten to now is that I'm much more in tune with the beauty of nature and much more able to enjoy just being within a natural environment, whether I see anything unusual or not. So that's how it's changed for me. I've come through it as almost a sport-like fascination—got to see more species this year than I did last year—and learned to see it much more as a natural environment within which I feel at home.

**Noah:** Yeah, and you become a part of it. I think there's a really interesting encounter if we talk about birdwatching. That powerful phrase of the watcher becomes the watched. With interactions with nature, I've definitely felt that, that it's a two-way interaction.

You talk in the book really effectively about alternative proteins or changing the diet, but I think one of the things which is implicit and at times quite explicit in the book is the impetus to change is uncompromising. I think that change requires not just a change in habit, but a change in the ways we think about our food, the ways we think about connection with the world. And part of that is maybe looking back and thinking, okay, this cheap food is quite a new phenomenon. How do you think people at home can change their habits fundamentally, changing how they relate to their food and relate to the food chains of which they're a part of?

**Philip:** Well, I think the first thing for us to come to terms with is that time is running out. There is a real urgency. Industrial animal agriculture is not only the biggest cause of animal cruelty on the planet, it is a major driver of wildlife declines. It is integral to the climate emergency that we're now facing. And if we carry on as we are, the UN has warned that we've got just sixty harvests left before the world's soils are depleted, gone. No soil, no food. Game over for all of us. So this really is not just about doing the right thing for animals, it's about doing the right thing for people, not least future generations, for our children.

So that is why I encourage everyone to get involved, and we can all get involved by seizing the power of our plate three times a day. By eating more plants, because over consumption of meat is a major driver of planetary harms. Eating more plants, less and better meat and dairy. And by better I mean from more regenerative agro-ecological sources such as pasture fed, free range or organic. In this way we can give animals a better life and we can ensure a better natural environment. It's healthier for us as individuals and we save the future for our children. It's a triple win scenario, what could be better than that?

**Noah:** I really enjoyed meeting and talking with Philip and I found it really impactful how his work uncovers the absurdity of short-term intense productivity at the enormous cost of mid-to-longer-term sustainability. Indeed, in his book he points out that during the Covid-19 pandemic, we saw how fragile the chains of production are and how quickly our shelves became empty. If society continues on the path it currently is on, the situation will be so much worse.

Crucially, however, voices such as Philip's or those of Kate Raworth, who we heard from in the previous episode, offer alternatives and alternative ways of thinking, a fundamental aspect of which is changing the way we think not only about our own relationships with the natural world, but how we view and conceptualise who we are, both as individuals and as members of society.

How we think and how we view ourselves does have radical implications on our actions. For instance, in 2012, researchers conducted an experimental survey on university students. They found that those who were invited to take part in a "consumer reaction study" identified far more strongly with notions of wealth, status and success than their fellow students who were instead told that they were participating in a "citizen reaction study". This highlights the tension inherent in these two ways of thinking about ourselves.

When one recognises oneself as a citizen, one is not only a part of a wider society, but a part of wider nature, the web of life, within which everything is deeply and fundamentally embedded. Indeed, thinking of ourselves only as consumers undermines the very best things about our humanity. As the media and cultural analyst Justin Lewis explained, unlike the citizen, the consumer's means of expression is limited. While citizens can address every aspect of cultural, social, and economic life, consumers find expression only in the marketplace, rather than existing in the limited space of the marketplace, which not only refuses to recognise the inherent value of so much labour, community, and connection, but

also ignores intensive industrial and fundamentally cruel and contradictory practices, such as those of industrial farming, simply because of high output.

Instead, we can recognise ourselves as citizens. We can recognise that when we buy something, take something off the shelf or stock our fridge, we are just one part of a larger whole. And in doing so, we can reclaim our agency and redress this balance between the unsustainable and excessively selfish consumer part of ourselves and the part of ourselves which recognises that we are citizens. Once we start to redefine ourselves as citizens, we start to challenge power structures and market mechanisms, which are only good towards the consumer side of ourselves.

However, only by challenging and bringing to light these issues, as Philip and others do, can we start to make change and start to live in a more sustainable rhythm with the rest of the natural world. This is not only crucial to the health of the web of life and the ecosystem of which we are a part, it's also crucial to the sustainability and strength of our societies, our communities and, ultimately, us. For instance, the issues which arise from industrial agriculture and farming, to use just one example, are all pervading. Not only is it cruel or reduces the quality of the food we eat or the effectiveness of our antibiotics, not only does it waste enormous amounts of food, but fundamentally it is a symptom of a society which sees itself as a group of consumers rather than a collective of citizens.

These are themes I come back to in the next and final episode, where I talk to Dr Sam Gandy about the importance of nature connectedness and what we can do to change how we connect with the world around us and how fundamentally we see our place within it. Until next time, thank you for listening. I've been Noah and this has been *Entanglements*.

Credits: Written, produced, presented, and edited by me, Noah Rouse, on behalf of the Jesus College Intellectual Forum. Original music by Xanthe Evans.