Your Questions Answered - Bret and Heather 17th DarkHorse Po...

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**SPEAKERS**

Bret, Heather

**Bret** 00:09

Hey folks, welcome back to the Dark Horse techno pocalypse. I'm here with Dr. Heather hying. And if anything goes right, we will answer your questions regarding the Evergreen meltdown that occurred may 23 2017. At somewhere between nine and 10 in the morning or began

**Heather** 00:29

began, then the public part of it began then yes, yes. Okay. So without further ado, we are having trouble on pretty much every channel. But we are going to read those questions that those who have questions that came in that have something to do with evergreen only today. This this first one that came in is evergreen, adjacent, but we're going to start there. Now based on tutoring experience, I think it'd be a good teacher, but I see k 12 getting infected with the same SJW viruses higher ed, is there a way to teach in the US without either having to lie or ending up in your situation? It's a really good question. This is from our friend Holly math nerd.

**Bret** 01:09

I think the answer is no. Except if you broaden your definition of teaching, and I think at some level, the system that we the legacy system of teaching has followed bad assumptions straight into the ground, and something is going to take its place. So the question is, can you hold out long enough for the new system, whatever it might be, to, to alert us to its existence. In the meantime, you know, Heather frequently makes the point that most human societies don't involve formal instruction. There's plenty of learning, of course, learning is the core of what a human being is. But formal instruction is novel, it's necessary for some topics. But in general, it's not the way humans learn. So figuring out how to teach in a way that might not be labeled, that would be a wise thing to do in the meantime. And when the educational apparatus or whatever replaces it, shows itself, then you'll be already

**Heather** 02:16

practiced. This is indeed part of why I look at that picture of our students flinging mud at each other in the Amazon and say, That's educational, that it doesn't look like top down authoritarian sage on the stage style education. But that doesn't mean that those people weren't learning and that we didn't get them there through a variety of different means, and help them understand what why there was value in it. And and all of that is educational, even if it's not direct learning, you know, we weren't directly no one, no one, I assume, directly instructed any of those young men to throw mud at one another. I did. But, but you know, direct observation and leaving room for serendipity. These are some of the most educational openings.

**Bret** 03:03

So when somebody looks down their nose at you and says, guys, if you're laughing, you're not learning. You have to listen for the emoji. If there's an emoji, maybe they're okay, if there's no emoji, you just run the other direction. Yeah.

**Heather** 03:17

So just one more thing and answer this question. Ali asks, Is there a way to teach in the US without having either to lie or any up in your situation. And, you know, lying, you know, isn't something you want to have to do anyway, but I don't think it's sufficient. You know, we have we know plenty of good teachers who are still trying to do it with students and teachers in both public and private schools in the K 12 system. And they can successfully obscure their true feelings for administrators, but they're just being constrained on all sides. And some of them are trying to fight back within their institutions. Some of them are feeling it too strongly and are looking for other things to

**Bret** 03:59

do. So if I can just add one more thing, I think it's so important. During the Evergreen riots, a student of mine, a current student at the time, called my attention to the story Harrison Bergeron, which many of you will have read a Kurt Vonnegut story that takes the intersectional point. At some level to its logical extreme. It's about equality of outcome. Yeah, it's about equality of outcome through handicaps. Anyway, she said, You got to read this. And I was like, okay, and I didn't read it. And she's like, No, no, no, you have to read this. And anyway, this is one of the students student of color who actually went with me to the four o'clock meeting to defend me from my newly discovered enemies. But anyway, she was right about the story. We had a teacher assign the story to Toby in his class. Last year in eighth grade. Yep, it occurred to me that if I was stuck in the system, I would probably engage Agents versus behavior like that. They

**Heather** 05:02

all say he also got assigned but the same teacher to listen not watch but listen to the entire album of Pink Floyd's the wall Pink Floyd has a section on this is the section that this teacher created within the public school system on dystopians. Yeah. And is that there were other amazing things. But those are the two that I remember to the wall and Harrison Bergeron.

**Bret** 05:20

Yeah. And for older students seem I mean, there's no shortage of servers, subversive literature catch. 22 is a favorite of mine. But anyway, yeah. Figuring out alternative ways of teaching the lesson.

**Heather** 05:31

Yep. Okay. Congratulations on your birth by fire from your African experience. You showed the world the dark side of an ideology that ran away from its core good purpose and descended into madness. I'm glad you knew life includes us. Thanks. Very well

**Bret** 05:45

said. And thank you get Benjamin

**Heather** 05:47

Martini. We should do that. Yeah, last time we saw him we were enjoying Chinese food together and there weren't any more teenagers available. But next time we'll make sure martinis are on the menu, or we could

**Bret** 05:57

just send them a free strike one.

**Heather** 06:00

Free strike. Okay, next question, Brett. In a previous podcast with Eric, he robustly stated that he advised to leave evergreen several times before the meltdown. What was Eric's main issue with task, the Evergreen State College? And what was your counter argument? This is this is

**Bret** 06:18

good. It's a good question. It's a fair question. Yeah. Eric never liked my teaching or our teaching at evergreen,

**Heather** 06:25

just like your teaching didn't like that you are we were there. Right? He

**Bret** 06:29

thought it was a waste of our time. And there's one way in which you could make that argument you can't get anywhere from evergreen, it's a cul de sac. On the other hand, you know, Eric, took a while to find a path through the world. And you have to do something in the meantime, and Eric did several some things in the meantime, they were of a different nature. But I don't regret teaching at evergreen, because it was a marvelous environment, if you had the right students in the room. And it wasn't that hard to work things out. So that you did, I learned a tremendous amount, I kept active in my field of interest, because evergreen allowed me to teach evolution all the time. And it allowed me to teach it in whatever way I wanted, it never asked anything other than are your students showing up for your classes full. I was able to keep my research life alive without having to have a job in an r1 University, which would have been a death sentence anyway. So my basic feeling is given, given the choices available, it provided an income, it provided a place to raise children that was pretty healthy, it provided something to do every day, that was rewarding, almost all the time. It created healthy relationships, albeit, you know, not necessarily with faculty colleagues, there were some friendships but but we had lots of great exposure to people. So I guess the point is, what was the alternative? It's not, you know, Eric didn't have some job to offer. So I had to go somewhere. And I don't regret it.

**Heather** 08:06

I guess I would add to that, and maybe maybe modify a little bit because that makes it sound like we were just at some generic third tier liberal arts college, or could have been a university, right. And that's not what it was. evergreen is unique among institutions of higher ed on this planet. As far as I can tell, we've done a lot of thinking about this. So you know, there are other schools that have full time classes, but they last for three weeks in the block system that Colorado College among others has. And there are other schools that do team teaching. And there are other schools that banish requirements so that students can really delve into whatever it is that they want to do. But evergreen is the only school that does both those latter things and does full time programs that lasts for up to a full year so that you really can build community with students in a way that is that is unknown in any other environment. So it's not that we found ourselves at some third rate institution and just stayed there because it was in a nice place and we could have children and raise them there and earned a salary that was never quite enough, but was fine. It was that actually and you know, we, we were lucky. You know, I were lucky to be able to choose it. I got to choose between the job at evergreen and another academic job and we actively we looked at the two options. The other one was a much more prestigious school with a much higher salary, with much greater ability to do research and such that we chose evergreen we chose to go to evergreen because of what it seemed to offer. And because not only of the educational environment, but because you would not just be teaching rich kids, that the socio economic diversity was actually so critical to coming into your own as an educator and actually understanding what what modern humans are doing and how they're thinking and what what they are, that this was, this was not a cul de sac with regard to education. And it could easily have been a cul de sac with regard to science and science and research. But whether if you if you care about education, if you care about how to teach people how to think, and how to educate people across a wide wide swath, then I can't imagine a better place to have

**Bret** 10:17

them. Yeah, I agree. I mean, it isn't that place now at all. But But the other thing is, you know, Eric, and I have some stuff we got to work out, I guess. But we did a tremendous amount of good for lots of people who deserved it. And what's more, we did a tremendous amount of good in a way that Eric actually aspires to Eric, the portal is about the story that rescues people who need rescuing and transports them into a world that facilitates their discovery of their own talents. And so anyway, I think the thing is, you know, Eric didn't really see it up close. It wasn't really an environment you couldn't, you know, watch us teach. So he heard what we had to say, I guess, but, but from the point of view of all of the people who are doing interesting things who came through our class and had their, their understanding of the universe altered, that was, you know, it was very valuable. And there are lots of places that we could have found safe harbor for that period of time in which we would have done a lot less good. A lot

**Heather** 11:21

less go transformed. Many fewer lives. Yeah, right. All right. Next question. Oops. Oh, gosh, this is going so fast. untimely passing of cabby Mitchell on May 4 2017, seemed related to the disproportionate and inconsolable emotional energy directed at Brett grief has power in the body and displacement is real. Do you have thoughts? This is this is an interesting question. So most people won't know what what has been referred to here. cabbie. Mitchell was a longtime faculty member at evergreen who died suddenly, as far as most of us were concerned, it turns out he had been battling a disease for some time, and I kept it to himself. He was on the dance faculty. He was a he did not look like a dancer. He was a black man who was a big bear of a guy there a black man, who was also wonderful both both Brett and I were friendly with him. I don't think, you know, we'd never we never sat down to a meal together. But we sat down to many conversations really

**Bret** 12:24

liked him had almost nothing in common, but he was always pleasant to talk to them.

**Heather** 12:29

Yeah, he was absolutely wonderful and, and he hated what was going on on campus, actually. And so I mean this. Let me just say this before we actually get to the heart of the question that I actually did run into in the last couple days as I was going through old emails. After cabbie died, and it was announced, and people were overcome with grief, I think that you said something to the listserv about what a generous and welcoming human being he had been. And the set some people in connection into conniption fits the idea, the idea that cabbie had fondness for you, and that you would fund this for him just put all sorts of holes in the story that they were trying to create. But the fact was like I had actually had a friend long conversation with him, the previous summer would have been, who would have been right what Brexit was happening, because I remember it was it was so it was like june of 2016. And we were in a summer institute together for the day. And I had mentioned this Barbara Ehrenreich book called dancing in the streets, a collective of history. And you have a history of collective joy. I think it is wonderful book. And he sat down with me afterwards to talk about we talked for a couple of hours, just the two of us. And during that time, he mentioned a couple of the strange events that had begun to happen on campus the previous year, which was the first year of George bridges tenure. And he said, I just I just don't know what is wrong with these people. You know, this is, this is insane. We live in such a bubble of delightful relations between all people and I cannot actually fathom what is happening. And so when he died and some part of the activist faculty tried to take his death as a banner for their, for their act of activism. It was awful. And they co opted, they co opted it. And so I think you know, this time just looking back at the question, the untimely passing of cabbie seems related to the disproportion inconsolable emotional energy directed at Brett. I think, I think the fact that you dared speak of him Yeah, with fondness and dared say that, you know, he, you and he had been friendly and whatever you said it was maybe two lines long. It wasn't a soliloquy. It wasn't, you weren't claiming deep knowledge of the man just that he was a good man. And what you didn't say there but which was true, which maybe people could read, the subtext was he wouldn't have tolerated what What's going on?

**Bret** 15:00

Now? He wouldn't. And if he hadn't been sick, I think he would have been a voice of reason. Yeah. So I don't know that you and I have ever talked about this, actually. But after the, there was a moment at which I became public enemy number one, and Benjamin Boyce has now covered it. It's the faculty meeting in which I took my colleagues to task for their very first official move, which was to get our union to negotiate into our contract, a requirement that we investigate our own racism in our annual self evaluation, which would then be fodder for hiring, firing, promotion, all of these

**Heather** 15:37

types would have been at the end of the 2016 year, right? Rather, the 2015 2016 or so like May or June 26, after we got back

**Bret** 15:44

from Ecuador trip wrap. So I stood up at that meeting, and I took my colleagues to task and I knew roughly what was going to happen, I didn't know how far it would go, but I knew that I was going to be public enemy number one. And I said my piece. And after the meeting, I went over to one of the people on the other side to side of the argument, and I attempted to reason with her. And cabbie made a point of coming up to me, right, so this is a meeting in which I've alerted the intersectional that I'm not going to put up with their stuff. And cabbie comes over to me, unconcerned. And he starts talking to me about his confusion at what was unfolding on the campus. And the thing he pointed to actually was what I would call flyer gate, which was the initial public foray into this madness, in which Naima Lowe had portrayed herself as at the you know, the height of exhaustion from having consoled students who were holding vigils It was like a black wellness rally but it involves some black power symbolism in it claimed to fight white supremacy. I actually remember seeing the flyer on the campus and thinking white supremacy, what are they even talking about? But anyway, this flyer had been apparently torn down by some people. Now, I don't think we ever got to the bottom of it. We don't know if it was torn down by people who said white supremacy, what are they talking about and tore it down? Or they

**Heather** 17:26

were placed some places that they weren't allowed to be flyers, and the janitors took them down, which all the time

**Bret** 17:31

right? Or the story was fictional or it was fictional? Right. And actually, I must tell you there was so Nyima showed the flyer, a picture of herself holding the flyer broadcasted on email, and the most insane stuff erupted, right. So suddenly, the campus was falling all over itself for

**Heather** 17:50

bravery or courage or courage to declare endless work on behalf of all of us,

**Bret** 17:55

right. But even worse was the the escalating language surrounding the atrocity, I believe actually even came up of the use of tearing these flyers down and there was I kid you not, I am not exaggerating, and I am not making this up. But before this thing was over, all the administrators were posting this flyer

**Heather** 18:20

for the Fed, I think that had already passed at this point. Maybe they were

**Bret** 18:23

posting it on their doors and the Children's Center, this daycare center for

**Heather** 18:29

visitors, which had been amazing, both our kids had was printing out

**Bret** 18:32

the flyers. And anyway, it was it was incredible. So anyway, after this meeting, where I had gotten up and spoke and cabbie comes over to me, and he says, I don't know what's going on around here. And he said, You know, I started looking at this email thread about the flyers I couldn't figure out what's going on. I thought somebody must have been shot. Those are his exact words. I thought somebody must have been shot. And it really you know, it may be that there was some emotional outpouring that came from the loss of cabbie that got directed at me, but that is not how cabbie would have wanted it. Yeah, right. This was not

**Heather** 19:11

he was he was a good man an honest man and he held no truck with this intersectional bullshit. Yeah,

**Bret** 19:17

so anyway. It it's very sad that he was lost. And I must say, we felt that personally, I didn't know him all that well, I guess I'm a little better but, but it's terrible to take somebodies memory and the grief over their loss and co opted to your own purposes, which you know, at best, that's what happened here.

**Heather** 19:40

Yeah. Um, we'll come back to this one which is sort of tangentially related to evergreen if we have time. Sorry, I'm still scrolling through here to do it. evergreen grad in 1992. And a student of Pete Sinclair and Mark Levin ski, it saddens me that these events weren't able to be handled by the Evergreen community itself. What do you think the future of evergreen will be? No one says for your, your institution, and what was our institution?

**Bret** 20:20

Yeah, I mean, I think, unfortunately, evergreen had opportunities to change course. And even after the riots that unfolded, I believe, if they had fired George, and they had basically alerted the world, that they understood that they had took, taking a wrong turn, that they could have recovered. And they so thoroughly refused to do that. And to this day, refuse to do that. And, you know, the only move they seem to have is to double down and insist that they were right all along. And so at some level, the Evergreen you knew and the Evergreen, we knew it's gone. And I won't be sorry to see it fail at this point. At some level, it's just dragging out the misery. Yeah,

**Heather** 21:07

it's a shell. It's beyond a shell of its former self. Yeah, it's it saddens us so much, that evergreen couldn't fix this, inside of itself. And Brett was trying harder than anyone and I was trying and a handful of other people were trying and even up until it must have been the last our last formal day, when we were in mediation. With the college. We began by saying, we want to come back, we want to keep doing the work that we've been able to do there which which they the administration at the college had been celebrating, they would put these study abroad programs that I was running and that we were running on their front page. And the you know, they they were they loved what we were doing, because it shown the right kind of light on evergreen. And we said, Look, one of the one of the things that has happened in the last at that point three months since evergreen blew up is that we now know so many of the people in both the civil rights movement and the Free Speech Movement. And we could bring them together, we could we could likely make conference at evergreen happen that combines these two ideas. And we could bring people together like Bob Woodson and Jonathan hight and Greg lukianoff. And you know, so many other people and actually have a real conversation difficult, not always an agreement at all about what the future of free speech and civil rights on campuses should be. And wouldn't that be amazing? And they said, No, thanks. We're pretty pleased with how things are going. Yeah, this was in September of 2017. Right before classes were due to start up again, no, thank you, we're pretty pleased with how things are going.

**Bret** 22:54

Now. So I will say, you know, that moment in the hallway, which I obviously was not expecting, or I would have guessed better. You know, I said, history could pivot in the direction of the values you're standing here for If only we could hear each other words to that effect. And this is kind of what I was talking about. Now, at that time, nobody had ever heard of me, we certainly couldn't have staged such a conference, but at the point that they wanted their nose at us in negotiations we certainly could have. And imagine for a second, that that's what had happened with the Evergreen story was the madness had broken out the world had seen it, people had realized this is not reasonable. And then we could have had a discussion about well, what grievances do make sense? And what remedies didn't work? And what remedies might work and, you know, what does another model look like? And you know, I mean, you saw it, you saw it with the those images of our class, learning about all the features of biology, cultural anthropology together, that's kind of what it looks like when it works. So there is some place to go. But unfortunately, this simplistic nonsense, derailed the entire conversation, and the people who allowed it to happen were either too foolish are too cowardly to change course, which tells you how we got to where we are.

**Heather** 24:17

That's right. Thanks for this, guys. how painful it must have been to have the students and careers you love ripped from you. My question is, where's the redemption? The podcast is lovely, but it's like fair, what will you teach? What will you really teach the world? It's a lovely question.

**Bret** 24:36

Yeah, that's a good question. That I mean, I there's one part of it that I take some exception to broadcast is like fair, it can be in the sense that any individual podcast can only be so deep and people are only paying attention to such and such a level but we believe in something that we call collective consciousness and collective consciousness. We know from the classroom is something that gets built over time. So concepts get introduced, they're, they're clumsy at first you get better at understanding how they work. And then sooner or later you have a toolkit of things that are actually capable of doing something new. And so the podcast is one facet of an attempt to generate conversations that are actually capable of fixing problems that just simply stalemate us in their present form. So anyway, yeah, the podcast is not the end of anything. But we are interested in, I wouldn't say teaching the world because I don't think we know. But we're interested in discovering how it is that we might function better. Right? And actually, if I can say one more thing, there is, there has long been this voice that says, You're progressives, you brought this on yourselves, and then it turned on you, then that's the point at which you woke up or something. And it's always been nonsense, but it does point to a confusion. That's important. How is it that we are progressives, and yet, we claim no ownership of that madness? Well, we are progressives, by virtue of the fact that we believe progress is necessary. In my case, I will say I believe that if we do not make a an extreme kind of progress, that our tenure here on the planet is about to come to an end. So this is a requirement, progress is necessary, doesn't mean I believe in progress that's been spelled out by others. I'm not signing up for any program of progress. That is formulated that I don't accept much less all programs for progress, which I guess if you have this idea of what progressivism is, then you just embrace all progress. Now, most progress is not going to work, and it's going to have bad consequences. There are things we could do that would make us much better off, we don't even know what most of them are. But I'm interested, we're interested in that exploration. And so that's what makes us progressive. And that's why we don't own any of the garbage proposals, because we never signed on for them. We never said we were for them. Those things are their own kind of delusion. And we're interested in going you know, threading the needle and getting to something that isn't a delusion, but does make us better and more important. More importantly, safer.

**Heather** 27:27

To add to that, the question, what will you really teach the world, the book that we're working on, which is a collaboration, and each chapter could be and I hope many of them, we, each one of us individually, will ultimately turn into books of their own, is effectively a kind of redemption book. And that wasn't how the publisher approached us to see if we were interested in writing it or the agent who approached you first, after African was blowing up to see if you had anything that you want to write, was thinking of it. But I think it is that effectively, it brings together so many of the threads of evolutionary thinking that we were developing ourselves, and teaching students and sharing in creative form with learning communities that were themselves evolving as well. Over 1415 years, this hunter gatherers guide to the 21st century really does introduce some new ideas, fixes some of the errors of the thinking in, in Darwinism to date, and addresses how it is from, you know, from individual, you know, food and sleep choices, through relationship with, you know, with with, with pair bonded partner, to children, to friends, through to society level choices of how it is that we are going to move forward, you know, how is it to speak to your point, how is it that we are going to make the kinds of changes that we need in order to allow more human beings to actually enjoy this planet, hundreds of years in the future? This this is that book is will be a kind of redemption. And from there, then I think each of us will start moving, you know, into our, our own projects that often directly follow from the work in that book.

**Bret** 29:21

And I assume most of the people listening to the q&a will have listened to the the first hour of the podcast, but the students who dropped in on our classes who kept coming back even after they had graduated, in some cases just to participate in the conversation. The book is a continuation of that conversation. So if you're interested in getting in on what it was that brought them back, this is the way

**Heather** 29:46

Yeah. And yeah, just be noted that our research assistant on the book is in fact one of one of those students. He is he was one of our students fairly early on in our time there and became a friend and has worked with us in on physical projects, and now on intellectual projects. Yeah. And we've worked

**Bret** 30:06

with him from evolution to construction. And he, you know, he's somebody who was, like me, a very bad fit for school or school was a very bad fit for us. And he's somebody who I mean, by his own telling, didn't really feel like he had a lot of capacity in that regard. And until he landed in our class and, you know, took off. So anyway. Yeah, the story sort of is ongoing, even if the locale has changed.

**Heather** 30:37

Yeah. Do this one, I think is evergreen related ish. So I'll go with it due to COVID-19. Due to COVID-19, brought changes in college Ed, it being nonperson, etc, could now be a good time to separate the two goals of higher ed, research and teaching. Would that make things better? This is this is a tough one said that the question is basically, about exactly as the as the question writer, points out, that there really are two things that higher ed is trying to do. And research and teaching are not the same thing. People who are good at one are often not good at the other research is privileged. And if you're only good at teaching, and not at research, it's very hard to get a job anywhere, you know, with with tenure, or especially anywhere elite. And because many researchers are either not good at educating to begin with, or because the priority is do not line up to encourage them to become good at educating, they end up dismissing it as something that only people who can't do research do and so you get this separation of classes. And mostly researchers, people who are primarily researchers with hard money, academic positions have to teach some, but that's how they feel about it, I have to teach, as opposed to Oh, and I get to teach these things. So given all that, it might seem like okay, let's just separate them, and honor the researchers for what they do and honor the teachers for what they do. But our experience was certainly that our understanding was honed and refined and driven by knowing that we had to be in front of students and by the conversations with students in the classroom in the field around campfires otherwise. And that, my my sense is that teaching will become even less good, if it has no direct interface with research. And researchers will become even more arrogant and less tuned into the real world if they have less interface with teachers. And let me just before you go, say one more thing, an anecdote that when we were looking to go to grad school, our undergraduate advisor Bob, Trevor's extraordinary evolutionary biologist, gave us the following advice. He said, go someplace, well, two pieces of advice, really, oh, no, this is two different things. He gave us advice to go someplace to the museum, first of all, but then he also said, when you end up deciding where to go after you graduate, go someplace where you have regular interactions with undergraduates. Why said because undergraduates don't know what they're doing yet. And they will ask questions that the people in the field who know what they're doing, wouldn't dare to ask. And therefore, if you only talk to the people who are already in your field, you are likely to get stuck in intellectual dead ends. Whereas if you really engage with undergraduates, as he had done with us, you know, he had taken us under his wing and we were effect we were like graduate students, working very closely with him for a couple of years at UC Santa Cruz. We, we both through lots of stuff, Adam, that he didn't, he hadn't thought in those in those ways. And we didn't know that we were being disrespectful to the field because he didn't know the field yet. So you know, that advice has struck me as very wise and is a counterpoint to the idea that research and teaching could be profitably separated.

**Bret** 34:02

Yeah. I take all that to be accurate. I think both research and teaching are broken. So it's a little hard to know, what the net effect would be of separating them. I do think there's something as much of the work that flies under the banner research becomes more technological, and therefore more specialized. The relevance to what it is that we need to teach undergraduates is dropping. And so I do think there's something absurd about somebody who has, you know, gotten a degree by studying some very narrow question, and then suddenly they're teaching bio 101 and it's like, well, what do they even know about it? Right? You know, yeah, what they know about it is what they learned in bio 101, you know, many years before

**Heather** 34:50

and the received wisdom from the textbook that they've been encouraged to use by the publishers, which is its own cabal.

**Bret** 34:56

Yeah. So it turns to garbage. Really, I think the problem As we start tugging at the sweater, you find the whole thing is going to unravel. And really, we need a new model that's a lot more enlightened about what it's trying to accomplish and even knows what it's trying to accomplish. So that then can figure out whether it's succeeding rather than a model. Who defaults to kind of a self preservation mode where it is its own defense. So anyway, not clear to me. I did have one other thought, though. There, I think there's an argument to separate research from teaching, although not so much theoretical work, theoretical work is a good companion for teaching, whereas lab work might not be. But there's a place where I see something else that goes the other direction, which is medicine. And I was thinking about the fact that doctors do not autopsy their patients in general. My correct about that?

**Heather** 35:53

I assume so. Yeah, I think medical examiner's are different, different crew.

**Bret** 35:57

Right. So anyway, yeah, the the thought and if I'm wrong about this, if doctors do do their own autopsies, then somebody will surely alert me and I will deliver an apology. But to the extent that they don't, the problem is this breaks and ability to test hypotheses when a doctor, imagine something is going on inside the body of a patient, and they act accordingly. And then the patient dies, the ability to go in and see what actually is going on inside that body means that they will become a better doctor, it makes the process educational in a way that if you just get a report of what was in there, it would be you know, I'm not a doctor. So I don't know for sure. But my guess as a biologist would be it would be a dim shadow of what you would learn actually seeing which tissues were inflamed. And in what way which would give you better intuitions, which might result in breakthroughs that we won't otherwise get. Yeah.

**Heather** 36:49

Next question. How do you imagine evergreen would look today, if you had not resisted the mob? What attention to the mob pay to the admissions process and policies? For example, if a group of prospective white students visited campus, you guys rock? Thanks. So don't totally follow the end of it. But what would have happened? And you know what, they're in so many points that you could have stopped. You could have just stopped sending emails at some Yeah. But imagine that it gets to may 23 2017. And they show up? I don't even know how you know, many, many people have said, How did you do that? How do you stay so calm and cool, and reasonable in the face of a mob? And that is a question that I would love to hear you answer. But I mean, I've heard you answer it. But I'd love to hear you answer here. But also, there was nothing you couldn't have just laid down and let them be like, what what would what would any other response look like? Especially given that all of your students were there? backing you up? Yeah, actually, I

**Bret** 37:55

spent a lot of time thinking about this. On the one hand, yes, it's very nice to have people say, I'm so glad you did that. And you didn't do the other thing. And it's like, well, how will the other thing even? It's a non starter. Right? A you have to sleep You do have to sleep. And you know, had I caved in the face of this nonsense, which I knew was nonsense, it would have been a betrayal, certainly of all those students who were standing there. And then all of the students

**Heather** 38:22

who were leaving all of your students was my students.

**Bret** 38:25

Yeah, well, also the students. It's not what I meant to say, but also the students who were there confronting me, some of whom were perfectly reachable, and were in Thrall to some crazy idea, as many of us have been in Thrall to some crazy idea at some point. So I owed it to them to try to compel them that there was a better way of seeing this puzzle, and that it wasn't impossible to get there. And in fact, I know that I made some progress on a couple of those fronts, and that the problem was I was up against something, that when I made progress, it would go unravel that progress right afterwards. And so that was an unwinnable puzzle at that point, but I, I'm there a lot of things I'm not good at. I do feel like I was kind of born for that sort of thing. I don't know what to wear in that sort of situation. That's not difficult. And, you know, it's weird as it unfolds, you know, you the conscious mind sort of becomes a spectator and it watches the whole thing happened and it hears you say, what you say, just as everyone else hears that, but that's because it's done a lot of preparing. And,

**Heather** 39:38

you know, this is this is true, this is something that you do and you really are, you really are best at the world and several things. And what, what people when people see you do extraordinary things like what you did that day and over the next several days and even weeks, but especially initially that day, in the hallway, People see that and I remember often, our students, especially our male students would see you and be like, yeah, that's what I am like I can, I can be like that. And they thought that what they were seeing was all of it. But the fact is that you spend so much of your time when you're not on as it were working through alternative scenarios, figuring out and, you know, both in terms of action, but in terms of idea space, especially like this, this is what makes you the theoretician that you are right, that, that you go through and say, Well, if you know if this prediction holds, what else what else? What else? What else? Okay, now, okay, I'm gonna go back, back back, I'm going to go through this. And you do this over and over and over again, and you redo them to you iterate it, and I don't think there's one of our students actually, who I just heard from who really actually did think that something was coming down the pike like this, Frankie, um, but I didn't you'd like the idea of a confrontation in real time and a hallway never occurred to me. And I don't think to you, I think I don't know. But still, you prepared in so many ways over the year? Would it be when, when the anger that was coming back at you, was increasingly vitriolic and filled with bile and insane and more and more people were jumping on the bandwagon? In some ways, you got calmer, and calmer and more and more resolved? Not more certain. you question yourself and your conclusions and the conclusions of others all the time. And that that is the thing that you were there. They could not call your intentions into question in either your head or the heads of any of your students. Because these are students, you'd been away. This was like week seven, I think of the quarter, it was only a one quarter program, but you would know on some of these students for years, some of the students at the least that you know, these students for seven weeks, and not a single one of those students thought, Oh, yeah, maybe these protesters are right about Brett. Yeah, not a single one. They couldn't possibly have been misled into that. And it's because every single day in the classroom and in life, you demonstrate this, just this constant reassessment of what if I was wrong? What if I was wrong? Okay, if I am right, what does that mean? Okay, what if I'm wrong about this thing, you're doing it all the time, and you just can't ever stop? This is what science is supposed to look like, this is what good life is supposed to look like. And this is what you do? Do a degree that I've actually never seen anyone else do?

**Bret** 42:38

Wow. Yeah, there's a lot a lot in there. And it's very gratifying to hear it described that way. I will say that the A, as I said to Mike Naina, when I interviewed him early on in the dark horse podcast, there was something I learned from his film, even though I had seen all of the clips, and I'd seen all the interviews, but the way he likes to post things revealed something to me about what the students thought they were accomplishing on that they are expected to accomplish. They were expecting my students to jump ship, because this accusation of racism is so powerful, that, you know, people, people naturally, you know, figure out which way the wind is blowing, and they position themselves accordingly. And because most students at evergreen and everywhere else, don't have a deep relationship with their professors, you know, and certainly no reason for loyalty, then they expected people to flee and what a different situation that would have been, but it never occurred to me that that was going to happen, because for one thing, not only you know, these were my students, and in many cases, our students, and you know, I knew them all well, but I had been processing this with them, even though that was not the explicit topic. So somebody mentioned recently that I had a diagram on the board. I think the day before the whole thing happened. of the basically a hypothesis that I was advancing for the way witch hunts function. Why were witch hunts on my mind? I can't imagine but, but they were on my mind. And so I was processing with the students. And in fact, at one point, I remember might have been in the week prior, I came into class. And I was, you know, I typically rode straight from home, rode my bike and leaned up against the wall and just started teaching, you know, hence the way I was dressed in the hallway. But

**Heather** 44:31

as you always arrived with like, negative 30 seconds to spare,

**Bret** 44:35

no, it was about 30 seconds. 13 seconds was the average. But anyway, I arrived, and I had just read an email one of these terrible emails from one of these awful people, you know, telling me how awful I think it may actually have been one of the guys who wrote one of those emails and in that email, he had alleged that there was a calculation that we could be doing About how much the value that we would assign to the damage that I was doing students every hour of my teaching, by teaching them in this, obviously racist modality. And so you know, it was 1000s of dollars, you know, per student per quarter. And anyway, you know, I saw I read this and I

**Heather** 45:23

saw someone who would become familiar with over email, but like, couldn't recognize in a lineup like don't have any idea what the guy?

**Bret** 45:28

Yeah, yeah. But anyway, I came into class having just read that. And some some of my students noted that something was, you know, ran behind my eyes. And they were like, what's up? And I was like, Okay, I'm going to tell you, I just read this email to share it with them. I didn't don't think I read it. Again, I explained the premise of it.

**Heather** 45:52

And so this is, like, angry. This is the day of

**Bret** 45:57

No, no, it wasn't a couple days prior. I can't place it for sure we can figure it out. But anyway, my students, I did not actually predict I thought they would see the humor in it the way I did. They were angry because somebody was basically accusing them of whatever the opposite of learning is of, you know, having ignorant stare educational vectors, right? Since they're, they're too dumb to recognize that the person in front of the room is making them stupid, or I don't know what, but anyway, they were angry about this. And you know, as soon as I saw their anger, it made a lot of sense to me, I didn't predict it. But nonetheless, that was the context of the hallway. And, you know, never occurred to me that they were going to, they were going to reject that or even not live up to the need to be courageous in the face of that. And so, anyway, I was heartened to see that it on that front unfolded exactly as I would have expected and not at all, as the protesters expected. That's as it should have been.

**Heather** 47:06

Can evergreen survive a post COVID-19 higher ed crisis? Probably,

**Bret** 47:13

can evergreen survive a post COVID-19? Higher Ed, but no, it? Here's the problem, though. Okay. I think that what they're actually thinking is that they're going to shift blame for the collapse of evergreen to COVID-19. And this makes me livid. The fact is, the history is clear. Yes, there was some deficit of students before George arrived, George arrived, catastrophic things happen. We all know what they were, we all saw on YouTube. They've been dissected, ad infinitum. There's no mystery about it. And then the covid 19 pandemic happens. And yes, of course, they've drained the coffers to deal with the results of the Evergreen riots, they never admitted, they were wrong, they didn't change course. So of course, they were going to, you know, plow into the earth hundreds of miles an hour. And to blame COVID-19 is just to unright history. And so anyway, I would appreciate it if we did not allow that to happen. Because what happened to evergreen is, George and his foolish partners drove the college into the ground in a very short period of time.

**Heather** 48:20

Next question, if the right opportunity arose, would you jump at the chance to be in and out of the classroom? Again?

**Bret** 48:29

I think this one's pretty easy. The problem is think about what we've said and I promise it won't land on you the way it needs to. But Professor teaches full time, one class students take one class full time, it can go on for a full year, right? You know, everybody in that room? Well, if the course is one that has any field component, you've gone out camping with them, or, you know, you've broken bread, all of this, it's a very different environment. So when I hear Do you want to go back into the classroom, I think what classroom four credits at a time, I barely know who my students are, I stand at the front of the room, and I lecture at them, and I don't really know if they've gotten it. That does not sound like fun to me.

**Heather** 49:10

Yeah, so the questioner does say the, if the right opportunity arose, and so there's a lot of possible wiggle room in that. And, you know, we were working for a year or so on trying to figure out what a possible alternative to the current higher ed system might look like. And, you know, may may end up back on on that project at some point. As Brad said, not in any current instantiation. But are there are there possible ways, you know, might we, for instance, start running workshops for people, you know, college student age and otherwise? in evolutionary thinking, we've thought about that, in fact, we're making some progress on on thinking through that before COVID-19 hit, and it's totally stalled at the moment. Yeah, that maybe that's Yeah,

**Bret** 50:03

I would say, if you take the right opportunity broadly then sure the right opportunity sounds delightful, but it doesn't have a lot of detail associated with it. But there are a lot of wrong opportunities that wouldn't be that appealing.

**Heather** 50:15

Yeah. Mostly I'm not reading the names, but duck McMuffin asks, If you could turn back time, do you think you could prevent the catastrophe? If yes, how could you just did everything and you were being maligned for everything that you did do and you started out gentle, so gentle, and then you got less gentle, but we're always respectful. And you know, what, what else could have been done? What else could have been done? I mean, I guess if we could turn back time, a long ways and not hire George bridges in the first place. You know, we knew people who were on the hiring committee. I know one of them very, very well. And he was not sure about this guy. But the chair of the committee, basically, the college GOT GOT consultants to come in, they basically, they basically outsourced a lot of the work to educational consultants, and who knows what their incentives are. And together with the chair not being fully present, we ended up with George bridges. And I think at the point that bridges shows up. It's you know, it's true, like we were gone, you know, his his first year there was included the 11 weeks that we were in Ecuador, so we we were gone for a lot of his laying of his plans, but what else could he have done?

**Bret** 51:27

Okay, so Okay. You read that question? Yes. And I understood it incorrectly. I thought, if you can turn back time, could you prevent the covid 19 pandemic? And I thought maybe, and then it turned out it was about evergreen? Oh, no, there's nothing I could have done.

**Heather** 51:46

No duck muffin here is ambiguous. He says the catastrophe a

**Bret** 51:50

catastrophe. So COVID-19, maybe Probably not, but maybe but evergreen, now that that was two years, too much momentum in that system are headed in the wrong direction.

**Heather** 52:02

Post evergreen, what helped you most to deal with the loss, you must have felt?

**Bret** 52:10

I'm gonna be honest about this one, loss, there was loss, but it was not net loss. And that changes a lot. So there was something very traumatic about a having colleagues and in some cases, friends turn on us. There was something very reassuring about seeing people we barely knew, in some cases rise to the occasion. And the the consequence of being so publicly threatened in our workplace resulted in all kinds of things becoming possible in our lives that just weren't before. And so, you know, is there loss? Yes, very definitely, if we limited to what we had at evergreen in our teaching environment, we lost that. But we gained a tremendous amount in this process, also. And the other thing is, I think, we were living on borrowed time, for a year or possibly two, this was bubbling up, it was gonna come for us sooner or later. And we got out intact after a couple of very dangerous years. And so in some sense, there's a sense of, you know, relief, we made it to the beach and lost it. It's not it's not a simple feeling of loss for me.

**Heather** 53:43

Yeah, I think I agree with all of that. I think I felt, to some degree still do feel but certainly felt. Especially after the just the horror of mediation and the way the college treated us just horrifying. I felt that acutely, I felt the loss and I felt it as a kind of disloyalty that I had not imagined possible. And it was one of many moments when I really wished my dad had been alive. to talk to about he came up he was born in 1938. And he came of age when you gave your heart and soul to an organization that you thought was valuable and it treated you right in exchange now he had almost always not always but almost always found that to be true in his in his work with even these big corporations. Yeah, Xerox and Honeywell and such. And I had come to recognize many years earlier, that loyalty was really one of my my highest values that once once I have really done my assessment and figured out whether or not someone or something is worthy of my loyalty, I am loyal and evergreen had had appeared to be responding in kind by advertising my and our work on its front page and celebrating some, you know, the never through anything that we could take to the bank literally. But through recognition from all the people who seem to matter on the inside, that this was actually that we were really doing what what the founding faculty had intended to be done. And having people like Steve Herman recognize that recognize that, that AI and we were doing that was so important. So the really grotesque way that they treated us in the end, I still feel and I, you know, most most weeks, I don't think about it most months, I probably don't think about it. But in the last few days going back to these emails, you've seen me I've been, I've been just dragged right back there. I'm just, I still have the ability to be stunned by you know, having had 15 years of true unique, creative, analytical educational success in a place and being told, at midnight after what would it have been 16 hours straight of mediation? Okay, we're done. You'll have your keys to us within 48 hours, you'll be out of your offices by then

**Bret** 56:20

they would have walked us to if they could have, yeah, yeah,

**Heather** 56:23

they would have after, you know, trying all sorts of other things on us in that mediation, including getting us to sign non disclosure agreements, and you know, all sorts of stuff. It was stunning. And I spent, you know, I spent my nights I spent overnights for two days, and we got an extension of one day. So it ends up being 72 hours before I had to like walk the keys over the key office like I'm done. You had never been fully in your office in the way that I was fully in this. I mean, you'd had to move a couple of times, but I was fully in this pretty extensive office. And I was finding throughout all of these notes from students, things that they'd made for me artwork, of dolls, arts, and I like just so many things that students had given me over the years. And I wrote them. I wrote everyone, everyone who I could find, before I got cut off from evergreen email the night before we got cut off I went in and just so mail blast emailed all of the old classes, knowing that the farther back it was, the more likely those emails were to have gone, gone out and it wouldn't have been good anymore. And said, you know this, this is it. And our programs were flawed, but they were they were great at evergreen cannot take that away. And, you know, I still feel that that's what we did there. Yeah, was actually amazing. And we have generations of students who know that, and what the current administration and many of the faculty at evergreen are now apparently even teaching the current students. Exactly the contrary does not make it true. Yeah, the fact that they're lying does not make it true. Quite. Okay. I hear about an hour an hour. Okay, I'm going to go through one or two more here. What you could have, what could have been done to avoid the Evergreen situation escalating? Is it dead? Or wasn't unstoppable runaway canoe that once set in motion can only span of control? How do we stop this happening where it arises?

**Bret** 58:40

That depends what position you hold somebody who had the proper position could have prevented this, it was not possible for a tenured faculty member to derail it. I believe the Provost could have which is why George took about firing him right away. And whatever else may be true of George, George played a pretty savvy game from the point of view of reorganizing the administration. And the purpose of that game was to protect Georgia. And it worked. I mean, this is why George has, you know, left with laudatory reports even though he's wrecked the place is that he he elevated some people which made them very, very loyal. He fired some people who were going to be trouble because they wouldn't have put up with his bullshit any more than we did. And it was effective. So

**Heather** 59:42

one of his first moves, right one of his first moves was to fire Michael Zimmerman, who was the Provost because you need him God if he was gonna do what he was

**Bret** 59:51

gonna be able to bulldoze his way into the nightmare if he didn't get rid of Michael so so how

**Heather** 59:57

do we stop this happening where it arises you You got it? Depends on it depends on what your position is. If you are not administration, you need to know the administration will have your back. And you know, at a higher ed level, the Chicago principles, the principles put up by University of Chicago a few years back are the right thing, but they don't probably go far enough. And they don't appear to be binding. Even those universities that have adopted the Chicago principles don't necessarily stand up to the I don't know, the Webster's the intersectional crowd when it comes.

**Bret** 1:00:32

I want to add one other thing. When we got back from Ecuador, I had during Ecuador, I had tried to capture a photo of every student that actually got who they were. And there were a few students who were very, very difficult to capture and a couple I'm not even sure I got there. But I spent a lot of time on the project. And we had 1000s of other photos from places we had been and things we had done and all of that. And we had offered to put together a galleries of it that

**Heather** 1:01:07

I put together, there was so much to this, sorry. But like I had this whole formal proposal, and I'd met with the gallery person, and she loved it.

**Bret** 1:01:14

And it was, it was beautiful, because we had done what it is that evergreen had tried from the beginning to do so you had assignments that these students had written reflections that were really deep, these weren't things people just turned in, because you know, they were going to be read by you. And they put their heart and soul into it. We had the photos, we had this extraordinary trip itinerary that went all over, went all over and it was going to be a great show, and was

**Heather** 1:01:43

going to highlight what could be done at evergreen, it was exactly about the richness of what was possible at evergreen. And it could have even been it could have even gone to other liberal arts colleges to to highlight what was possible because there there are always people who were saying at other schools, what what you're doing at evergreen is amazing. How can I do that here?

**Bret** 1:02:03

Yeah, right. So anyway, my point is at the point that the administration, and in fact certain people who were gunning for us already decided no, no, we can't do that.

**Heather** 1:02:14

Even after I'd gotten an informal Yes, and thew z stick Yes, from the gallery director,

**Bret** 1:02:19

right. And you know, in this gallery, well, I won't go into the fight over whether or not the gallery should continue. But this would have been an excellent use of the gallery, and it would have brought a lot of people into it. And it would have allowed people to see what was possible at evergreen, which frankly, many faculty come in, and with this weird model, nobody ever tells them what's possible, and they default into the first thing they see, and they never get over it. So this would have been valuable. The fact of it being effectively erased from the history by blocking it at the level that we would have displayed it. That was a move. And that was a move that made what happened possible because frankly, I mean, you all watch the podcast, have seen some of the photos, the photos put the lie to the idea that this, you know that we were some sort of, you know, backwards racists who were teaching this stuff in our classrooms, so it would have been inconsistent with it. Now, I don't think the people who shut down the idea of the gallery show knew what they were doing. But there was an instinctive thing, which is that anything that shines a light on what's possible, what we were doing is bad for whatever they were up to. And there was a lot of that. So in some sense, displaying the possible makes it impossible to tell fairy tales that are incompatible with reality. And that would have been would have been useful.

**Heather** 1:03:46

One more question, and then we'll stop. Okay. You guys had me crying with that letter from the student? Me too. Yeah, I was almost there. That's all weather, things like that. Were our will be a main catalyst for stopping the spread of this bigotry.

**Bret** 1:04:05

I hope so. I really I think it's very difficult to convey the level of tragedy. I mean, at one level, all the people that we knew, I think every student we knew is now gone. From evergreen. Is that right?

**Heather** 1:04:26

I think that's right. At this point. Yeah. As of as of this last graduation,

**Bret** 1:04:28

right. So at the level of

**Heather** 1:04:31

now, yeah. The last one. A long while ago now. Yeah.

**Bret** 1:04:36

So in some sense, we don't even know the population of students anymore. You know, we are now gone. But the recognition that the biggest betrayal here as bad as the betrayal of us was, there were an indefinitely large number of students going forward into the future, who needed a college that would treat them very individually because They weren't built for a college that expected them to just simply hit the ground and perform. Those people have now lost that college because there aren't others. And those who did it did it for their own reasons, most of the students who lead these protests, they're gone Nyima, she's gone. So these people have moved on, they've doing whatever they are doing with their lives. But the people who've really got hurt most are the people who needed this, and now it's not going to be there for them, and they're never even going to know it. So, hopefully, if you can recognize that somebody like Odette, you know, is a measure of what's possible in such a system, you know, and she didn't need the place, but she certainly benefited from it. And you can imagine what it would be like to be confronted by people who, you know, mean, you know, they talk about black bodies, right? And I know where that phrase comes from. And I actually think that there's a meaning to it that is deep, but the meaning that they were applying to it was just total D individuation, they were just totally removing the individual identity of everybody. You know, Odette was either going to become a tool, just another black body or she was nothing to them or worse. And you know, that is the opposite of enlightenment. It just is. And so, anyway, yes, I. I also find the, the grotesqueness of the confrontation that she faced, stops me in my tracks every time. I've never gotten over it. And I hope it does change people. I hope they see how this madness hurts people who don't deserve to be heard. And maybe maybe it will bring us to a better place. All right, well, again, sorry for the technical difficulties. We will continue to try to figure out from where they emerge, YouTube if this is you fix it. Exactly, exactly. Alright. Until next time, which is scheduled for this coming Tuesday at 330. We are signing off the Dark Horse podcast be well stay safe.