S3E1: Transcript
An Agenda for Rebuilding Our Civic Ideals

with Dr. Andrew Briggs &
Dr. Dominic Burbidge

Tavia Gilbert: Welcome to Stories of Impact. I'm producer Tavia Gilbert, and in every episode of this podcast, journalist Richard Sergay and I bring you conversation about the newest scientific research on human flourishing, and how those discoveries can be translated into practical tools.

In our third season of the Stories of Impact podcast, we're exploring the timely and vital subject of what it means to be a citizen in a networked age, asking the questions: How can we listen to people we don't agree with? ...rebuild trust in an era of fake news and alternative facts? ...create social cohesion, cooperation, and healthy, safe, inclusive societies? And to begin to answer these questions, we'll be in conversation with some of the world's leading scholars who are exploring questions of citizenship in a digital era: listening, privacy, decision-making, and more, on the Stories of Impact podcast, which delves into the big questions of meaning, purpose, and truth.

Today's episode brings you an interview with Drs. Dominic Burbidge and Andrew Briggs. Dr. Andrew Briggs is a professor of nanomaterials at the University of Oxford, and Dr. Dominic Burbidge is a lecturer in politics at the University of Oxford and director of the Canterbury Institute. Along with a team of scholars, their study of citizenship in a networked age has led to a carefully crafted report, including seven recommendations in support of their Agenda for Rebuilding Our Civic Ideals. Here's Richard:

Richard Sergay: I'd like to begin with looking at citizenship in a networked age, and trying to understand the genesis of the project. Who'd like to begin?

Tavia Gilbert: And here's Dr. Andrew Briggs:

Andrew Briggs: About three years ago, a group of us in Oxford who formed a Templeton World Charity Foundation team wanted to consider human flourishing and how it's promoted through the best of scientific insight and spiritual wisdom. And the more we thought about that more we realized, this is a huge topic. People have been caring about human flourishing probably since before writing was invented. So we found ourselves thinking, well, what changes are taking place in the world that impact human flourishing and what aspect of human flourishing do they affect and why do we care about it? We went through a series of very careful consultations, both within Oxford and internationally, and identified quite a number of changes that are taking place in the world that really do have a big effect on human flourishing—changes of life expectancy, change of healthcare, change of education, changes of patterns of religious commitment. And we also thought about some of the technological changes that are taking place, and of those what floated to the top was artificial intelligence and machine learning, which is impacting increasing areas of our lives. And then we thought, what aspect of human flourishing does that impact? And we thought of a number of ways: It impacts both humans as individuals and humans within community. It impacts human decision-making both the privileges and the responsibilities of decision-making. And it also impacts things like identity and also who you connect with. And we realized that all those things that the networked age impacts come together in citizenship. And therefore we homed in on this topic of citizenship in a networked age.

Richard Sergay: Dominic?

Dominic Burbidge: The sort of problem we were initially stuck with was to ask, what is your community? So if you really think for a second about who is in your community and who is out, the border is much more difficult to delineate. It's very hard, compared to an ages past, to work out what community means and its expanse. Previously, there had been a lot of natural restrictions to that because who counts as your society or your community is very geographically determined. But what some of the technological changes have meant is that we are in a way free from those boundaries of thinking about us versus them, of thinking of the other as different because of geography, and we're all in this new community together. But at the same time,

the decision making processes of that community are under radical alteration because of the processes that Andrew mentioned, such as machine learning, artificial intelligence, and in general, our sense of connectivity through digital technologies. So speaking to experts around the world, we really felt this is an issue which is not just extremely important right now, but one that is going to get more and more important as the years progress.

Richard Sergay: What does citizenship mean in a networked age? What are some of the important conclusions that you've drawn?

Dominic Burbidge: Our overriding sense is that as our understanding of community expands, so do our responsibilities. This is something we are not ready for. And yet the responsibilities, the duties are, are thrust upon us. And so that is in terms of who you count as a member of your community that you're responsible for, but also the breadth of effects of the decisions that you take. This enters obviously into the realm of what is ethical decision-making that involves technologies. But what I'm saying here, just as a starting point, is that the notion of who the dependents are, who are the people who might be vulnerable through some of these shifts has greatly changed. From the legal point of view, citizenship very much remains somewhat stuck in the past in that we're all kind of attached to nation-states that guarantee legal citizenship, and with that, they give particular legal rights. Rights and wrongs of action and what we count as our community that we're responsible for, all of that has radically changed. So we need a corresponding reaction from experts, from policy makers to have civic ideals that apply to this new size of community.

Richard Sergay: Andrew, the subtitle of your report is an agenda for *rebuilding* our civic ideals. And I'm sure you've been very specific about using the word "rebuilding."

Andrew Briggs: Identifying civic ideals has been a key topic of discussion and debate and refinement, well, since people started living in cities, since people were in communities. And there've been all sorts of ways that over the years, people have refined those, not always with complete agreement, otherwise we wouldn't need to have elections and governments and so on, but what's changed now is the whole way that we think about those ideas and the whole ways

that we develop them. So think for a moment about decision-making. So this is a crucial component of civic ideals is, how do we take decisions that we can live with? Machine learning has brought in a whole new way of decision-making, because artificial intelligence has made a transition from classifying things, to actual decision-making. So the machines are taking decisions and that's going to impact how things work in society. And there are some aspects of decision making where the machines demonstrably outperformed humans. So we welcome that, and that's a very positive contribution to decision-making. Nevertheless, there are aspects of decision making that really uniquely need what it is that makes us human, the sort of moral dimension of decision-making. And then there's a further aspect, which is that you not only want good decisions, but you want good decisions to which people are committed. And part of the way of achieving commitment to a decision that's taken is participation in the decision-making process. And how people are going to participate, even before Covid and lockdown, was already dramatically changing, and of course, we're now all aware of the different ways that we network with each other. So we need to navigate this new kind of digitally networked space with the ability of the machines to contribute to the decision-making process in a way that will come up with good decisions, with good technical basis, with this uniquely human moral component, and to which people are committed.

Richard Sergay: So Dominic, that begs the question around the issue of machine learning and morality. Do we imbue machines with a sense of morality to help humans make good decisions?

Dominic Burbidge: So of course, what counts as moral is something which is open to debate. Then when it comes to decision making that is informed by or guided through artificial intelligence and algorithms, what we're dealing with is an initial set of goals that are defined by the programmer for which the computer is then tasked toward optimizing. So that has at various stages, lots of ethical input. First of all, it's in terms of what is the objective, what are the particular goals? And so in medicine, you can broadly say a healthy body is the goal. So you would look at decisions that optimize the likelihood of achieving that, but even there, which is a very stable example, you would find there some dispute about what counts as health. So there is even there dispute that you'll find among ordinary people

about how valuable something is, how required it is for our happiness. And so when you task the computer towards the goal, you've got to bear in mind the debate that happens around some of those fundamental objectives, such that even when a computer does well in optimizing, it still has to ask the question of what is it we're trying to optimize in the first place. And so there are even much more difficult examples than healthcare. For example, if I were to ask what is good parenting? And you'd say, wow, that's a big question, and there's so much debate about what good parenting is. But at the same time, we do have local authorities experimenting with algorithms that will determine who are the vulnerable children in their zones. And that is a question about which children in the neighborhood are suffering from very bad parenting, such that there needs to be a government intervention. And so we're looking at ways to move that into computer decision-making, because it will be more efficient and time saving and cost saving from the resources point of view, but within all of that is the question of what good parenting is. And it used to be that in a democracy, you would focus on leaders who would tell you what their view is. But instead, now we're voting on leaders who may consult with technical experts on the formation of an algorithm. So the different steps that are involved create all kinds of ethical dilemmas.

Andrew Briggs: One of the things we found ourselves addressing as we wrote this report was the extent to which artificial intelligence raises new questions that have never existed before, and to what extent it gives a new force to questions that have been around previously. The example that Dominic gave of healthcare and beauty is a wonderful example of that. The recent head of skin surgery at Oxford, Tim Goodacre, when he started his career resolved that he would do restorative skin surgery, you know, if a child had had a badly burned harm or something like that, but he would not do cosmetic surgery, because that wasn't what he wanted to give his life to. So he started with this very, very simple criterion for whether or not he was going to do surgery. The longer he went on in his career, the more complicated he found it was, that, that simple criterion, you know, time and again, he was trying to apply it to situations that were much more subtle than that. And so it needed his sort of growing and developing wisdom in order to be able to make good judgments, just for his own particular speciality of skin

surgery. What I think we're seeing now is many, many examples like that, for example, targeted influence, which have been around since long before machine learning, long before the networked age. But the availability of the machine learning, which can be implemented through the digital network is in some cases, giving a sort of new industrialized scale to the sort of problems that earlier on might have just been local and individual applications of ethical considerations.

Richard Sergay: Can you give me an example of that?

Andrew Briggs: So targeted influencers existed long before digital networks. You might think of Shakespeare's play Othello, where Iago is targeting this fake news if you like, this targeted influence to Othello about Desdemona being unfaithful to him in a way that from Iago's point of view is effective and leads to disastrous consequences: four people lose their lives as a result. Now, that sort of targeted influence has existed before, but it's now being industrialized with the machine learning working out the profiles of the individuals who you want to influence and the best and the most subtle way of just feeding them the story that pushes them a little bit at a time in the direction, in which you want to move them. It's happening also for commercial reasons, as well as political regions. And you've got some of the best brains in the world being paid some of the highest salaries in the world by companies like Amazon, for example, just to increase the amount of time you spend looking at the screen on your smartphone, because that way they can sell more ads and make more money. So this is a sort of industrialization of targeted influence in a way that we've never seen before, and to some extent we're not very well equipped to deal with. So one of the things we want to do with this report is to encourage the development of those civic virtues which will enable people to be well equipped to cope in a situation like that alongside the best regulation that is available. But the regulation will never do the whole job, and it'll need the virtues of the individual citizens to be trained and developed, to be able to cope with this kind of thing.

Richard Sergay: Dominic, some of the virtues that your report highlights include a spirit of public service, justice, neighborliness, democratic, participation, and moral reasoning. Why are those virtues so important in the 21st century in the networked age?

Dominic Burbidge: What your contribution is can sometimes be hard to work out. And I think this is where the emphasis that we're making on moral reasoning is particularly important. It's not the case that this report or other work that we've done promotes the sort of single moral view down a particular direction, but we are trying to detect and promote the general need for moral reasoning as a key feature of decision-making. So there's a danger that sometimes through citizenship, we think that we vote or elect those who are able to make good decisions for us. And the problem comes when the decisions are essentially a product, more of technical expertise, such that those who are most in touch with how the digital technologies or artificial intelligence is emerging, are those who are able to affect and change the process. So instead, there needs to be some critical reflection on what is the role to be played by the citizen in that process. And of course, moral reasoning has to feature. So we all know from philosophy that it's not enough to simply say, we'll just maximize the greatest good for the greatest number. You have to define what the good is. And even as Andrew has pointed out, it can be very individual. Your experience is different to mine and this personality behind our ideas of the good and what means a good life inform on the decisions that we make on the good choices that we take. Likewise, our more reasoning needs to almost infiltrate some of these discussions of technology to be able to understand what is really in the common good.

Richard Sergay: We live in an increasingly polarized world, polarized societies. The United States, which has an election, a presidential election upon us, show that tribal nature. How would your report in general deal with this increasing polarization within societies? It's an issue that clearly fights the common good.

Andrew Briggs: One way to start thinking about addressing the polarization is to recognize what's happening. This is an example of things that can happen without machine learning, without a networked age, but they can be much more accurate and applied with much greater precision in a networked age. So let us suppose that we've got a range of views that can be represented on a single straight line, and complete polarization means being at one or other end of the line. And let's suppose that you have someone who starts not quite at the middle, but rather near the middle. And then let's suppose that for whatever reason, you'd like to move them to the end. And

the way that you do that is not by straightway, feeding them a story that represents the extreme, because they'll recognize that as the extreme and probably be horrified by it and appalled by it. But if you can be accurate enough, you can feed them a story, which is close to their current position, but just nudges them a little bit in the direction in which you want them to move. So they read the story, and they think, well, I quite like that, you know, it's quite close to what I think, and I identify with it. So in that process, they've been nudged a little bit along the line, and then you feed them the next story, which just nudges them a little bit further. And through this systematic process, you eventually can get them to a polarized position. Now, if you're just trying to do this individually, without digital networking, it's quite hard. It's not impossible. Newspapers have done it for a long time. And I probably choose the newspaper that sort of reflects the position that I warm to, you see? And so does everyone else. But now what's happening is that the networked age, combined with the accuracy of machine learning can do this in a far more refined and far more effective way. If you can once identify that and bring it out into the open so that people see it and appreciate that it's happening, I think that's the first step towards mitigating that kind of polarization.

Richard Sergay: What you're describing sounds almost diabolical.

Andrew Briggs: But I'm afraid that it's happening, Richard. It's happening.

Richard Sergay: So Dominic, how do you counter what does seem to be in increasing polarization in societies around the world? How do you balance it out for the common good? What do you say?

Dominic Burbidge: Shoshanna Zuboff's book, "The Age of Surveillance Capitalism" is quite good at demonstrating how a lot of, um, social media companies, and some of the internet giants are focused on the attention economy. This is not to say that they're focused on polarization. They're not. But they are focused on getting people's attention. So the question is what do you give your attention to? The problem comes when scandal, fear and anger elicit more attention than what is interesting, reasonable, proportional, or moderate. So we can in that way start to see some of the explanation for polarization, and it's one that accompanies the simplification of the interlocutor. So the person that you are discussing politics with, or is part of your social media community,

is in some ways simplified, they're restricted in how much they can say, but also what you hear of them is simplified in that it's just a few typed words, or maybe a short clip, it's not the full person for a very long amount of time. And so the encouragement I would give, first of all, to help mitigate some of these effects is to make special effort in seeing the whole person. We need to get to know people we talk with and we need to be able to see the context from which they speak and their own biography, their own history as to what may lead them to have had certain experiences and not others. We're speaking with people and discussing things without being able to see the full person, both through history and through the context of their community. So it's got to feature. But then of course it raises the question of how do you increase the appetite for that? How do you make people want to see the whole person, in fact, as anger and resentment or fear build up. In fact, they want to see even less of their enemies than they did before. So it has a self-reinforcing mechanism to it. And it's really through the discovery of something you have never seen before. We're social animals, that was the key point of Aristotle. And so we are intrigued by each other. Difference is exciting, amazing. E pluribus unum, the idea of, through the many are one, is precisely because diversity is so enriching. In some ways, if we were surrounded only by people with our own views, it's banal and boring. What intrigues us about the other person can also be a point of attention. We need a kind of social media engagement that is going to still be focused on people's attention, we don't want people to fail, to give attention to each other, but what you're focused on in terms of attention is on the intriguing creative differences of other people.

Andrew Briggs: I think a key aspect of good human relations is the capacity to be with people who challenge us and challenge our beliefs and views. Of course there's bad kinds of disagreement that don't have a good outcome, but there's such a thing as disagreeing well. It's enriching, and by having our views challenge, we can refine them. And when we live in a physical community with people we just meet with, and we just live next door to, if we build good relationships, those will be relationships that include this aspect of challenging or bringing different views to us, of helping us to appreciate people who are different from us. They may have different interests, or they may have different ethnic origins or all sorts of other differences. The best way to overcome prejudice is through getting to know such

people and spending time with them and being enriched, as Dominic was saying. If we're moving to a world that's more digitally networked, we have to pay attention to maintaining that, because it's all too easy only to connect with the people that we just agree with. And if we do that, we can undergo, I think, ethical and moral and spiritual drift as it were, because we're not getting these healthy corrective balances from a greater diversity of people we encounter. And so, as we move into the digital age, I think some of us are finding that actually even in the pandemic, we have to pay attention to maintaining and cultivating those relationships, which will help to challenge us in our views and beliefs.

Richard Sergay: Otherwise it does become the echo chamber effect.

Andrew Briggs: Exactly so.

Tavia Gilbert: Richard, Dr. Briggs, and Dr. Burbidge turned to the first of the seven recommendations listed in their report, An Agenda for Rebuilding Our Civic Ideals. Here's their first recommendation:

Richard Sergay: Protect human uniqueness for moral decision-making. What does that mean?

Dominic Burbidge: In terms of the decision making processes, we are identifying something unique about what humans contribute. Too often, we fear that the aim of technology is to make our lives more efficient, and therefore human decision-making, human involvement in the processes are really a thing of the past. So we fear generally unhelpful interference, in terms of what experts can otherwise do or what technology can otherwise do. And it's true, of course, that technology has been wonderful in making our lives easier from the point of view of time-saving, but not necessarily in terms of helping us choose what are our ultimate goals, and what are the best ways of achieving our ultimate goals. Sometimes technology can provide us with so much that it, in fact confuses our priorities, and we get into all kinds of habits or addictions, which don't really transform into what we really wanted to do. And so we can understand also that there is a unique role to play in terms of human input. And it is in terms of those objectives, what are the real missions for your life that make you feel life is meaningful? You need to get in touch with those understandings that you have about yourself and the other people can help advise you on in order to say, well, what sorts of technologies are going to best help me achieve that? And so what

we're doing in this first recommendation is to say that there will always be a point of human moral decision-making as part of this process, it needs to be protected. It needs to be promoted. We need to shout out about it because right now it's being ignored.

Richard Sergay: Recommendation two is nurture complimentary skills of humans and machines for collective decision-making.

Andrew Briggs: With the growing amount of evidence that there is that there are certain aspects of healthcare that the machines are just better at than humans, you can start to ask yourself a series of questions. So you could start to ask, would you wish to be treated by a machine that knew less about you than a doctor does? Well, that's rather easy question, the answer's no, I'd rather have a doctor who knows more about me than the machine. So now you move to a slightly harder question, which is: would you prefer to be treated by a doctor who knows less than a machine? And now you say well, now, oh, that's a bit harder, I'm not quite sure now. Put like that, no, I don't think I'd want to be treated by a doctor who knows this on a machine, but maybe it's not the right question. Maybe the right question is, would I rather be treated by a doctor who doesn't use the resources of machine learning, or a doctor who does use the resources of machine learning?

Or you can move to the judiciary, so you can move to sentencing policy. And there's plenty of empirical evidence that sentences handed down by judges are not always consistent. In fact, this was such a well-recognized problem in the UK, in the noughties of this century, that the sentencing commission was set up to address the thing. So now you say, would I want to be sentenced by a machine that's less consistent than a human judge? Answer, No. Well, would I prefer to be sentenced by a machine that's more consistent than a human judge? Look at that series of questions about a doctor who knows less than the machine. And so I think where we are going is we want to develop the skills and the capabilities to draw on the best that the machines have to offer in making better decisions than we could make unaided by the machines. And that's why we want to nurture these complementary skills of humans and machines, and now apply that to the sort of collective decision-making that goes into citizenship.

Tavia Gilbert: Here’s recommendation three:

Richard Sergay: Engage in consensus-building about civic ideals for networked age.

Dominic Burbidge: When people think of good technology, bad technology, they're often in the zone of saying, I'm a consumer, there are producers, and we've contracted towards something, if it has harmful effects, then we should regulate that. And of course on one level, that's true. But when you have few users, you would say, yeah, this is a product and these are consumers. But if you increase the number of users to near a hundred percent, it no longer becomes a consumption question, but becomes a political question. So healthcare is like this, that on the one hand, we say healthcare is a sort of a benefit or service in a way I'm like a customer. On the other hand, because everyone, at some point needs healthcare. The consumption base is more like 100%, and that makes it more political than we thought before. So likewise, with these digital technologies, with artificial intelligence, we have to look at its expansive use and say, well, what does it really require to get right, and it's not just a good contract between the customer and the company. It's also the civic ideals that will guarantee and guide the overall direction of the purpose of these technologies, of these developments.

We're trying to find a common sense of happiness that can help direct us within their use because these are relational in their development. As much as we sort of praise the tech geeks for having such great intelligence to have invented them, many of the products that we're talking about in fact are user-generated. They're good because the users use them a lot. And through that, they improve the service. That's the case ranging from social media to delivery products. So it's very much user generated. But as these platforms increase, they start to border each other. And from being single consumers, we become a collective, a kind of population that needs to ask “What is our overall rights within this, our overall duties?” And we've seen that already, you know, among Amazon employees, among those who provide services through Uber, we found that in criticism of Silicon Valley, with respect to its lack of diversity among its workforce, you're seeing a sort of growing consciousness among people that this is turning a bit more towards the political, not just contractual. And therefore we have to also generate ideas on the civic ideals that help coordinate all of those efforts for reform.

Richard Sergay: Andrew. I know this one is particularly close to your heart. Recommendation four is teach listening as a civic virtue. Listening.

Andrew Briggs: I love this recommendation. I think, as we've talked about the report to various different audiences, this has been the one that perhaps has most resonated most often with people we're talking to, particularly actually with students, I think. In the networked age, it's getting easier and easier for people to speak. There are more and more channels through which they can tweet and email and post videos and Facebook pages and so on. That's getting and easier. So there's more and more and more being said. We need to develop the comparable skill of listening. If anything, that's perhaps getting a bit harder with the networked age.

There was an Oxford philosophy professor who would tell his students that the greatest benefit they would learn from their Oxford education was the discernment to know when someone was talking rot. So we need this in terms of the content of what we're saying, but we also of course, need to learn emotional listening. When we're in the same room as someone, there are all sorts of clues, in addition to the content of what they're saying, that will tell us about how they're feeling the body language, the tone of voice, the facial expressions. Again, that becomes more challenging in the networked age. So we need to hone and refine and develop these skills of listening, listening to what people are saying, listening to the justification that they have for what they're saying, but also listening to what they're feeling and experiencing, because that's essential if we're to create harmony in our community, and if we're to create harmony as good citizens.

Richard Sergay: Recommendation five is maintain distance between thought and speech.

Dominic Burbidge: It's quite a peculiar one in a way. It arose from all kinds of discussions we had with experts and others. In terms of thought and speech, the idea here is that a lot of what digital technologies emphasize is making things instant for their users. And that's because they're about saving time. And we want our work to be efficient, but we don't always want our though to be efficient. And I think that's the mistake that is sometimes being made, because with social media, what we're orientated towards is instant reaction. Sometimes our first reaction is not our best reaction, and yet we

have a system which in some ways rewards the fastest person. So some very interesting in-depth interviews with voters in the 2019 Indian general election revealed that a lot of those people who spread fake news...first of all, people don't usually know it's fake. So this is not like you're sort of blaming them for something, it's a mistake that all of us are going to make at some point, if we haven't already, but what motivates a lot of people is being the first one to share within their group. That can have a euphoria to it, and it can make it feel as though you are the one really in touch. So I might share, for example to all my colleagues who work in this area, look at this story, which shows something really new. And that makes me look on top of my game. And if I emailed that round and then everyone says, well, actually, you know, Brian sent it around a few days ago, then it makes me look out of touch and not someone on top of my game. So we all kind of face this, and so we have some reward at play for those who are instant, and we don't have the same kind of reward for people who are giving the most thoughtful and measured response. So we need to sort of protect the way in which the human body has this distance in-built between thought and speech in the way digital technologies evolve. And we need to have some reward for that distance or some in-built placement of it. We in a sense need to to be able to help people see how much better it can be to pause and have a measured response.

Richard Sergay: Recommendation six, promote the value of privacy for personal moral development.

Andrew Briggs: This follows very logically from what Dominic's just explained about recommendation five. I don't know if we're allowed favorites. I think if I were allowed a favorite, this would perhaps be my own personal favorite. To some extent, machine learning is serving as the canary in the coal mine, because for any machine learning, you have to specify the score function. What is it that you're asking the machine to optimize? So you have to sit and think, what do I want the score function to be? And sometimes it's obvious and sometimes it's a bit harder and sometimes it's multi-objective. And you can sort of apply that to society more generally, you can apply it to yourself and say, what is it actually that I'm trying to maximize in my life? What is it that by the end of my life, I most want to have contributed or to have done? And for the reasons that Dominic was explaining, you need a certain amount of privacy and quiet to do that, either

individually or in a small trusted group. It's hard to do it if you are forever responding instantaneously to anything that comes in. And I think there sort of three dimensions that are going to be important. One is the material because it's hard to think of flourishing. If you can't feed your kids and you haven't got a roof over your head. The second one is relational, because it's not good to be alone, we need good relations if we're going to flourish. And the third one, it's hard to know what to call it, but I'll call it transcendent—this sort of sense that the material and relational world calls us to something beyond itself, which we recognize. And you need private space to reflect on these things, preferably to reflect in depth what is it that really matters to me in life? And if I then share that with others, and we're in a community, what is it that really matters to us as a community that we really want to pursue in life? And so that recommendation is that in the sort of helter skelter of this digital age, we should protect private space for what are really the most important questions we'll ever address in life.

Richard Sergay: And last but not least, recommendation seven is remake democracy in terms of the ability to bring about social unity and trust.

Dominic Burbidge: I think this is something we can empathize with very keenly at this moment in history, whereby of course we want the economy to be strong. We want to have a lot of scientific development, a lot of technological innovation, but in the process, we also need to keep in mind the need to be together as one. So together as a group, what is that common togetherness and what is it based on? And so this is why I think it is important to look at what do I hold in common with others and how can I improve that? Core behind everything that we set out to do in terms of this original focus on human flourishing that Andrew mentioned, is the search we have for happiness. This, we hold in common. So when I listen to you, I get not just the what of information, but I also get the why, why you act as you do, what you are searching for in that process. And if you ask people why enough times then you start getting towards their core motivations, many of which you can understand and sympathize with, and you may even hold in common. So at the deepest level, you may be seeking happiness, which is your “why” as to the actions you've taken. And that's something I can identify with as well, and it brings us together. So we need to understand

that in the processes of democracy decision making, even at a public level, at a policy level, that we're close to each other, and we're able to cooperate precisely because we see these common goods. So they've got to be front and center in the new processes that we're developing. Otherwise, we are just going to split apart and time spent with people, listening to their full story to see the context and see the whole story and the depth of the people involved, and when you are able to engage with that full story, you see how much you have in common, even among people who have done bad things. And of course there's a case to be made in terms of what is just, but in terms of our society's togetherness and why we even have responsibility for them, is that we hold so much in common. So we have so much in common, so much togetherness, this needs to stay in the midst of all of the technological changes that we're facing.

Richard Sergay: When you come away from this report, are you encouraged by a sense of democracy or is democracy threatened in a networked age?

Andrew Briggs: I think both. First of all, there is no one thing called democracy. I remember Lord Griffiths about three years ago saying that he had never known a time in the British Parliament of such acrimony between people, and particularly such acrimony within parties, not just between parties. So I think those kinds of things are threatened. I think there are all sorts of ways in which people are giving less weight to expertise and knowledge and more to the short, quick statements that empathize. But in another sense, I am encouraged, because I think that we're moving towards a richer understanding of what it means to be humans and how humans flourish. And just to illustrate that from the world of economics: A lot of economics has been dominated by a concept which is called homo economicus, which assumes that you have rational humans who work out exactly what they need to do in order to get the maximum benefit from the minimum effort or cost. So this is sort of characterized as rational, lazy, greedy selfish man, and the women who are listening will be glad to know we are, this is man we're describing, alright? Now, I think that there are a whole lot of people in that sort of world who are saying actually, humans sometimes behave like that, but they're capable of being motivated by other things too. They're capable of being motivated by identity, they're

capable of recognizing that not everything can be measured by its cost in free market terms. There are other things that matter. It is even the case that even when people are working at their job, they can be motivated by wanting to do a good job and wanting to do it well. There's a growing weight of economic scholarship, one of the big developments at the moment is the sense that humans cooperate, and that we've evolved both genetically and social for cooperation with each other. And as these things are increasingly being brought out into the open, so I am encouraged that we're laying a foundation for a richer kind of democracy with a better understanding of what humans are and what it means for humans to flourish, both as individuals and in community.

Richard Sergay: Dominic, same question to you.

Dominic Burbidge: So is democracy threatened? I would say definitely. In many parts of the world, democracy is about to collapse, it seems. What we've been able to look at in the report specifically is the way in which decision-making is totally changing, and that changes what is needed in terms of democratic input on each of those decisions. We've also seen how globalization and jurisdiction is changing. So what counts as the territory is radically threatened by digital technologies, which cross territories, but raise all kinds of ethical and civic questions. And we're really just beginning with this, because as much as we complain about computational propaganda from other countries, it's the tip of the iceberg compared to the use of transnational algorithms for decision-making for public duties. So that is a whole different evolution that's about to happen. But then democracy is also threatened in internally what counts as emergency provisions, and it's very unclear for a lot of people on what their say is and what it means to have democratic involvement in these times: very, very fundamental questions that you would have thought would never be raised again about changing the times of elections or not having elections, or in fact, going towards more authoritarian responses in terms of curfews or not allowing people to travel. Many of these, maybe all of them, are somewhat necessary depending on the particular context, but we've got to realize that a lot of what we counted as democratic had some kind of hard, fast rules that we have had to renegotiate in the midst of a crisis. And so to the extent that it seems emergency provisions are more normalized and more possible in a more authoritarian

structure creates huge problems for the image of democracy. We don't want to come out of this crisis saying that democracies are where you go to die. We've got to have a better understanding of the way you can have democratic input in decision-making while still making them efficient and orientated towards people's wellbeing.

Andrew Briggs: For all sorts of reasons that we would not have chosen, the current pandemic is providing us with an amazing stop and think point. We're learning to do things in ways quite different from the way we were doing them a year ago. And we're realizing that some of them don't work so well, you know, we long to hug our children and be able to enjoy meals with friends and so on. But we're also learning that there are some other things that we thought we couldn't do with that, that we're finding actually we can do without. And we're finding that video links actually enable us to make new connections in ways that were not previously so easy, or at least we weren't making use of. So it's giving us a whole lot of new data, and it's giving us a chance to stop and think, what do we want to be like, as we emerged from this? And I hope it won't just be, the answer is, well, you know, as quickly as possible to get back to exactly what it was before, because although there were some very good things about what it was before it wasn't perfect, and there are improvements that we can make. So I very much hope so what we're learning now and what we're reflecting on, you know, giving ourselves the privacy for personal moral development, individually and in groups, will give us a chance to think, where do we want to go from here? And how do we want things to be as we ease up from the lockdown caused by the pandemic?

Richard Sergay: A nice note to end on, a more hopeful future for all of us.

Tavia Gilbert: I hope you have found value in this conversation and that it has aided you in becoming a better educated citizen, with a deeper understanding of the way fake news and impulsivity are super-charged and weaponized in this new era of election interference, increased polarization, and disdain for difference. One thing I'm shifting is spending less time overall on social media, and when I find myself in conflict with a friend or loved one in that digital space, I've started reaching out with a phone call or an email that says, "I love you. I respect you. We're in conflict, but maybe we

don't have to be. Would you be willing to have a conversation? I want to understand you better." This practice, this spaciousness and effort, has already borne fruit. Perhaps you'll also consider a similar adjustment in the way you interact with people you value in your life in the digital space. And perhaps you'll be inspired to share this episode with your circle of friends, as well as spending time with the full report, which you can find at citizenshipinanetworkedage.org. Richard and I are committed to helping Dr. Briggs and Dr. Burbidge spread more widely their findings and recommendations for healthier citizenship, so we thank you for your support in making that happen.

We'll be back in two weeks for another timely episode on Citizenship in a Networked Age, including conversation with Nuala O'Connor, President and CEO of the Center for Democracy and Technology. Here's Ms. O'Connor:

Nuala O'Connor: I think at a minimum we are privileged to live in a country where people have the right to vote and should exercise it. But even more that we now have information at our fingertips about how agencies at the federal, state, local, municipal level are running, and we all need to exercise our duty of care to the democracy.

Tavia Gilbert: We look forward to bringing you that full conversation, along with more interviews from this most timely and important season of conversations about our rights, responsibilities, and opportunities as global citizens.

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This has been the Stories of Impact podcast, with Richard Sergay and Tavia Gilbert. This episode written and produced by Talkbox and Tavia Gilbert. Assistant producer Katie Flood. Music by Aleksander Filipiak. Mix and master by Kayla Elrod. Executive

Producer Michele Cobb.

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