



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Episode #28: Scary Scary Freedom

Please note: This is an unedited transcript, provided as a courtesy, and reflects the actual conversation as closely as possible. Please forgive any typographical or grammatical errors.

- Martha Beck: [Intro Music] Welcome to Bewildered. I'm Martha Beck, here with Rowan Mangan. At this crazy moment in history a lot of people are feelings bewildered, but that actually may be a sign we're on track. Human culture teaches us to come to consensus, but nature — our own true nature — helps us come to our senses. Rowan and I believe that the best way to figure it all out is by going through bewilderment into be-wild-erment. That's why we're here. [Music fades] Hi, I'm Martha Beck!
- Rowan Mangan: And I'm Rowan Mangan and this is another episode of Bewildered, the podcast for people trying to figure it out. I've been trying to figure it out, myself, in the early mornings lately. And then Marty stayed up late and she listened to six full audio books in three hours. And by the time my alarm went off, she had it all figured out.
- Martha Beck: Well, yeah, obviously. The problem is it's all in my brain, in the form of a phonological loop.
- Rowan Mangan: Of course it is.
- Martha Beck: Yes. There's a part of the brain that when you hear something with your earballs, it stays like perched in your brain. Like if you've memorized a phone number and you say it over and over and you remember it and you dial the phone number, but it never goes to long term memory. So I have my six audio books on a phonological loop in my brain. It's totally figured out. No problems. Come question me within the next 30 seconds, I'm golden. After that, forget it. Nothing, nothing.
- Rowan Mangan: That's what we do for exams. Isn't it?
- Martha Beck: Yes, exactly that-
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: ... exactly that. So, what are you really trying to figure out, Rowie?
- Rowan Mangan: Let me tell you, just let me, because I'm going to.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Martha Beck: Go ahead.

Rowan Mangan: I'm trying to figure out, Marty ... Observing us in parents of toddler mode.

Martha Beck: Ah.

Rowan Mangan: ... I'm trying to figure out, are we potentially getting to a point where our personalities are going to be permanently altered?

Martha Beck: Oh, no question.

Rowan Mangan: Let me tell you why I ask.

Martha Beck: Okay.

Rowan Mangan: You don't know this.

Martha Beck: Okay. I'm listening.

Rowan Mangan: Well, I don't think you know it. So, probably three days ago, I was doing something, you were reading.

Martha Beck: Ah.

Rowan Mangan: You were in our living room reading. And as you read, I couldn't help noticing you very gently-

Martha Beck: What?

Rowan Mangan: ... putting your right foot in and then putting your right foot out. And I knew what you were doing because you were also singing, gently to yourself, under your breath. Then you put your right foot in again and do you know what you did?

Martha Beck: What?

Rowan Mangan: You shook it all about?

Martha Beck: Oh, no way.

Rowan Mangan: Oh you did.

Martha Beck: [inaudible 00:02:47].

Rowan Mangan: There was no mistaking.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

- Martha Beck: I had no idea. I mean I knew, I knew from raising toddlers before that your brain is never the same. For one thing, every baby comes out clutching about a fifth of your brain in its tiny fists and you never get that back. But then, then comes the toddler time and you will realize if you think about it ... I mean, we've had COVID protecting us. But if any observer came in, they would hear us going, "And that's what it's all about," to ourselves while looking for like alcoholic beverages or whatever. No, that's-
- Rowan Mangan: I do think that potentially it is what it's all about.
- Martha Beck: It is what it's all about. I think that's what I figured out the last time we recorded a podcast, that really is what it's all about. But yeah, you remain a toddler. You know what I just learned?
- Rowan Mangan: What?
- Martha Beck: And this is literally true.
- Rowan Mangan: Marty, is it literally true?
- Martha Beck: Yes. I was reading an argument for how language developed and here's the deal. Music came first, like the ancient hominids, they were singing to each other and then poetry came next and then came like prose discourse.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, I love that.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. It started in the right side of the brain and there are still cultures mainly, you know, in jungle areas where there are no articulations, there's whistling and humming.
- Rowan Mangan: Wow.
- Martha Beck: And that appears to be a precursor to the kind of language that we usually speak.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, I love that. I love the idea that music comes first, because that feels true to me.
- Martha Beck: And think about how the baby comes along, I mean like the second she was born. Remember, we put her down, we took off all her little clothes, warmed her up, so we'd see what she did just as a sprog?
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: Remember the song we started singing spontaneously? (singing)



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Rowan Mangan: And then sometimes there'd be a little bit of a (singing)

Martha Beck: And now, she's starting to ... She gets to the point where every time we sing a song, she ends with boom, boom.

Rowan Mangan: I know. It's really cute.

Martha Beck: We are. Hey, ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. I think that's it.

Rowan Mangan: Obviously.

Martha Beck: Maybe it the opposite. Anyway, we are relearning language as we did as toddlers. And I see no reason to go beyond the hokey pokey. None.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Let's just..

Martha Beck: Wouldn't the world-

Rowan Mangan: We've got ... We're on to a good thing.

Martha Beck: Wouldn't the world be a better place if all the politicians, you know, when they do their debates, they're literally just, "I put my right foot in. I put my right foot out." the other one's like, "I put my far left foot in and then I shake it all about."

Rowan Mangan: My far left foot, which in any other country would be quite a centrist foot. But you know, hey, whatever,

Martha Beck: How far right can my foot go? It's forgotten it's connected to my body and it's attacking my other foot.

Rowan Mangan: Marty, what are you trying to figure out, if anything?

Martha Beck: I am trying to figure out why I can hold things in my head that I heard in the middle of the night, like the evolution of language through music and humming, but I can't-

Rowan Mangan: [inaudible 00:05:59].

Martha Beck: What?

Rowan Mangan: You just said it.

Martha Beck: What?

Rowan Mangan: [inaudible 00:06:04].



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Martha Beck: Oh, yes, of course. That, I can remember.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: What I can't do is schedule a damn appointment.

Rowan Mangan: Oh yeah.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: Like, I have, I have people that gently and kindly do that for me in some places. But like with personal things, I'll think, "I am going to get out of my ADD brain. I'm going to pull myself up by my damn boot straps. And I am going to think like a person for five minutes and schedule an appointment." So I'm like ... I have to get nerved up for it, like all the blood goes to my brain and I schedule something. Like, I did for this morning. This happens to be a Saturday morning. So, not only did I schedule an appointment, I put it on my reminders, so it comes to my watch. It comes to my phone. It comes to my friends all around the world. It comes everywhere. And do you know what it says?

Rowan Mangan: What does it say, Marty?

Martha Beck: 10 o'clock Saturday morning.

Rowan Mangan: Aha.

Martha Beck: No idea what I'm supposed to do.

Rowan Mangan: Aha.

Martha Beck: But, dammit, I've got that time reserved and I know it's happening, 10 o'clock Saturday morning. It came, it went. Did I lie? Not. Somebody-

Rowan Mangan: We'll never know.

Martha Beck: ... out there's going, "where the hell is?"

Rowan Mangan: Oh God.

Martha Beck: There's always someone out there going, "Where the hell is she?" That's the story of my life.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. It's often you.
- Martha Beck: It really is. But I think I have an evil scheduler twin that's just trying to mess up my life. And it's winning.
- Rowan Mangan: Totally. Totally.
- Martha Beck: So, in keeping with our new item-
- Rowan Mangan: Oh yes.
- Martha Beck: ... which won't be new forever, but it's still new to us, we have to do our weekly Karenism.
- Rowan Mangan: Karenism of the week.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Now do you want to set the scene?
- Martha Beck: Sure. We have this very large golden retriever who we ... She was a rescue. Somebody else couldn't keep her and we took her on. She's this big fluffy golden, beautiful. We sent her to Doggie Do Good Camp when we first got her. Doggie Do Good is supposed to send them back after two weeks with a full range of behaviors that you could use to get them to, say, cook a full meal, right? Like this Doggie Do Good is the dog training champ. So, we take her in, two years later ... Two years ... two months later. No, it was two weeks, God darn it. My evil twin.
- They sent a note, "We would like to keep her for two more weeks. She hasn't really mastered all the skills." So we left her there for a full month at Doggie Do Good Camp. She came back to us with a very, very dim, hazy understanding of the word come. Everything else was like not happening. And she forgot that within a week. They wrote a note saying, "Claire is one of the prettiest dogs we've ever hosted at Doggie Do Good Camp. Her scores are very low." Poor Claire.
- Rowan Mangan: So picture it, our living room mid-afternoon. Karen is cleaning yeast infection out of Claire's ears with cotton balls.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

- Martha Beck: Which is constant. And I think, frankly, it's become kind of a compulsive disorder for Karen too. The two of them are locked in [inaudible 00:09:31] where Claire comes up and goes, "Excuse me, I'm feeling somewhat anxious. Would you please scrub the youth from my ears?" That's how she talks. "Excuse me ..." The first day we got her, I wake up in the night and there's this massive thing, like clump on my back, pushing her nose into my face, going, "Excuse me, I'm feeling a trifle anxious. Could I please put my face against your face?" And that's how we slept for about a week.
- Rowan Mangan: Do you think anyone out there has a sexual kink whereby they have to come up to their partner and go, "Excuse me, would you scrub the yeast from my ears?"
- Martha Beck: I bet there's someone out there-
- Rowan Mangan: There's got to be.
- Martha Beck: ... going, "I feel so seen."
- Rowan Mangan: So there, Karen is scrubbing the yeast from Claire's ears. Claire loves it, by the way, because it's attention. And Karen fondly looks down at Claire and she says, 'Oh Claire, you're just a combination of yeast, Prozac and dumbness."
- Martha Beck: Yeah. That's it, a dog made of yeast, Prozac and dumbness.
- Rowan Mangan: And who among us can say different?
- Martha Beck: None. None among us.
- Rowan Mangan: None of us.
- Martha Beck: My evil scheduler twin could say that. But, yeah, that's our Karenism. She just ... Occasionally, one of them just floats out of her brain and it's delicious. We enjoy it deeply.
- Rowan Mangan: Utterly delicious. But let's get onto podcast of the day.
- Martha Beck: The topic at hand.
- Rowan Mangan: The topic at hand, yes.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Rowan Mangan: We'll be right back with more Bewildered. I have a favor to ask. You might not know this, but ratings and reviews are like gold in the podcasting universe. They get podcasts in front of more faces, more eyes, more ears, all the bits that you could have a podcast in front of, that's what they do. So, it would help us enormously if you would consider going over to your favorite podcasting app, especially if it's Apple, and giving us a few stars, maybe even five, maybe even six, if you can find a way to hack the system, I wouldn't complain. And a review would also be wonderful. We read them all and love them. So, thank you very much in advance. Let's just go out there and bewilder the world.

So, the topic of this episode comes from a conversation ... As so many of them do, let's be honest ... a conversation that we had recently about, of all things, whether or not the plot of the long ago book, Lord of the Flies-

Martha Beck: Classic -

Rowan Mangan: ... is ... Classic.

Martha Beck: ... it's another word for long ago book.

Rowan Mangan: Thank you, Marty.

Martha Beck: Anyway, Lord of the Flies,

Rowan Mangan: Lord of the Flies by William Golding is plausible or not. So, our question was - will a group of boys, if left to their own devices on a desert island, kill each other?

Martha Beck: Yeah-

Rowan Mangan: Boom.

Martha Beck: ... just in case you've never read Lord of the Flies, that is the plot. And it was written by William Golding, who was a very unhappy school master in England in the early 20th century. And he wrote this book where a bunch of school boys end up deserted on an island. And at first, they have sort of social institutions that they put in place, but very rapidly, they deteriorate into brutal, horrifying, like animalistic ... Well, no, animals are nice. They're much worse. They like are killing each other and biting each other's flesh off.

Rowan Mangan: It's sort of like bullying taken to its natural extreme.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Martha Beck: Yeah, yeah, quite so. And so, this became a huge aspect of the culture where, I mean, Golding's premise was, "Thank God for all the rules at British boarding school, because this is what boys will do when left to themselves."

Rowan Mangan: Right.

Martha Beck: And it was almost sort of taken as a, "Obviously." But, then I was reading a really good book called *Humankind: A Hopeful History* by Rutger Bregman, who's a Dutch psychologist? Sociologist? Social scientist, anyway,

Rowan Mangan: It was the ninth book she read three nights ago.

Martha Beck: Yeah. I've got it on a phonological loop, catch me now because it'll be gone in the morning.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: Anyway, his premise is people are naturally good. Okay, fine. So, he said *Lord of the Flies* was accepted as if it were fact, but in point of order, it is fiction. So he went looking for a real world scenario and he actually found a case where a group of boys in the South Sea islands stole a boat for a joy ride, got caught in a storm and ended up stranded on a desert island for 15 months.

Rowan Mangan: Isn't that brilliant, that there's a real case of it? I mean, probably sorry, boys.

Martha Beck: Yeah. And I think one of them was ... The sea captain who found them was Australian. It's always-

Rowan Mangan: Of course, he was.

Martha Beck: ... the Australians to the rescue, right? And South Africans, just the adventurous folk. So, what he found out was what had happened on the island when they were in fact in a *Lord of the Flies* situation. The first thing they did was sit down and say, "We must never disagree with each other, we're all we've got." And like, "If we get upset, go off to a different part of the island. If you've argued, the two boys who argued go to different places until you calm down. Then, we'll all get together and iron this out together," which is the way a lot of tribal people do work with conflict, or did, when they still were left to themselves. But, 15 months later, they were in tiptop shape physically. They were lifelong friends and they had evolved a way of being and doing things that was intensely cooperative.

Rowan Mangan: How many of them were there?



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Martha Beck: There were six.

Rowan Mangan: So, do you think that case, not to get too far off topic, but like that case buoys the theory that culture only really begins to break down once it gets to a certain number of people or is that bullshit?

Martha Beck: Yeah, that's a span of attention. Basically, when you get to a group of 135 people, they can't form a cohesive organization and they start factionalizing. Like a company would have to start making departments. The most people we can hold in our heads is about 135 people.

Rowan Mangan: That's way more than I can.

Martha Beck: Oh, me too. And yet, people have like 9,000 friends on Facebook.

Rowan Mangan: That's ... Yeah.

Martha Beck: That's a whole nother podcast topic. Anyway. That's really not about things become bestial and brutal at that point. It's just that you can't really track the activities of that many people, so you have to start diversifying. But the-

Rowan Mangan: Creating social media platforms.

Martha Beck: ... brutality ... I think that Golding would argue with Hobbes from the Leviathan. And there's this breakdown where Hobbes was a-

Rowan Mangan: Oh God.

Martha Beck: ... philosopher and Rousseau was a philosopher and Hobbes said, "People are nasty, brutish and short-"

Rowan Mangan: Rude.

Martha Beck: ... and their lives are nasty, brutish and short. He was physically nasty, brutish and short. Then you've got Rousseau who said, "No, people are actually good, noble, savage. We're all good at heart." And there's been this back and forth ever since. And I think the William Golding Lord of the Flies thing is you get two people in a room, they're still going to stab each other's eyes out. Like, that's just who we are.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Rowan Mangan: Gotcha. Yeah. Yeah. So it was quite interesting in our conversation where Marty said, "Well, that's how kids actually are," like these Polynesian boys who were there and created a little utopia-

Martha Beck: Yeah. I was like, "Oh, la life, everything is nice."

Rowan Mangan: ... of cooperation, and like a little Swiss Family Robinson kind of scenario. But I said to her, "No, no, because kids at school actually do act that way. They act exactly like Lord of the Flies." And that's usually when Lord of the flies is invoked-

Martha Beck: Yes.

Rowan Mangan: ... is to describe kids at school. So then we looked at each other like-

Martha Beck: Oh.

Rowan Mangan: ... "Oh, school."

Martha Beck: School. So instead of thank God we have the rules of school, because it's keeping people from being bestial brutes, it's like, oh, all those institutional rules are making them bestial brutes.

Rowan Mangan: So we started talking about like the institutions of the culture and how ... I'm talking about schools, universities, corporations, governments, military, prisons.

Martha Beck: Prisons is kind of the ultimate.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, like those are the kind of big eye institutions. Right?

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: But then there's also the more practice based.

Martha Beck: Yeah. There's either ... Yeah, they either exist as an entity or as a relationship, so institutions like marriage and the traditional family. There's some religions that just sort of leak into every aspect of your life called life world religions. And those are also institutions, though you don't go to them the way you'd go to prison, for example. By the way, just a shout out to the show we've been watching on Apple TV called Severance where it is the corporate world taken to its extreme.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Rowan Mangan: Anyone who's watched Severance, bear that show in mind as we have this conversation.

Martha Beck: Yeah, because it basically shows how the corporation taken into its logical extreme becomes very prison-like.

Rowan Mangan: Among other things.

Martha Beck: But so do practices, so do families ... You know, life world religions can become very, very confining and put you under a microscope of scrutiny to see if you're cooperating.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: And that's ... Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: In a way you can sort of think about these institutions as the hands and the arms and the biceps of the culture, because it's where the culture teaches us to be it.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: It's the places where we get indoctrinated or trained. When we were talking about it, I kept saying, it's like a human processor. These institutions, like a food processor, are human processors because you go into them and they form you or-

Martha Beck: Yeah. They digest all the bits of you that they can use and then they excrete everything else. And it so happens that what they can use is conformity, obedience, blind obedience, and what they don't want, what they excrete at the other side ... In other words, what they treat as the, yeah, the end product of digestion is your soul, your personality, your joy. Those really don't make institutions run more effectively. The institution wants a mechanistic approach.

It's so interesting what you say about biceps because where the right hemisphere approaches things by interacting within the left hemisphere of the brain makes you grasp, grasp, grasp things. And there's this ... And it also creates the types of institutions that force obedience. But we don't need to look very far for examples of this. We've all seen how institutions eat people's souls in one way or another and how that can create brutality. So, that was our takeaway from the Lord of the Flies thing is that the institutions are the problem creating the supposedly subhuman behavior, not keeping us from it.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

- Rowan Mangan: So if the boys are taken out of the school, so if we are taken out of the social controls, will we kill each other? Or will we cooperate? This is what you were just saying. Golding says that only school prevents brutality. And then the question that we're raising today is are those behaviors that we think of as coming from the absence of the controlling institution are actually the thing that's creating that?
- Martha Beck: Right.
- Rowan Mangan: Sorry. I got a bit lost in the digestive metaphor. So I'm just trying to come back to ... Like desert islands are easier for me than gastrointestinal tracts.
- Martha Beck: Well, I like the organic side of it. So anyway, that's what we're talking about today, right? What is our real relationship with institutions as part of the culture? And we all interact with various institutions, our families, our work, jobs, work jobs, religions, different ... you know, if you're going to a university or whatever. If you have medical care, you're in the institution of medicine. And we talked about it and decided that this is something we need to understand so that we can come to our true nature because it is very, very insidiously destructive to nature.
- Rowan Mangan: It is.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: So, as our listeners know, in this podcast, we help people from bewilderment to be-wild-erment, to their wild true nature. And I must say this topic is a meaty one. And so we're going to try and keep it as simple as we can as we go through. But let me tell you, it got meaty as hell out the back when we were trying to like ... Oh, I mean, she's already got into Rousseau. Camus came. I mean, there will be existentialists-
- Martha Beck: Yes. There will be existentialists.
- Rowan Mangan: ... friends. How could there not?
- Martha Beck: Yeah. So prep yourself.
- Rowan Mangan: Get ready, get ready.
- Martha Beck: We got some philosophers coming your way.
- Rowan Mangan: All right, here we go.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

- Martha Beck: Okay.
- Rowan Mangan: So listen, Marty-
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: ... let's explore first what does the culture say? What's the cultural context? What's the consensus view about institutions?
- Martha Beck: Well, you can almost say that institutions are like fractal forms of culture writ large, let me break that down. They're smaller versions of the main culture of that is dominating you, whatever that happens to be. So you may be ... If you're in the West, we talk about Western culture a lot. And the Western culture creates institutions that are like hyper examples of itself. And the only thing that the culture ever wants is for you to do what it says. So ... Yes.
- Rowan Mangan: Can I say a word?
- Martha Beck: Yes, Please.
- Rowan Mangan: Synecdoche.
- Martha Beck: Synecdoche?
- Rowan Mangan: Mm-hmm.
- Martha Beck: Wait, I just have to hold that enough on phonological loop and just stroke it for a few minutes.
- Rowan Mangan: A synecdoche is when you take one example of a thing to represent the thing. So you can say a sail and what you actually mean is a fleet of ships. So-
- Martha Beck: wow.
- Rowan Mangan: ... if you look at a single church, we say the church, that's a synecdoche, because we say the church with a small "c", no, no, with a large "C" meaning the institution of churchiness-
- Martha Beck: Right, [inaudible 00:25:00].
- Rowan Mangan: ... which is their official name. So, that's a synecdoche.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Martha Beck: Wow, that is incredible. It is such a shorthand way to just like deliver this concept. Synecdoche, you say to people, and then you spend 20 minutes describing what you mean, defining synecdoche. And after that, everyone just has to sit and fondle their phonological loop.

Rowan Mangan: I would like to tell a story now.

Martha Beck: Please do.

Rowan Mangan: My friend Kat, who is a listener to this show ... Hi Kat ... once was delivering a paper at a conference. She's an academic. She's very institutionalized in universities, but she'd written this paper and she got up to deliver it. And she used the word synecdoche in it. And it was only when she got to the sentence with the word synecdoche in it that she discovered she had no idea how to pronounce the word synecdoche, which is not intuitive. And you got to learn that. So everyone go ... Like, let that one go. I'm doing a public service here.

Martha Beck: You are, yeah.

Rowan Mangan: I'm helping.

Martha Beck: To me ... You know what's coming into my mind is Eeyore from Winnie the Poo-

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: ... because he's a cynic donkey.

Rowan Mangan: I didn't see that coming.

Martha Beck: I made you laugh with a pun and you told me that no pun-

Rowan Mangan: God dammit.

Martha Beck: ... will ever make you laugh.

Rowan Mangan: God dammit.

Martha Beck: You're the one who brought up cynic donkeys.

Rowan Mangan: I'm never going to ... Kat, let's just go back to synecdoche.

Martha Beck: Okay, synecdoche.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

- Rowan Mangan: All right.
- Martha Beck: I've embarrassed myself a few times that way, words I read, but did not know how to pronounce.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: Okay. So, whatever your synecdoche is, the church, whatever your individual church is, wants you to be faithful and not question it. The job demands loyalty. Your family has certain rules and roles that define how you interact with each other. And everyone says, "That's the way it's done." Like, yes, you go to Uncle Harold's birthday party, even though everyone despises him and he attacks people with weapons because it's family and that's the way it's done.
- Rowan Mangan: You know what occurs to me is that we talk about culture and on this podcast, and we talk about how we make little cultures all the time. And I wonder if the word institution is a good way of thinking about it, because the institution of ... There's the institution of family, but then there's the institution of your family.
- Martha Beck: Right.
- Rowan Mangan: And the way that those rules function, they function within this kind of institution.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. Fractal forms. Fractals, fractals, fractals.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. So the institutions are the way that the culture like reproduces itself and sustains its own existence. Like you think about school, we march these children ... I'm not saying school's bad. Sometimes it's bad-
- Martha Beck: I loved school.
- Rowan Mangan: ... not always school. Yeah, I loved school, but we march them in and then they march out the other side with like Rousseau in their head-
- Martha Beck: Because that'll help you in a blizzard.
- Rowan Mangan: ... and phonological loops that are already like dissipating by the time they head out.
- Martha Beck: I may not know how to pay the rent, but I can say synecdoche in a speech.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

- Rowan Mangan: Hell yes, I can.
- Martha Beck: I literally don't know how to pay the rent. I mean, I know that there's money and it has to go there. But the logistics of it baffle me. It's just like 10 o'clock Monday morning.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: Yep. Anyway-
- Rowan Mangan: So, the way I think that the culture does this control of us through its institutions is through like positive dog training, rewards, like we're rewarding us and approving of us when we do it right and ignoring us or censoring us when we do it wrong. But especially the reward, that's pretty powerful.
- Martha Beck: Well, I mean, that's what it motivated us in school because we fit in pretty well with that-
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: ... particular Institution. We liked doing it and it felt very comfortable to us. It was easy to ... Like, I was such a suck up bro.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh my God, me too.
- Martha Beck: Oh my God. I knew, intuitively, even as a small evil child, that if I sat near the front and looked absolutely fascinated, even though I was thinking about very different things and like making animals with clay under the desk with my hands, if I looked absorbed, I would be teachers pet. I didn't even have to perform well, just look at them that way.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, I know. At my most insufferable, I used to sit on the desk-
- Martha Beck: Oh, that is ... that's low.
- Rowan Mangan: ... in this one class every time. And I was such the teacher's pet. It was so gross. I would sit on the desk. I would write that ... Yeah, you can do it because ...
- Martha Beck: A lot of approval.
- Rowan Mangan: There's a lot of approval.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Martha Beck: We got a lot of approval. Now, other people who didn't fit into the system got a lot of punishment and I've worked with so many of those people as clients. I did a seminar once where like half the group turned out to have dyslexia. And I got to tell you the stories of how they were shamed and battered by the school system made me weep openly.

Rowan Mangan: I have some idea of that from people I know. And I also want to say that there is another institution, which is the institution of the playground.

Martha Beck: Oh yeah.

Rowan Mangan: And sometimes the teachers pets who did great indoors did less great when it came to the institution of the playground-

Martha Beck: Oh yeah.

Rowan Mangan: ... which is where we start to edge into William Golding's.

Martha Beck: I was periodically tied up by them during-

Rowan Mangan: Oh, Jesus.

Martha Beck: Yeah. It wasn't a great playground place for me, which is why both of us, like when Lila says, "Ball," and kicks across the room, we look at each other with eyes like horses that have just realized the barn is on fire. Don't let her go into a playground. Okay. So anyway, yeah, the institution takes you in it molds you with both positive and negative reinforcement. And if you're not Claire the dog, you come out doing what they say you should do. Otherwise, if you are Claire, the dog, your scores will be very low. Anyway, so the thing is, when you're born into this, you've got this wide open social sensibility that just sort of sucks up all the reinforcement, but like at the most minute level. And before you can talk, you're already conforming to it and believing that that's how it is. You just believe your authority figures. Then at some point, you're going to hit an institution that isn't right for you.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Martha Beck: And there's always ... The crap always flows downhill with institutions. So like there's a centralized school system that we both thrived in. When I put my older kids in school, they didn't all thrive. They didn't all like it. And the pressure I got, to make the children fit in was a social pressure that I had never experienced before. Like, not only does the child have to fit into the school, but the parent has to make the child. And I totally bought into that for a while, greatly to the expense of my relationship with my kids and my kids happiness. I was trying to force them because I was getting so much pressure from the institution.

All institutions do that. They develop these levels of hierarchy and the people who sucked it all in with their mother's milk and have never questioned it, will then massively apply it to other people. People who get hazed ... I worked with a bunch of doctors once, and there's a kind of hazing period. I had a doctor who had been on call for 48 hours and had the flu and was told to operate on someone. And she said, "I can't, I'll kill him if I open his chest." And her supervisor, her attending or whatever they call it, said, "You're going to do that, or you'll never be a doctor. Cut now."

Rowan Mangan: Wow.

Martha Beck: Yeah. Like that's how hard we are socialized by institutions and we become like them.

Rowan Mangan: That's right, and it's not very ... They're not organic squishy things, institutions, like little us. So as we become like them, we become ... Like the flu doesn't exist. Use your machine to open that machine and cut it up. I don't know exactly how surgery works, but I think it's something like this.

Martha Beck: That, I think, is a good ... For those of you who can see, this is a good representation of heart surgery.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Just kind of waggle your hands about a bit. I think I'd be great at it, but anyway.

Martha Beck: So, here's the thing you go into the institution and if you can match what it wants, it rewards you so much that you feel safe.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Yeah.

Martha Beck: And you feel, "Ah, I have, I have my community around me and I have made it, I have done ... I have gained the respect and the belonging," that all of us crave. But, at the same time, because the institutions are not actually modeled after our nature, they feel good to the ego, the part of us that is purely social, but they can be murder to the soul.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

- Rowan Mangan: Yes, absolutely.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. And the more institutionalized we become, the more we lose a sense of freedom.
- Rowan Mangan: So, to come back to the Lord of the Flies and the school example, so this idea of freedom, right?
- Martha Beck: Mm-hmm.
- Rowan Mangan: Like, the boys are free on the island where they supposedly kill each other, but what do we mean by free? What's free versus what's safe? Because somewhere between in the ... Like the story's metaphor of like the boarding school through to the desert island is a choice that we're actually facing in our lives all the time which is, "Do I tend towards safe, or do I tend towards free?" And I don't think I fully understood until we started having this conversation that safe and free are often, as we experience them, like opposites.
- Martha Beck: Right.
- Rowan Mangan: And we think of freedom as such a like la, la easy, "Yay. I'm free, free and easy." But actual freedom, when you're looking at how we relate to our culture can be really scary. And the institution often is ... looks like the more comfortable choice to make.
- Martha Beck: It's the alternative to plotting our own course. Right?
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: So we don't have to make decisions, we don't have to ... We just do what we're told. We look for our instructions, we follow our instructions and whoof, we're off the hook for figuring out what to do with our lives, right?
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, exactly.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Martha Beck: So like every morning we wake up with a range of choices, depending on where we are. Some of us are ... Like, if you're in prison, then your range of choice is obviously narrowed. But Victor Frankl said, "There are two ways to go to the gas chamber free or not free". And that's what he sort of discovered for himself in Auschwitz. You can't think of a more brutal and regimented institution than that. So, he still felt like he had the option of remaining free at some level in some way. And I remember reading that when I was about 13 and having to go away and think hard, like, "How could you possibly be free when you're trapped?" And I think it's about the choice of how you define yourself and these tiny myriad forks in the road that you make every day. So you get up in the morning. There's this wonderful scene. I think it's in *The Color Purple*. I can't remember which book it's in, but it's-

Rowan Mangan: Purple.

Martha Beck: What?

Rowan Mangan: Purple. Purple.

Martha Beck: Oh.

Rowan Mangan: Purple.

Martha Beck: That's how Lila says purple.

Rowan Mangan: Purple.

Martha Beck: We are definitely degenerating into toddler brain.

Rowan Mangan: I'm so sorry.

Martha Beck: So, anyway, it's a woman who's been raised in slavery on the morning after emancipation. And she goes to the door of this hut and she has no resources, no supportive social structures at all. And she says, "I get to decide for myself what to do with the day." And here's the thing is she appreciates that, having been robbed of it totally. But we get up, and more often than not, the idea of deciding for ourselves what to do with the day is just too overwhelming.

Rowan Mangan: There are two ways to go to the coffee machine-

Martha Beck: Free [inaudible 00:38:03]

Rowan Mangan: ... free or not free.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

- Martha Beck: Oh, oh, that's right on the edge there, Rowie. But-
- Rowan Mangan: That's me contrasting my easy privileged life-
- Martha Beck: Yes.
- Rowan Mangan: ... with what other people have had to go through.
- Martha Beck: Privileged noted, check. Anyway. So the easier path, I think, for most people, because we've been inculturated from our birth is what do we do with the day? We obey an organizational credo of some sort, an institutional rule. On our way to the coffee machine, what do you do? Do you shave your face or your legs or both? Do you send the emails to your superior, who's sent you emails overnight because we're not supposed to sleep in your corporate culture. Do you act out your cultural family role? Do you just fall into the institutional expectations? I think most of us do that. And the real killer here is that we don't understand we're doing it because it's invisible to us. We've interjected or built into our own psyches, the rules of the institutions that we belong to, so we don't know that we're free-
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: ... to choose our behavior.
- Rowan Mangan: This is my mantra that I'm always repeating when we talk about these things is like, we don't realize that culture is optional. We think it's natural. We think that we're obeying our own preferences. Right? But I think what this conversation showed me is that, no, by making itself the path of least resistance, the institution often is actually just slightly molding us towards moving into itself.
- Martha Beck: I would say more than slightly, often.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Yeah. But, you allow yourself to tell yourself that it's still a personal preference rather than mind control.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Martha Beck: Yeah. The question doesn't even arise to you because it's internalized at such a deep level, so we think ... The two phrases that I always ask clients, not to say, unless it's literally true, are I can't and I have to. And just notice the places where you say I can't and I have to. "I have to go to Uncle Harold's house, even though he stabs people because I'm his nephew or whatever. I have to go to work because ... I have to go to this job because it's my only way to survive. I have to, I have to, I can't choose for myself."

This whole thing really turned for me when you said, "What if institutions aren't using us? What if we are using the institutions?" Because if pressed, we will say we are victims of the institution. "I have to because the system says I have to." There's no argument. Right?

Rowan Mangan: Mm-hmm.

Martha Beck: But what if, given the ultimate freedom that we all do have, we shun our liberty and say, "Oh, I'm not going to have to take responsibility for thinking it through or dealing with the consequences or doing the hard things as long as I have to do it for the institution." So we're using the institution. And I can tell you, I have had clients go into rages when I said they had a choice whether to stay in the job they hated or leave it-

Rowan Mangan: Isn't that-

Martha Beck: ... rage

Rowan Mangan: ... fascinating.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: Isn't that fascinating that when presented with our own choices, we can become furious-

Martha Beck: Oh my God.

Rowan Mangan: ... and furiously defend our lack of choice.

Martha Beck: Yes, yes. Terrifying. I was in an assertiveness training class once and the teacher was saying, "When you say, 'That makes me mad or that made me feel whatever,' we're actually not being accurate." What we say is, "You did that and I felt this way," because you get to choose even how you react emotionally to what people do, so this is even in a very confined situation. And this woman, this little meek looking woman, jumped top and screamed, "I do not have choices."



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Rowan Mangan: Wow.

Martha Beck: And then she stormed out of the class because she in fact had a choice. Right? But everybody else in the room was like, "Wow, object lesson right there."

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Fascinating.

Martha Beck: It really is.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. So, this is where we got in our conversation about these issues and inevitably as happens, and we did warn you, we got drawn into existentialism-

Martha Beck: Like you do.

Rowan Mangan: ... like you do. And, Marty, you know that because I said the word existentialism, you now have to tell the existentialist story-

Martha Beck: Okay.

Rowan Mangan: ... which is completely irrelevant to this topic.

Martha Beck: Totally irrelevant. Just put parenthesis around this whole thing but this is very funny. I was talking to a friend who knew Ro and Karen and me, but hadn't realized we were a unit. And one day we were talking along and I realized that she didn't know that all three of us were in a relationship, so I told her. All of you who haven't heard the previous podcast explaining this, if you're freaking out right now, that's what she did. But, she of course, protested that she was not freaked out. She was like, "Oh yeah, that's fine with ... That's fine with me. I mean, I'm very ... Myself. I'm very ..." And she was groping, I could tell, for the word eccentric. She was, "I'm very, eh ... Well, I'm not an existentialist for sure, because they are really crazy." And I was like, "Yeah, you're eccentric."

Rowan Mangan: How does she demonstrate to you-

Martha Beck: She said-

Rowan Mangan: ... her own eccentricity?

Martha Beck: ... "I mean, I read books about these things. I mean, there are books about it. I mean, Google it, Google books. And then sometimes when I'm at a restaurant, I just eat the whole shrimp-

Rowan Mangan: The whole shrimp.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Martha Beck: ... "with the tail and everything."

Rowan Mangan: Which is very similar to polyamory.

Martha Beck: Exactly like polyamory.

Rowan Mangan: Amazing.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: Amazing. So there you go, freedom and choice.

Martha Beck: And the relationship always of seafood to your choices as a social creature.

Rowan Mangan: Exactly.

Martha Beck: Yes.

Rowan Mangan: Exactly. Perfect metaphor. So-

Martha Beck: Back to philosophy.

Rowan Mangan: Back to philosophy. So, this is where I started thinking about Sartre right. And started imagining myself walking through the left bank and all that fun stuff back when I could still smoke-

Martha Beck: [inaudible 00:44:39].

Rowan Mangan: ... ciggys. [inaudible 00:44:41] So, Sartre reckoned that all our suffering as humans comes from the fact that we can't cope with our own freedom, the fact that we are essentially free and oh-

Martha Beck: Oh, that really resonates with Pascal's famous statement, "All our suffering comes from the fact that we are unable to sit quietly alone in a room." Because if you sit quietly, your nature rises up and you recognize the truth of your own freedom. So they were kind of edging toward the same thing. When you let go of everything, boom, you start to feel the terror of your own freedom. So sorry. Back to Sartre.

Rowan Mangan: I don't disagree. As our friend, Carmen would say, I don't disagree, but I do think that you just got stuck in a little bit of competitive name dropping there because you heard me say Sartre.

Martha Beck: Well-



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Rowan Mangan: And your little Harvard drunk self went, "Oh, I see your Sartre and I raise you Pascal."

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: But guess what? I've got Camus around the corner-

Martha Beck: Well, I am

Rowan Mangan: ... bitch.

Martha Beck: I'm in fear and trembling. Kierkegaard, boom.

Rowan Mangan: I said Kierkegaard before you said Kierkegaard when we were talking about this.

Martha Beck: They're all going to hate us now, Ro. They're going to tie us up on the playground and ... They are going to tie us to the swings and then do bad things to us on the swings. Trust me, it's happened before. Anyway-

Rowan Mangan: I think you'll find that Sartre says, and I quote ... I think it was Sartre who said quite literally, "Man ..." He means that in a very general sense ... "is condemned to be free."

Martha Beck: Condemned to be free.

Rowan Mangan: Because once thrown into the world, he's responsible for everything he does. It's up to you to give life a meaning, which is terrifying.

Martha Beck: Absolutely. I mean, to realize there are no grownups, that we're all just bit bopping around. Like the boys on the desert island, "All the grownups are gone. What the hell are we going to do?" Right?

Rowan Mangan: That's ... Oh yeah, of course, institutions are the grownups. I just did that. I just did that. And that means that we can be kids forever if we just keep going to church and keep going to our corporation.

Martha Beck: Absolutely.

Rowan Mangan: Then we don't have to ever be free.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

- Martha Beck: So many people in ... 12 to 15 years ago, there was this period where I started, like ... I have this little company, Martha Beck, Inc. I had one person working with me and maybe twice a month, I would get people sending me emails, saying, "I need a job at your company. I will do anything. I will empty the waste baskets. I will lick the floors clean with my tongue." They're like, "Maybe I could work in sales or marketing." I'm like, "It's just me and one other person." And I would say to them, "I just made up what I'm doing. Every day, I make up my job. I make up my company. It's terrifying. I don't know if it'll work ever. Why don't you make something up?"
- Rowan Mangan: Because it's terrifying.
- Martha Beck: Exactly. And because we're not taught to do it at all. We're not socialized to be free. We're socialized to be unfree.
- Rowan Mangan: It's interesting, Marty, we often talk about the fact that as a public figure, thought leader, all these things that you are, that there's this tendency that people have ... Like, you have brilliant ideas. You have a brilliant mind. You're very well spoken. You're also really good at naming things.
- Martha Beck: Oh yeah. That's true.
- Rowan Mangan: We've talked about how from people you know through to people who read your books or listen to this podcast or whatever, you'll say something and have an idea and people want to immediately turn that into an institutional document, like-
- Martha Beck: Yeah, into a kind of dogma.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

- Martha Beck: And they'll come ... And I'll see ... Like people will say, "Settle an argument for us. in your book, *Steering by Starlight*, you wrote about the map maker and the," I don't know, "oil rig worker." I can't remember. And they're like, "What are the differences and similarities between the oil rigger and the mapmaker?" And I'm like, "I don't know, I haven't read it." But it becomes like this monolithic collection of meanings because I used it as a metaphor in a book once.
- And that's another way in which the institutional part of the mind ... Really truly the left hemisphere does think in more linear fragmented terms. I know that's a generalization, but it's also ... There's a lot of evidence. So one of the things about it is it's very, very verbal and it creates straight lines and hierarchies. So, the moment you give something language and it fits into the model of maybe this is an institution, people are like, "Okay, we need to have debates on the merits of these terms so that we can obey them somehow. And we desperately need a job with your company," which actually does not really exist. It's-
- Rowan Mangan: They want you to be their church. They want you to be their corporation-
- Martha Beck: Or, somebody-
- Rowan Mangan: They want you to be ...
- Martha Beck: Yeah-
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: ... somebody be the grownups and I'm not a grown up,
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, I can vouch for that.
- Martha Beck: I get up every morning and go, "Oh shit, I get to decide for myself what to do with the day." It's terrifying.
- Rowan Mangan: And that's bewilderment. That's-



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Martha Beck: It never gets easier. Well, you're right. Bewilderment gets easier because your wild self starts stepping up and saying, "Here are the things I would like to do." But, that comes later after ... That's sort of how to get wilder. Most of us are trained to just get up and do what we have to. And no matter how the freedom is offered to us, we don't take it. I had this class of business school students once, and I said, "What is your goal in life?" And this one kid said ... Kid? He was 30. He said, "I want to travel the world. And to do that, I have to get a job in a big company, work my way up the corporate ladder to CEO, become a member of the board with a lot of wealth and then I can travel."

And the other students in the class immediately said ... They were from all over the world in international business school. And they started to say, "Well, in my country, you could go right now and teach English as a second language. In my company, you could stay with my friends and help them build their house and they would put you up for a month." Within 15 minutes, they had found ways that this young man could actually really, truly have taken off the next day to travel the world. That's how free he was. And did he do it? No. He had to really let go of the institutionalized aspects of his own mind before he could allow himself to even countenance it, let alone, get the courage to do it.

Rowan Mangan: Right. And we do that in those big I institutions, like corporate institutions. But we also do it, I think in the small I institutions, like the family rules. I remember a long time ago, a friend of mine who was a single mother at the time, it was Father's Day. And I remember her just being absolutely heartbroken and saying, "A family isn't a family without a dad." And-

Martha Beck: Whoops.

Rowan Mangan: Oh shit, we fucked that one up. It's just so funny how the way that we interpret institutions can just have such power over us, you know?

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: And we talked about ... I think we've talked about it before, but someone I knew was talking about Liz Gilbert's Eat, Pray, Love journey with some colleagues. And they were absolutely outraged that she did that. Like, "Oh, it must be so nice to just travel. I would have to sell my house to do that." And my friend went, "Well, she did sell her house to do that." Like, it's a choice.

Martha Beck: Don't mention that.

Rowan Mangan: And the other-



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

- Martha Beck: Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain.
- Rowan Mangan: Exactly. And the man behind the curtain is you and your own freedom.
- Martha Beck: Ooh, wait, let that sink in for a while. Toto, the dog, pulls the curtain away and it's you fooling yourself into thinking you have to do what you say.
- Rowan Mangan: Wow. Those drugs that Judy Garland was taking are pretty strong.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. Well, she was an existentialist and they are way out there.
- Rowan Mangan: I've heard she used to eat an entire shrimp.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, so Tim Ferriss was the other one that I thought of where he was challenging the same, the work one, the work one's very powerful in our-
- Martha Beck: Yes, in this-
- Rowan Mangan: ... lives or-
- Martha Beck: ... particular culture, it really is. Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. And when he wrote *The 4-Hour Workweek*, his whole premise was we have this idea we work and work and work and save and save and save. And then we retire at 65 and then we can travel for a while. And he's like, "No, just do it all at once. Be working and ..." Travel was a big one for him, like it was for me ... "travel while you're working. Make it all happen at the same time. Not when your body's not as fresh and [inaudible 00:53:58]."
- Martha Beck: Yeah. I think one thing that shows us is that we are freer now to cobble together the life we want than ever before. If you were born a peasant in 12th century Scotland, you were going to plow the fields, feed your family, just barely, serve your feudal Lord. Hopefully not do anything wrong and get stabbed and then die at 35. Like, there really were fewer choices. And the institutions really, in some ways, they were more aggressive about owning people. But in some ways they really were-
- Rowan Mangan: You're digging yourself into a hole.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Martha Beck: ... a shortcut to knowing what to do with the day, when you were going to be uneducated and die really young. But now, like Tim Ferriss showed us, you have options. You have a lot of options to be outside of institutions. And here is the reason it's worth thinking about this.

Rowan Mangan: Okay.

Martha Beck: So, you know me, I'm always obsessed with Asian philosophy as well as Western philosophy. And what's missing from our philosophical bedrock and is there in Asia, is this idea of escape from suffering completely, where you liberate, I don't know, your Buddha nature, or your essential self. It stops speaking in the words of the left hemisphere. So, this condition of absolute freedom becomes hard to talk about.

But, here's the deal, I realized as we were talking about this, serving an institution is safety for the ego, for the part that is all about climbing pyramids as sort of an ape in a hierarchical structure, so that the ego gets fed as it's fed on by institutions. And the ego grows and grows as the soul gets rejected, the core self gets rejected. If you choose freedom, if you choose to liberate your soul, your true self, it gradually breaks apart the ego that is the institutionalized self inside you. And then it starts bumping into and possibly destroying other institutions around you. So it's like, keep your ego and lose your soul, keep your soul and lose your ego. Those are your choices.

Rowan Mangan: All right. So let's break that down a little bit. You're saying that when there's a fork in the road for us personally, in our own lives, the choice to turn towards the institution, like to turn with the cultural stream is something that feels safe to our ego-

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: ... which is the part of ourselves that seeks the approval and the safety and all of that sort of thing, as an approval also is promotions and-

Martha Beck: Yeah. And it goes toward pleasure and it avoids pain, so-

Rowan Mangan: Right.

Martha Beck: ... safe. Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: While the choice to turn away from the culture feels like freedom, which actually it's the culture that's taught us that that is scary, that the sensation of freedom is scary and unsafe.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: So, it's our institutionalized self that has been taught by the culture to become the culture, that that feels unsafe. It's not actually ... It doesn't feel unsafe to our soul. Our soul's just been shoved to the side.

Martha Beck: Right. Well, Michael Singer in *The Untethered Soul* writes about how you're in the forest and somebody's put you in a cage. And then someone opens the door and says, "This isn't locked. You could come out." And you're like, "Why would I go into a forest? Do you know what can happen to you out there?" And we cling to the bars of our cage because it's a shell. It shows us ... It makes us feel like we're not going to get attacked by wild nature, nature red and tooth and claw. So we stay in the cage, we trash our treasures and treasure our trash. We start to cling to the cage as a kind of free will choice. We think it's free will, but actual freedom for the soul is the opposite of all institutionalizing forces. So the institution works like a machine.

It has parts that can be interchangeable. Like different people can fit into different slots. They become ... Like on Henry Ford's assembly line, one person is as good as another. There's no individuality. There's a role. And you do the role, even if it's soulless and it's drudgery and it feels pointless and purposeless. And I will tell you something - more people ... When I ask people, "Why do you need coaching?" One thing more than anything else drives them. And that is, "I have no sense of purpose." So purposelessness does not sound like an affliction, but it is like a knife in your guts if it goes far enough.

There's such a primordial drive toward becoming your true self, that being purposeless drives people to suicide sometimes. So against this pointlessness, if you go out and start wandering in the wild forest, you will be terrified many times and you will have bumps and scrapes. You will fail. You will get hurt in some ways, you'll break your heart and you'll begin to follow your fascinations. And they will lead to your purpose. And anything on purpose becomes the fulfillment and it's what you were trading for the supposed safety of the institution. It's wildness in its essence. And it can look mad to the culture, but it's not madness. It's integrity.

Rowan Mangan: And as you go out into that wildness, the whole question of safety becomes very irrelevant. Right?

Martha Beck: Right.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

- Rowan Mangan: You realize that seeking safety never really made much sense anyway. So what it becomes is I don't have rules to tell me if I'm being safe and I'm doing it right. It's, like we always say, I go inside and find out if it feels good to me.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. And fascinating things can happen. I mean, we were talking little biblical stuff where Jesus told Mary, supposedly ... She said, "Don't go to Jerusalem. You're going to get killed." And he's like, "But I have to, I'm making my choice." But it was completely ... Like, except ... "He said, "For this cause came I into the world." King James Virgin, thank you. I was raised Mormon. And then he went in knowing he would be killed. And then when he was being killed, he said, "These people don't know what they're doing. It's okay." Like, he chose responsibility over and over and over and over for himself. And then all these churches sprung up that are like, "Don't have any self-agency, just do everything we tell you." And it's the opposite of the freedom that he was modeling for the world.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. All right. That's a lot. So how do we do this without necessarily getting crucified?
- Martha Beck: Yeah, not so much with the crucifixion example, more the Tim Ferriss.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, more just like lie on a beach and start a vitamin business.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. Win a tango competition. Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: How do we come to our senses, Marty?
- Martha Beck: Well, I will tell you in a minute.
- Rowan Mangan: All right, here we are. And my question is what is coming to your senses when we're talking about freedom and institutions?



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Martha Beck: So, once we'd had this conversation and I was pivoting on that one question, what if I'm not being used by an institution? What if I'm using it? To me, that was a huge aha reversal. So I started thinking at places where I've used institutions as the fall guy to cover for my own cowardice, where I have said, "Well, I really can't ..." I mean, one of them was the school system where I was forcing my poor children to try to be something different from what their wild nature, because the teachers were calling me and the principal was mad at me and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

And I didn't say right away, "My choice is to set my child free." I took it out ... I tried to make my kids fit in and it was awful. And here's what I realized. I mean, and I've done that at various times with, "I can't sleep tonight. I have to get my PhD," and that kind of thing. Okay. I choose not to sleep because I want a PhD from this institution. That doesn't make the institution responsible for me staying up all night. Right?

Rowan Mangan: Right, right.

Martha Beck: So, I realized that the red flag for the places that I was lying to myself by using an institution as my fall guy, is that I felt resentful.

Rowan Mangan: Ah.

Martha Beck: And then I went through all these sessions in my mind that I've had with clients. And when they get resentful and victimy, "He won't let me out of this marriage. He doesn't understand me, but he won't set me free." And I'd say, "But you are free." And if they were willing to accept that they were free, their resentment was immediately replaced. And sometimes it was deep, angry, bitter, resentment. It was immediately replaced by terror.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Yeah.

Martha Beck: "You mean I have to get a divorce?" "Yeah, if you don't want your marriage, you kind of do."

Rowan Mangan: So, coming to our senses is about actually facing and approaching the things that feel like this scary, scary freedom.

Martha Beck: Well, and the first thing is resentful, resentful, resentful. Wherever you are resentful of another person, because it can take place in a relationship, or if you're resentful of your family, you're resentful of your nation, whatever it is, stop blaming the institution and say, "I am free to disobey the institution."

Rowan Mangan: Right.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

- Martha Beck: If that immediately takes your anger away and replaces it with fear, you're probably on the right track.
- Rowan Mangan: Right. Right. Yeah. Oh, interesting. Interesting.
- Martha Beck: And the whole ... The terror is, "Oh my God ..." And I've heard this from so many people ... "what will I do if the rules go away? What will I do? How will I know what to do?" And they're usually afraid of a Lord of the Flies scenario. I'm going to do something brutal and bestial and wrong and horrifying, but that's actually not what our wild natures choose.
- Rowan Mangan: So, for me, I'm afraid that if all the rules went away ... Okay, if all the rules went away, I'm afraid that ... Oh yeah. So, I often will resent the tasks that come with my day job. And I'm scared that if the rules of that went away, I would just play with words and stories and do my writing and do my things that feel like play and do that all the time and not do my real job and not be a productive member of society.
- Martha Beck: Yes. And I have the same thing with drawing because when I was a kid, I literally drew 10 hours a day. It's a very, very obsessive thing for me. And I feel like if I start that, if I take off the rules, I will absolutely forget every appointment. Like all this 10 o'clock Wednesday mornings will just come and go and I won't even look at the reminder. I was working with this after we had this conversation, I was like, "How can I feed my soul a little bit and still participate in life?" because we all do participate in institutions. The question is, do we do it free or not free? So I said to my artist self, "What can I get you to make you feel free?" And it said, "Get a little case and put a little sketchbook in it and some colored pencils and carry it around." And I ordered a little case from Amazon and it came and it is as big as the Empire State Building. It is a large unit. You're supposed to carry huge canvases in there or something.
- Rowan Mangan: The Universe was giving you a bit of a hint there.
- Martha Beck: That's what you said.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: So now, I still have to learn to moderate that. But my big fear is always that I'm going to get the negative lashback from other people. They're going to be mad at me.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Rowan Mangan: Right. And that's so interesting because like, that's my fear too. I don't do my day job and then people get mad at me because I'm not being a productive member of society. And so both of our examples of what we would do end up with people angry at us.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: Right? So-

Martha Beck: But then the fear centers in our brain rev that up to, "And I will be an outcast and I will die."

Rowan Mangan: Right.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: But before that, like people are angry because freedom is stepping away from the approval of the culture, through the institution, that automatic approval. And when we were talking about approval and sort of rejection or punishment on the punishment side of the reward, that's what you see, that you're going to face people being mad because we don't ... Most of us ... Please, God ... don't live in places where their lives are being threatened. So a lot of our fears about being Wilder are going to be that we're going to make people mad and that's a good sign.

Martha Beck: Yeah. I remember when I left Mormonism, people literally would start shaking and crying when I told them. Other Mormons would shake and cry, when I told them I didn't believe it and I was leaving. And they would say, "But, you won't live. You can't live. What are you going to do to live?" Because the need to belong to a group was so intense for them. And the ostracism is so intense in that situation, that they literally had ... They told me I would be dead in weeks. They couldn't imagine anything else because that's how institutionalized their minds had become. And that fear was a visceral survival fear for them.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. If we think about ... Okay, so we're having a choice that we personally have to make. How do you tell the difference between the scariness of the freedom of leaving the institution and the scariness of moving towards something that's actually not the right thing to do?



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

- Martha Beck: Well, the scariness of moving towards something that's not the right feeling, feels like ... It can be almost compulsive, but it there's a toxicity to it. Like if, for example, I'm going to break the rules by becoming an addict so that I have temporary escape, that might feel free for a moment to the mind. But I know from working with addicts, that the feeling of being stifled and trapped, very quickly starts again. Or you might leave your family of origin or your marriage, and go into a relationship that feels like freedom. And then it crunches down on you again, you realize you're still not free. You're acting out the patterns of not freedom, of institutions inside the new situation. So, anything that feels like entrapment and being caged, there's that combination of, "Oh, I'm safe now," and then, "Oh, I can't really move or make choices." Then, you know you're going from wrong thing to wrong thing to wrong thing. And the resentment and anger will come back.
- Rowan Mangan: Right.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Gotcha. So then, when you leave the protection of the institution and move into true freedom, what's that process? What does it feel like?
- Martha Beck: The first thing is, I always used to say to people and I got ... A therapist trained me to do this. Somebody would come in and say, "I feel caged by my life. I feel like I have no choices." And, "Why?" "Well, because my boss says this, or my mother says that." And I'd say, "All right, imagine your boss sitting across from you and say to them, "I am going to give up all my free will and I'm going to do whatever you say. I believe you more than myself. I'm going to do ... I'm going to cooperate completely with any institution." And what would happen is they tried to say, "I'm going to sell my soul to the devil," basically, as their anger would rise up. "No." There's a psychologist named John Bradshaw who was just about to ordain as a priest and the last night he was like, "No." And then immediately they started to say, "Oh, I can't do that. Oh, crap, I have to create my own life. I'm responsible for this." And at first it feels negative, but then it starts to feel delicious as they realize how creative they can be in this day and age.
- Rowan Mangan: Right. So freedom is responsibility for yourself, it's accountability, right? It's like freedom is the state of being a grown up in your own life, becoming the grown up instead of giving that role to the institution. And that's where we're being condemned to be free, as Sartre said.



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

- Martha Beck: Yeah. So, just remember, here's the choice. You can choose the safety of an institution, which will build your ego and destroy part of your soul. Or, you can choose to act on your deepest impulses, your nature, which will free your soul and destroy part of your ego, maybe until your ego's all gone.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. That'd be nice. Now, I heard your Pascal.
- Martha Beck: Yeah?
- Rowan Mangan: And I would like to raise you a little Foucault.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, yeah. Foucault? Damn, I'm not [inaudible 01:11:54].
- Rowan Mangan: Foucault, I barely met her. Yeah, so he's talks about institutions a lot. And he says that the machine can actually come to inhabit you. The institution takes over and becomes its own actor, separate from the people who have made it. And then it replaces who you really are. So you have your ego, you have that institutional force of yourself, but-
- Martha Beck: But, it's not even you anymore.
- Rowan Mangan: But it's not you anymore. You've lost yourself. Or, you go free and you end up disrupting the institutions and the machine can't take you over in that state. So, you lose ego, but you free self.
- Martha Beck: Amazing. So, I just have one thing to raise you. I see your Foucault. And I talk to you in baby talk, I raise you one Albert Camus.
- Rowan Mangan: Ugh.
- Martha Beck: I say to you ... This is a serious quote and I love it from Albert Camus ... "The only way to deal with an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion."
- Rowan Mangan: Mic drop.
- Martha Beck: Whoa.
- Rowan Mangan: Let's do that.
- Martha Beck: And with that-
- Rowan Mangan: Stay-



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
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Martha Beck: Stay wild.

Rowan Mangan: We hope you're enjoying Bewildered. If you're in the USA and want to be notified when a new episode comes out, text the word, WILD, to 570-873-0144. We're also on Instagram. Our handle is @bewilderedpodcast. You can follow us to get updates, hear funny snippets and outtakes, and chat with other fans of the show.

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