ChatDDU Podcast #1 “tl;dr” - Abridged and Reorganized

This tl;dr is directionally consistent with but much shorter than the podcast itself and reorganized to express a clearer “line of reasoning” runway up to the Open Letter to OpenAI Leadership.

“Representation” Is Broken. How Might We Fix It?

Opening Frame

I want to begin with a caution and an invitation.

The caution is that what follows is, in part, supposition. It is an attempt to build a useful model. All models are wrong in some way. The question is whether a model is useful enough to help us see more clearly, speak more precisely, and act more wisely.

The invitation is this: suppose that much of what we call social division, political hostility, economic unfairness, institutional distrust, and human waste is not random. Suppose it has a structure. Suppose that if we can understand that structure, we might begin to build human systems that are not perfect, but are fairer, calmer, more resilient, and more worthy of the intelligence we claim to possess.

The personal prompt that led me here was not grand. It was painfully ordinary. I had done everything I could think of to stop damaging my relationships because of my politics, and yet the relationships still seemed at risk. So the question became: what am I missing?

My current answer is this: representation is broken. Not merely political representation, though certainly that. More broadly, representation in the sense of how we systematically and culturally represent ourselves and each other inside human systems. That breakage has a cost. It is not only emotional. It is not only civic. It is economic, developmental, relational, and, eventually, existential.

To explore that, I want to present a simple model of intelligence that I call **intqoin**.

Chapter 1. The Prompt and the Break

I did not begin by trying to solve the world. I began by trying to understand why people who care about each other can become dangerous to each other through politics.

That matters because political division is often treated as if it were just a conflict of beliefs, or values, or tribes, or information bubbles. Those things are certainly part of it. But they do not seem sufficient. They do not explain why so many people, acting in good faith from within their own story, still end up participating in systems that grind down trust, burn relationships, and amplify fear.

So I started with a more basic question: what if the problem is not only what we believe, but how we are positioned within systems that turn us into functions, categories, inputs, assets, liabilities, and threats? What if we do not merely disagree. What if we are being represented badly, both by others and by the systems through which we move?

By representation, I mean something broad. I mean the way a person, an office, an institution, a culture, or a model stands in for the interests of a whole. A representative is supposed to carry forward reality faithfully. A representative is supposed to help the system act intelligently. A representative is supposed to reconcile competing conditions in a way that keeps the whole viable.

But what if our representatives, formal and informal alike, increasingly represent factions rather than wholes? What if institutions represent their own continuity rather than their actual purpose? What if people learn to represent themselves primarily as members of competing hierarchies rather than as participants in a shared organism?

Then the problem is not merely incivility. The problem is structural misrepresentation.

And once I started seeing the issue that way, a larger pattern began to emerge. It seemed that non-human biological life has somehow solved, or at least much more tightly constrained, a problem that human social life has not. Other forms of life seem, on the whole, to keep their behavior close to what their structure would suggest they are capable of. Human beings, by contrast, seem to exhibit a much larger gap between potential intelligence and apparent intelligence.

That gap is where this whole line of reasoning begins.

Chapter 2. Nature as the Benchmark

Let us begin with a very simple contrast.

Non-human biological life, from the smallest organisms to more complex animals, appears to behave homeostatically. It responds to conditions. It consumes and produces. It adapts within its capabilities. It moves, as if by design, in ways that preserve the integrity of the organism or the species.

I am not saying non-human life is gentle. It is not. Nature is full of predation, conflict, competition, death, and scarcity. But even so, there is something striking about it: non-human life seems to remain in relatively tight relationship to the requirements of survival and adaptation. It behaves, in that sense, intelligently.

Humans are different.

Now, of course, humans are part of nature. So I am not placing us outside the biological order. I am saying only that we seem to have inherited or developed capabilities that allow us to depart, at least behaviorally, from homeostatic functioning to an extraordinary degree. We can imagine more. We can abstract more. We can store more. We can amplify more. We can deceive more. We can self-code to a degree that appears unusual, at least within the span of an individual lifetime.

And that is both our glory and our danger.

If a lion behaves like a lion, we are not surprised. If a cell behaves like a cell, we are not surprised. If a family, a company, a religion, a state, or a civilization behaves in ways that undermine its own long-term viability while generating enormous suffering along the way, we ought to pause.

Why does that happen?

My working thesis is that non-human biological systems behave homeostatically, while human systems often do not, because humans have not yet learned to integrate, in a unified manner, the gradients that are unique to human life. We are navigating not only energy and food and shelter, but status, narrative, identity, ideology, money, law, legitimacy, belonging, transcendence, symbolic meaning, and countless other gradients that can conflict with one another.

So, while we often congratulate ourselves on our intelligence, much of our actual behavior suggests fragmentation, not integration.

And that leads to the need for a model.

Chapter 3. intqoin: The Five-Part Model

The model I call **intqoin** is meant to be simple enough to hold in mind and rich enough to do actual work.

It consists of five major components.

First, the **plexus**. The plexus is the set of networked system components actually producing the system's intended outputs. In a biological organism, think of the distributed working structure. In a company, think of the people and functions actually doing the work. In a society, think of the citizens, families, communities, trades, and exchanges through which life is actually lived.

Second, the **hierarchy**. The hierarchy is the set of hierarchical system components monitoring and directing the plexus in continual efficiency and effectiveness. In a cell, you might think of the nucleus. In a body, the brain. In a company, management. In a country, government. In a religion, the formal authority structure.

Third, the **homeostatic bond**. This is the engagement architecture between plexus and hierarchy for maintaining equilibrium. It is the reality that these are not two unrelated things. They belong to one organism, one system, one quantum of intelligence.

Fourth, the **sweet spot**. This is the homeostatically behaving overlay between hierarchy and plexus. It is the operating code of the relationship. It is the answer to the question, what kind of relationship exists here between those who coordinate and those who produce? Is it fair? Is it extractive? Is it stable? Does it level stress? Does it distribute surplus? Does it reconcile the whole?

Fifth, the **context**. This is the gradient-space within which the system exists, finds resources, and produces outputs. Context includes scarcity and abundance, but also time. It includes the past that has shaped the system and the possible futures toward which the system may move.

Now, one reason I like this model is that it does not begin by moralizing. It begins by observing structure.

It does not say hierarchy is bad. Hierarchy is not bad. Hierarchy is necessary in sufficiently complex systems.

It does not say the plexus is innocent. The plexus is not innocent. The plexus can be inert, fragmented, fearful, manipulable, shortsighted, and complicit.

It says only that if we want to reason clearly about the health of a system, we need to see both the plexus and the hierarchy, the bond between them, the sweet spot that would reconcile them, and the context within which they are operating.

Once you see that, a great many things begin to line up.

Chapter 4. The Gradient

Now let us place this model inside a landscape.

Imagine a gradient of scarcity and abundance. Peaks represent better conditions: more food, more energy, more safety, more resilience, more possibility. Valleys represent worse conditions: less of those things, more stress, more constraint, more risk of failure.

Every living thing, and every system composed of living things, must somehow navigate that gradient.

The plexus works where it is. It consumes what is available. It transforms inputs into outputs. It carries out the actual business of being alive, or of making the organization function.

The hierarchy receives signals. It monitors. It coordinates. It orients the system toward better position on the gradient. It seeks, in a sense, higher ground.

That is not sinister. That is appropriate. If the hierarchy did not care about position on the gradient, it would not be doing its job. The problem is not that hierarchy seeks peaks. The problem is what happens when it begins to seek peaks in a way that ceases to preserve the whole.

Homeostasis, then, is not some soft and sleepy equilibrium in which nothing changes. It is continual adjustment. It is the ongoing balancing of internal needs and external conditions so that the organism or system remains viable.

And here I want to make a move that is important for everything that follows.

If we are going to use biology as an analogy for human systems, then we should pay attention not only to competition, but also to buffering. Organisms do not merely chase resources. They also manage stress. They store. They regulate. They distribute. They use feedback. They do not treat every fluctuation as a total emergency. Where scarcity exists, some combination of structure and process prevents the whole from simply tearing itself apart every time conditions worsen.

That matters enormously for human life.

Because if a human system lacks adequate buffering against scarcity, then fear becomes chronic. And once fear becomes chronic, the hierarchy can become voracious, the plexus can become pliable, and the whole system can drift far away from any plausible sweet spot.

Chapter 5. How Human Systems Drift Out of Homeostasis

Now we come to the painful part.

In human systems, it often appears that surplus accumulates upward into hierarchy, while scarcity-related stress accumulates downward into the plexus.

Money is the easiest example, but not the only one. Security can accumulate upward. Optionality can accumulate upward. Mobility can accumulate upward. Authority can accumulate upward. Insulation from consequences can accumulate upward. Meanwhile, precarity, replaceability, and fear accumulate below.

Again, this is not meant as condemnation. It is meant as description.

A hierarchy, left untethered, is naturally inclined to use available resources to secure and improve its own position on the gradient. That includes internal resources, not just external ones. In a business, workers become resources. In a government, citizens become resources. In a religion, adherents become resources. In a media ecosystem, attention becomes a resource. In all such cases, the hierarchy can begin to treat the plexus not as part of the same organism, but as usable material.

Once that happens, a dangerous transformation begins.

Plexus-to-plexus relationships, the kinds of relationships through which people learn, create, help, build, care, govern locally, educate each other, entertain each other, and sustain one another, can be repurposed into hierarchy-controlled channels. Self-governance becomes hierarchical governance. Self-education becomes hierarchically managed education. Local exchange becomes platform-mediated exchange. Peer care becomes institutional dependence. What was once mesh becomes funnel.

This is not always bad. Sometimes hierarchy truly does improve coordination. Sometimes it really does increase efficiency and resilience. But the danger is that margin begins to replace mission. Once hierarchy discovers that it can mediate a relationship and capture value from it, it often will.

And if there is no countervailing architecture to protect the health of the whole, the hierarchy keeps growing while the plexus keeps thinning.

In biology, a runaway hierarchy has an obvious analogue: a part of the organism growing at the expense of the whole. In human systems, we do not have a clean, neutral vocabulary for that yet. But we certainly recognize the pattern. We see it in institutions that thrive while the people inside them deteriorate. We see it in economies that produce extraordinary aggregate wealth while families become fragile. We see it in states that become more administratively sophisticated while citizens become more alienated. We see it in cultures that can manufacture endless distraction but cannot reliably cultivate wisdom.

That is not intelligence in any satisfying sense. It is capability without integration.

Chapter 6. Fear, Choice, and Human Agency Waste

Why do human beings participate in this?

Why do we so often yield plexus relationships into hierarchical ones? Why do we tolerate, normalize, and even defend arrangements that steadily convert human lives into extractable inputs?

Part of the answer, I think, is fear.

If the hierarchy controls access to the things I need to survive, then resisting the hierarchy becomes dangerous. If losing a job means losing shelter, health care, dignity, social standing, and the ability to provide for family, then my range of meaningful choice shrinks dramatically. If my entire life is perched on a narrow ledge above the valley of scarcity, then of course I become easier to manage.

This is where the issue becomes deeply human.

We are not talking about abstract systems. We are talking about people with children, aging parents, debts, illnesses, traumas, obligations, limitations, and hopes. We are talking about people whose stories are so deep and complex that one can rarely know, from the outside, why they are not behaving more courageously or more clearly or more independently.

That realization ought to reduce our appetite for judgment.

At the same time, it ought to sharpen our analysis. Because if fear of scarcity is one of the main mechanisms by which human beings become more governable, more extractable, more manipulable, and more divided, then any serious attempt to improve human systems must address scarcity not only as an economic condition, but as a behavioral force.

And this brings us to what I call **human agency waste**.

Human agency waste is the loss of human capability that occurs when people spend their lives managing preventable precarity, performing for extractive hierarchies, aligning with systems that do not actually care for the whole, or fighting one another as proxies for competing hegemonies. It is the waste of thought, courage, craftsmanship, love, creativity, responsibility, civic energy, and deep service.

We waste people constantly.

We waste them through chronic insecurity. We waste them through incentives that reward fragmentation. We waste them through ideological sorting. We waste them through institutions that use fear to stabilize themselves. We waste them through the conversion of whole persons into labor categories, voting blocs, consumers, audiences, or moral abstractions.

A species that does this at scale should probably be a bit more modest in how it speaks of its intelligence.

Chapter 7. Mars and the Cost of Failure

At this point, Mars may seem far away. I do not think it is.

Mars is useful here not because I want to escape Earth, and not because I am trying to make this grander than it is. Mars is useful because it gives us a tangible context in which the cost of human agency waste becomes impossible to ignore.

Suppose humanity were genuinely committed to becoming multiplanetary. Suppose we wanted not merely to visit Mars, but to build durable human life there. What would that require?

It would require extraordinary coordination, sacrifice, competence, resilience, honesty, and trust. It would require long-horizon thinking. It would require tolerance for complexity. It would require humans who can work across differences without constantly collapsing into factional struggle. It would require institutions that can hold mission above vanity. It would require a culture that does not casually devour its own people.

In other words, it would require a higher apparent-to-potential intelligence ratio than we presently seem to exhibit.

Mars, then, is a mirror.

It asks us whether we are actually becoming a species capable of stewarding complexity without collapsing into extractive hierarchy, ideological war, or mass waste. It asks whether our systems can treat people as integral components of a whole rather than as expendable means. It asks whether our technological advancement is being matched by social maturation.

And even if Mars never happens, the question still matters. Because Earth itself, with all its nested systems, all its gradients, and all its competing hierarchies, is already challenging us at that level.

A civilization that cannot reduce human agency waste on Earth is likely to export that waste anywhere it goes.

So I keep Mars in the picture not as fantasy, but as a clarifying horizon. It helps reveal that this is not merely about having better politics. It is about whether humanity can become more homeostatic before its capabilities outrun its wisdom beyond recall.

Chapter 8. The Buffer: What Human Homeostasis Would Require

Now we come to what I consider one of the first practical implications of this entire line of reasoning.

If non-human biological systems remain viable in part because they are buffered against immediate collapse under shifting conditions, then what is the human analogue? What architectural element in a human system could reduce scarcity-related stress enough that people might think more clearly, act more courageously, and participate more fully in the life of the whole?

My answer, at least provisionally, is that **UBI belongs in that conversation**.

I do not present UBI as a cure-all. I do not present it as a slogan. I do not present it as an ideological badge. I present it as a candidate for a homeostatic buffer.

What would such a buffer do?

It would provide an out for people trapped in extractive systems. It would reduce the extent to which survival depends on constant submission to hierarchy. It would create breathing room. It would give people a chance to step back, reset, retrain, relocate, recover, reconsider, and reengage.

That matters because many people do not need a full life handed to them. They need enough stability to regain traction. They need enough floor beneath them that choice becomes meaningful again.

In that sense, UBI is not the homeostatic condition itself. It is an enabling architecture.

It says: if we want more homeostatic human behavior, then perhaps we should not build systems in which millions of people are permanently one bad month away from collapse. Perhaps we should not design a civilization in which fear is one of the primary tools of labor discipline, political discipline, cultural discipline, and institutional continuity.

Now, any such reservoir would have to be handled carefully. It would need to be continually regenerative. It would need to be protected against fraud and capture. It would need to be

understood as an enabler of human homeostasis, not as a license for indifference or manipulation. But those are design questions, not disqualifications.

The deeper point is this: if we are serious about moving toward a socially homeostatic civilization, then we should expect to need at least one structural mechanism whose primary purpose is to level scarcity-related stress across the organism.

That, to me, is one of the clearest reasons to elevate UBI in this conversation. It turns a moral complaint into an architectural question.

What would we build if we were actually trying to behave like an intelligent species?

A buffer would be near the top of the list.

Chapter 9. The Third Kind of Person

Even if such a buffer existed, architecture alone would not save us. People still matter. Representation still matters. Character still matters.

So let us return to the human role that began to emerge earlier in this line of reasoning: the **third kind of person**.

The first kind of person is primarily aligned with plexus concerns. This person knows what it is to produce, to work, to live close to the ground, to feel the stress of scarcity, to care about immediate integrity and reciprocal bonds.

The second kind of person is primarily aligned with hierarchy. This person coordinates, directs, allocates, plans, decides, and seeks position on the gradient for the system, or at times for themselves through the system.

The third kind of person is neither anti-hierarchy nor anti-plexus. This person is fundamentally committed to the health of the whole.

That commitment sounds obvious until one looks around and notices how rare it is in operational form.

The third kind of person must be able to think in systems. Feedback loops, tradeoffs, interdependencies, scope, incentives, waste, change management, thresholds, nested systems. They must care about fairness without becoming simplistic. They must understand hierarchy without worshipping it. They must respect the plexus without romanticizing it. They must be able to represent the whole in a way that is calm, emotionally seasoned, and practically grounded.

In a healthier civilization, that role would not be treated as exotic. It would be cultivated.

That, in part, is what I want the Plexus Leadership Academy to help do.

Because if we are going to build homeostatic human systems, we will need people who can host the dance between hierarchy and plexus without immediately collapsing into one side or the other. We will need people who can help design and protect the sweet spot. We will need representatives who do not merely mirror conflict, but reconcile conditions.

And I think many more people are capable of that than we have been taught to believe.

Chapter 10. Beyond Labels

Now we come to a temptation that shows up almost immediately in any serious social conversation.

Is this capitalist? Is it socialist? Is it communist? Is it conservative? Progressive? Religious? Secular? Western? Post-Western?

My view is that those labels, while sometimes useful, are often too coarse to do the work required here.

Each major socioeconomic ideology appears to capture something real. Each sees part of the problem. Each generates partial solutions. Each also, in practice, tends toward incompleteness when manifested through runaway hierarchies. That is why systems built under these labels so often leave wakes of human agency waste.

The problem is not merely the label. The problem is what happens when a label allows us to stop thinking.

Once I say “capitalism” or “socialism” or “communism,” I may feel as though I have said something substantial. Sometimes I have. Often I have not. Often I have only identified a camp, a preference, a history, or a mood. The actual work remains.

The actual work is more granular. It asks: what specific arrangement best preserves the integrity of the whole? What specific rights, roles, responsibilities, incentives, and buffering mechanisms support fairness? What does this do to scarcity-related stress? What does this do to local agency? What does this do to the relationship between plexus and hierarchy? Does this reduce waste or increase it? Does this move us toward or away from a socially homeostatic sweet spot?

Those are harder questions. They are also better questions.

If this model is useful, it may help us move from ideological sorting toward design thinking. Not because ideology disappears, but because the whole comes back into view.

And once the whole comes back into view, another possibility emerges. Perhaps we do not need a revolution of destruction. Perhaps what we need is a revolution in thinking. If enough people began to think homeostatically, then over time they would behave homeostatically. And if enough people behaved homeostatically, new architectures would become thinkable, then buildable.

That is a quieter claim than “burn it down.”

It is also, I suspect, more difficult.

Chapter 11. The Academy and the Invitation

This is where the Plexus Leadership Academy enters the picture.

The Academy is not meant to be a monument to a model. It is meant to be a place, conceptually and eventually institutionally, where people can learn a vocabulary and a discipline for thinking about troubled human systems without immediately losing either clarity or courage.

Its first offering is, in essence, an introduction to intqoin. But the point is not merely to explain the model. The point is to help people become more fluent in fit-for-purpose thinking about relationships, organizations, economies, communities, governments, and missions.

That means theory, yes. It means structure, dynamic relationships, context, and application patterns. But it also means safe spaces for reconciliation work. It means game-like environments in which complex social problem-solving can occur without immediately reproducing the harms we are trying to reduce. It means missions, workbench tools, bibliography, invitations, and a wider culture of experimentation around how human systems might behave more fairly.

There is also a moral tone to this that I do not want to overstate, but do not want to hide.

If we are going to do reconciliation work, safety matters. Physical safety, emotional safety, cognitive safety. “Stay Safe, Play Safe” may sound simple, but it is not trivial. Human beings do not reason well when they are under threat, and social systems do not self-correct well when fear is the main energy source.

So, in the end, the invitation is not merely to agree with me. It is to join a line of inquiry.

Suppose representation is broken.

Suppose human systems often waste astonishing amounts of human agency because they are insufficiently homeostatic.

Suppose the intelligence gap we keep displaying is not inevitable.

Suppose better representation would require not only better leaders, but better models, better buffers, better stewards, and better ways of seeing the relationship between hierarchy and plexus.

Suppose UBI, wisely designed, could serve as one of the first enabling structures.

Suppose Mars helps us see the scale of the challenge.

Suppose the whole thing is less about ideology than about whether we are willing to grow up, systemically, into a species that can carry its own power without constantly turning it against itself.

That, for now, is the mission.

And if the mission is sound, then the work ahead is not merely to talk about it, but to begin behaving in ways that make a more homeostatic future easier to imagine, easier to discuss, and eventually, easier to build.

Closing

Representation is broken. But broken is not the same as irredeemable.

The line of reasoning I have laid out here may prove incomplete. It may require revision in many places. I expect that it will. But if it helps clarify the shape of the problem, if it helps us distinguish hierarchy from plexus, if it helps us think more rigorously about fairness, buffering, agency, and the sweet spot, then it will already have done useful work.

My hope is that this is not the end of a conversation, but the beginning of one.

A good next move is a second pass that tightens rhythm, trims repetition, and slightly sharpens the spoken voice so the manuscript lands harder in the ear without losing its backbone on the page.