Bret and Heather 18th DarkHorse Podcast Livestream\_ Freedom ...

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**SPEAKERS**

Costco Clip, Bret, Heather

**Bret** 00:07

Hey folks, welcome to the Dark Horse podcast live stream our 18th. I am sitting with Dr. Heather hying. And we are going to talk to you today about why it is that we are so confused about COVID-19. And what we are supposed to be doing about it. Are you ready to embark in that discussion? I am. All right. So let's talk about what we are seeing in the world. And you know, we are all seeing the world through this lens that is social media. And I have to say one of the lessons of all of this, I suspect is that social media has become the ghost in our machine. And on the one hand, that may sound nonsensical, because we can see what social media is. But the algorithms themselves obviously haunt our thinking in ways that we can't even test. Are you

**Heather** 00:56

suggesting that the pandemic has made social media into more of a Ghost in the Machine or that it has merely revealed it and more starkly?

**Bret** 01:03

Yeah, I think because nobody has a real handle on this, because it is emerging in real time, we are seeing something about the magnitude of its effect. And we have talked about phenomena that you cannot detect directly, but that you can detect as gravity, you know, so for example, the existence of a planet that manifests first not as our ability to see a planet, but its effect on other planets in their orbits, we can estimate how big the effect is. And I think we are seeing something here of extraordinary magnitude. And it's to be honest with you not very hopeful. But what exactly it is and why it works. The way it does is less clear. Yeah, because it is hidden in a literally private layer. It's the ultimate black box, in a sense.

**Heather** 01:57

Yeah. So it's interesting, listening to you talk, it seems like you could be talking about the algorithms in social media as the Ghost in the Machine. And not so much because of the machine. But so much of what you just said actually could apply equally to what this virus is and how it's doing what it's doing in various layers in society.

**Bret** 02:18

Well, I mean, I think these things are and you know, we've said from the beginning that these are two very different things that there's the hazard of the virus, and then there's the hazard have its effect on us. And at the moment, as concerned as I am about the virus, I'm much more concerned about what we're going to do to each other as we attempt to sort out issues of social distancing and mask wearing and the like. Yep. Can I actually

**Heather** 02:43

start by by reading from this excellent essay in this month's or the June episode of Harper's Thomas chariton Williams, who's a terrific thinker and writer for those of you don't know him, an essay called reading the plague and quarantine the plague being can lose 1947 I think it is novel. And here's just here's a quote from the plague itself translated from the French. pestilence isn't a thing made to man's measure, they're probably tell ourselves that pestilence is a mere bogey of the mind a bad dream that will pass away, but it doesn't always pass away. Or townsfolk were not more to blame than others. They forgot to be modest. That was all about that everything still was possible for them, which presuppose The pestilences were impossible. They went on doing business arranged for journeys and formed views. How should they have given a thought anything like plague, which rules out any future? cancels journeys, silences, the exchange of views? And then one more thing, there's a few more than here, but just for right now, Williams writes, kemu was clear and careful throughout in his presentation of what it takes to combat the forces of annihilation. Quote, there's no question of heroism and all this, he writes, it's a matter of common decency. That's an idea that may make some people smile, but the only means of fighting a plague is common decency.

**Bret** 04:02

As a matter of common decency, the only way of finding a plague is common decency. This is this is beautiful. So I think then the natural thing to do is to take a look at the two clips that we found circulating online about the way these clips happened to be from the US about the way some Americans are treating other Americans in light of COVID-19. So let's, let's start with the one that I believe was circulating earlier.

**Heather** 04:32

I think I've only seen one that you're talking Yeah, that's the one dealing with different tech stuff. So

**Bret** 04:36

the multiple clips stitched together.

**Heather** 04:42

Yep. I think that's not the one. Oh,

**Costco Clip** 04:51

yeah. What was that where she you have some sound.

**Costco Clip** 04:54

Thank you for copying. Bye.

**Bret** 05:03

Well, we don't know if you can hear this, maybe you're but what we have, wow. are Americans coughing at each other in retail environments? Oh, she's sitting. I got the opposite. No, there we go. Assault and Battery

**Costco Clip** 05:54

trauma 3000 followers. Mostly, I work for Costco and I'm asking this member to put on our Ask because that is our company policy. So either way the map, and I'm not doing it so I woke up in a free country.

**Bret** 06:06

All right, before we discuss what we've just seen here, I would like to show the other clip that was circulating this week. So here, this is a clip from stat. Those of you who can't see it, we have a woman not wearing a mask in the grocery store being shamed and chased out of the grocery store by a bunch of patrons wearing masks.

**Bret** 06:43

So

**Bret** 06:45

I think we have to be very careful addressing this question. I am aware that I have some sympathies somewhere in here, but that they do not amount to a simple analysis of either clip. My reaction is that this is us going insane. And that I believe I can detect in my own processing of what I'm hearing and seeing and reading, that I'm struggling to stay above water, I'm trying to tread water fast enough that I don't succumb to some overly simple position. But that that struggle has become difficult. And I think a lot of people are just simply failing at it. And that this is the product, it manifests as fed up at best and excruciating, and perhaps angry and

**Heather** 07:42

almost demonic at worst. Yeah,

**Bret** 07:45

it is almost demonic is not a bad description, I would say the thing that strikes me most is, let's take COVID-19 out of the situation, let's say that we are somehow dealing with the common coke. The idea that somebody would deliberately cough at somebody else, sick or not, but just to suggest the possibility of transmitting a cold to somebody who didn't have it. That would be a monstrous act, because the amount of harm that even something as minor as the common cold, carries with it is a major setback in a life, right? It's a week or two of misery. Who knows how many people are downstream of you, when you have one of these things. Hopefully you can, not transmitted to anyone else. But it you know, who knows how many people some code that you have had has passed from you too many. So the amount of misery in one misplaced cough is potentially large. And yet these people are playing at

**Heather** 08:52

cold isn't as bad as the flu. The flu isn't as bad as COVID-19. And by bad at the simplest metric, as we've talked about here before, is deaths. colds don't kill people, unless those people have a considerable number of comorbidities, underlying conditions, you know, things have to be going very, very badly for someone for a cold to kill them. Please do kill people. And COVID-19 is clearly killing people. But the long term effects as I don't remember which number it was, but you talked at some length in one of our earlier live streams about it was the one we were talking about telomeres about imagining what it is that is pulling you to the grave. And that every sickness insult injury that you get, contributes just a little bit to making you a bit less robust, a bit more prone to future injury and insult and illness. And it shortens the literally shortens the lifespan of the cell lines that have been injured, right like it actually just literally does that and each of your cell lines is not the same. Is your individual life. But without a significant number of your cell lines, you cannot continue to live. And this is of course, what senescence is.

**Bret** 10:07

Yeah, it's you know, it's like a video game in which you have some quantity of life force and things, spend it. And to have another citizen, even in jest approach you with something that robs you of some of your most precious element, you're the life force that keeps you around, is ghastly. And to do it in the context of a pandemic, that I promise you, nobody completely understands. I mean, really, we don't know what this bug is capable of, we don't know what it will become. We don't know what it is, all of those things are still open questions, to have anybody playing with this thing, or feeling so sure of their position that they are entitled to? You know, again, I keep saying in dress, it's not really in jest given that many people have this disease without showing any symptoms, these people who are coughing, they will be sick, especially if they've been lacks about masks, which they obviously have. Now, on the other hand, you've got this other clip, where people are chasing a woman who's not wearing a mask out of a store, I don't know for sure whether the store had a requirement. But again, it's not that I'm without some sympathy for their position here, there is a thing in the absence of governance, there's a thing that keeps people behaving honorably. And it has to do with reputation. And it has to do with people willing to penalize those who misbehave. And so there's an ancient tradition here. On the other hand, this woman, whoever she is, I'm certain key arrived at this position that she was safe to be in this grocery store without a mask, because she's been fed bad information. She's not the villain. And she's being chased out of this grocery store as if she's a terrible human being. Now, if one of those people who coughed on somebody were chased out by people in masks? I think I would like I think I would get it and I think I would accept it. But assuming that didn't happen here. My sense is you're still turning on another citizen who's as confused as you are. Right?

**Heather** 12:20

Yeah. Well, there, we've been handed a lot of simple rubrics, some of which contradict one another, some of which have changed over time. Like, you know, as we talked about, I think in our very first live stream here, the Surgeon General of the United States and the who were both saying masks don't wear masks, they do you know, good, before they both reversed completely. So similarly, and this isn't exactly the same kind of thing. But one of the things that's being done as places begin to open up, at least in areas in the US that I'm aware of, is that in some in some kinds of establishments that are opening up, they are doing temperature checks at the door. And this strikes me as mostly ridiculous, because most people It seems according to our current and mostly like all the way back in our understanding of this particular disease, are asymptomatic and are spreading the thing, even if they become symptomatic, are most infectious, or at least quite infectious before they develop any symptoms at all. So the asymptomatic and the pre symptomatic symptomatic and the pre symptomatic are both capable of spreading disease, the the never exposed are obviously not capable of spreading disease because they do not have it. But pre symptomatic and asymptomatic are both terms that refer to people who have the disease are capable of spreading it, or are have the disease in them. And taking people's temperatures seems like a pacifying move a way to make people feel like they're doing something like they're being active. And it's not going it is actually going to give people a false sense of security. And I worry that many of the people who are engaged in flaunting The rules are reading you're hearing, wear masks and take your temperature and stay indoors as similar sorts of rubrics that all make no sense. And of course, the first one does make sense from epidemiological perspective wear masks when you are in stores, with strangers or with or in close proximity to other people whom you do not know the health history of do take people's temperatures at every moment possible and have the sense then that if they don't have an elevated temperature at the moment, then they're healthy. No, they're not necessarily healthy. Now they do have an elevated temperature, you know, something maybe but you've also don't know if they have COVID-19 that we have something else.

**Bret** 14:49

Yeah. Although in a world where we all got the same software update, so we all understood what the implications of a temperature being taken was. I could See it as one piece of a much larger strategy? In other words, how many illnesses could you prevent, if everybody whose temperature was elevated at the point they wanted to enter a place was barred, obviously, it doesn't bother the people who were completely asymptomatic or completely pre symptomatic, but it would stop a certain number of cases. So you have to put up that savings against the false sense of security, which actually could kill people, the sense that it's safe enough might be worse than the benefit.

**Heather** 15:34

And, you know, the the behavioral rule, which has been around for decades, which is if you're sick, stay home, you know, hopefully, you know, right now, this doesn't pertain. But you know, you go to a school or you go to you have a workplace, that if you're sick, you aren't going to get penalized for, for calling in sick and staying home. And of course, many people don't have that luxury under normal conditions. But when people go out into the world, when they are practically sick, they are causing problems for not just themselves. They're not just extending the life of their own sickness, but they're, of course, risking other people. And people who have active fevers shouldn't be out there in the first place. And I worry actually more about the false sense of security from temperature taking stations, then I think the value will be gained from catching the few people who have active fevers at the moment, because it really does seem, you know, it's it's it's medicalizing of in this case, and, obviously, medical process, but because it's because it's a metric, because it's it is an action done by someone to you, and then you have a number. People love numbers, we know. And in fact, I think that the most innumerate among us are the most fond of these simple measures. That may not mean what they what we think they mean. And so I very much worry about the idea of being out there being told, oh, yeah, your temperature is fine. Maybe that means that they're less likely to wear a mask in a crowded store, for instance?

**Bret** 17:09

Yeah. In some sense, I think, though, if that's right, and that may well be right, it is a small corner of a big problem. And the big problem is that, if there's one thing we know, about SARS, COVID, two, and COVID-19. It's part of a complex system. Not only is the virus itself a part of a complex system, the body it interfaces with and therefore the symptomatology is a complex system. The body politic is a complex system. The world economy is a complex system. And all of these things are interfacing in ways that do not fit our clearly strong desire to have an answer. Am I safe to do X? If I were this, am I protected? None of these things have perfectly clear answers. And that is, I think, allowing people to be driven crazy. So if we can, I want to point to two things, which again, will harken back to discussions we've had at various times. One is, we have two sources of bad thinking. In the case of this pandemic, one of those sources is noise. This thing is so new. And the way that it interfaces with the body is so complex, that there's just false leads everywhere. There are things that appear to be patterns that weren't patterns, or they were patterns for a moment, and then the pattern evaporated because it was overwhelmed by some other pattern. This is noise. And then we have false signal, which is frankly, even worse than systematic bias of an experiment, false signal that's being delivered by people who have a conflict of interest. And this is the thing that worries me, above all else is I have the sense that for a while, Americans, and in some sense the world were somewhat galvanized, by facing this very frightening pandemic as one, we were all seeing it for the first time it was disrupting almost every life, every human life on earth. And that disruption caused us all to think because what else were we going to do? But something took our willingness to think, and it captured it. It's now delivering us messages that are not based on our best understanding of what's going on. They're based on the political advantage that comes from pushing one story much farther than any of the actual evidence suggests. And the question is Ah, is there any way to avoid this? And be if there's not? What is going to happen when even COVID-19 can't get us to put our political bias biases and allegiances aside? We're going to tear each other apart.

**Heather** 20:19

Yeah, no, it does feel like, like the US is doing a particularly poor job of this. But at least this is this is Thomas chariton. Williams take, and I've seen a few other places as well, that we are polarizing more fully than other places. And it does seem to come down to the classic tension that most people don't think of as a tension between freedom or liberty and justice. And, you know, we are, we are promised both in this country, right. And it is imagined that Liberty and Justice are two of the very few primary ideals of a democracy that this is what the government is supposed to be providing liberty, justice, well, not taking much of your liberty. But we have these sort of characters of these positions right now. On basically on the far left, we have slide it all the way over to maximize justice, freedom be damned, Liberty be damned. And on the extreme, right, we have the slider all the way to extreme liberty, Justice be damned. Found the idea of coughing on someone else you are, you're actively taking away the rights of other people and, and what's going on, in the sort of no nuance world of will be unlocked in full lockdown, maybe in your house, full masks at all time until the end of time, space. I don't know, I don't really see that. But I imagine it's out there to some degree. Also relieves everyone sort of maximally of their freedom, their liberty. And I was thinking about this the idea of with liberty and justice for all of courses, instantiated in our pledge of allegiance event, which every school kid in a public school Anyway, I'm repeating over and over and over again, I didn't realize that it was actually Madison, James Madison, for whom our dog is named, and for whom the program at which we are ensconced, luckily at Princeton is named. So in the I'm going to read this here, the 51st paper, the Federalist the Federalist Papers, James Madison says, Justice is the end of government, it is the end of civil society. But what he means is that it's the final state, it ever has been an ever will be pursued until it be obtained, or until Liberty be lost in the pursuit. He points out, James Madison points out that there is a trade off between these two, and that we are what a democracy is doing is pursuing Liberty until we start losing freedom. But of course, you could read that fight, you could read that at either extreme. And the fact is, we can't do either and retain our a civil society. We can't we can't slide either of these two to their extreme.

**Bret** 23:03

Yeah, you can never optimize any one thing in any complex system, because you'll crash every other parameter. That's important. That's just the simple consequence. But I even find there's something odd about the suppose, of liberty maximizers is that, I don't think their position has anything to do with anything that could wisely be called liberty, it's a very narrow form of liberty, am I free to go to X establishment? And dresses? I like? Okay. Well, if you were really trying to maximize liberty, then you would have to understand that somebody else ending up in the ICU has to be counted against liberty, you're not very free if you're in the ICU. So there's always a question about whether the Liberty you are maximizing is narrow, or whether it is broad, maximizing broad Liberty requires high quality regulation of things, everybody's free to drive on both sides of the road, you're not very free to drive anywhere, because you're taking your life into your hands every time you get behind the wheel. So we have to limit your freedom to one side of the road or the other in order for you to be free to drive from here to wherever, right. That's an excellent example. Likewise, you know, the massive regulation that surrounds aircraft, right, the ability to fly anywhere on Earth. I mean, that's a huge boon to freedom. It comes from regulation, that's the thing that makes it possible.

**Heather** 24:33

So anyone who's ever flown has benefited from regulation.

**Bret** 24:37

Right? And you frankly, you know, you'd have to be crazy not to want it that way. Does that mean that there are not places where the regulations go too far? No, of course there are. And you couldn't even build a system in which there wouldn't be accesses. There will be accesses there will be places where the regulations don't go far enough. That's noise, but the the position that has people would rejecting the importance of the virus and thereby arguing in favor of basically a return to normalcy, right down to face coverings not being not only not being required, but mocking people who wear them, which is now an active feature of the landscape. This is absurd. And the thing, the thing that is missing, the thing that increasingly is haunting me is I don't see a contingent who are saying, we really have to open back up, that's a very dangerous thing to do. The way to do it is with extreme caution with respect to things like face masks and physical distancing. So instead of, you know, the position, there's nothing to worry about. Let's just go back to normal, I would expect to see people advocating for let us go back to economic normalcy. And in order to do that, let us behave in an extremely careful and meticulous fashion with respect to how we are around each other. What's more, that what I think is, I mean, I don't think that is my position. I think actually, it's not time to go back to normalcy yet, because the danger is still too great. And the unknowns are still too large. But I understand the

**Heather** 26:20

perspective. And it you see almost no one occupying the position,

**Bret** 26:23

I see almost no one occupying the position. And that tells me something is not right here. What's more, and you and I've been on this, from the beginning, there are places where actually, the nature of COVID-19, as we see it in May of 2020 is such that we could afford more liberty. So to the extent that there are places where we actually have to curtail Liberty right now, for the greater good, there are places we can afford to relax it. So I would expect to see a intelligent, synthetic position that said, Look outside for reasons we don't yet understand, you're way safer than we thought. Okay, outside is pretty safe. So let's take advantage of outside. What does that mean, clock's ticking. In the northern hemisphere where most of us live. Summer is about to dawn, it's not going to last forever. Vitamin D is an important component. So let us take advantage of outdoors. Let us let us ratchet up our return to normalcy outdoors as much as we can. But I would say if you're engaged in an activity that makes it difficult to wear a mask, if you're biking hard, if you're running hard, probably you don't want to be wearing a mask. We went out for a family bike ride the other day, a long 115 miles into town that involves quite a few hills, quite a few hills, we had masks with us. We wore them if we were near people, but as we were riding hard we weren't, we didn't have them over our mouths think any of us ever put them on motorbiking. Not while we were writing when we were stopped and there were people. But in any case, so you can make a judgment call there. But what I you know, again, I think the intelligent position would have to recognize not only his source code to a virus with unknown capacities, but it's also an evolving virus, right? If we give it the opportunity to spread outside, then it will probably go from being very difficult to spread outside to figuring out how to do it, and then we will lose that opportunity. So we should protect it, we should cherish it. But I don't see this position. And what that tells me is that the opportunity for us to become enlightened about this terrible thing that has happened the planet Earth is being lost in favor of some mind numbing and terrifying political instinct to do. I mean, these people who are coughing on other people, they are clearly not seeing the other person as human. This is what people do before they go to war against people, they D humanize them. And in this case, we are watching and happen, you know they are willing to spread a pathogen to somebody because not spreading it to them is not important. how terrifying is that that

**Heather** 29:04

Americans would do that to each other? No, this is this is the drumbeat that that we've been on that this is not a moment to choose sides on the basis of how someone has voted or how someone's going to vote or what party they're in. And, you know, as we've said in previous live streams, if if Trump begins to act like a statesman, we all need to get behind him and be if if if he doesn't, then people should not be blindly following him because they liked him before. This is this is not the moment for that. This is this is becoming an even Starker sneetches it is that I keep on coming back to this metaphor, but I just think Dr. Seuss was right, that people are in this case are choosing sides and it's it's masks or not. It's magga hats or not It stars on your belly or Stars are in our bellies without and, and it effectively reduces people to their tribes, it reduces people to their demographic features, which is oddly, given this, this, we won't wear masks. groupthink is coming out of the right. It is a, it is using a demographic marker to identify people exactly in the same way that the social justice left has been using demographic markers to identify people, it is just as tribal. And just as group thankee.

**Bret** 30:37

So I'm now going to get myself into trouble. But I see a kind of analogy. There's a way in which people who subscribe to a narrow version of liberty, right, I want to be free to do anything I want to do at any moment, right? That kind of liberty. There's a way that those people become suckers, they become pawns of this corporate force that is, you know, subtly enslaving us. And the thing you said early in our discussion here, that the right thing to do if you're sick is to stay home. And then you pointed out the obvious fact that for most people, they know that that's not the rule, because they know that their livelihood depends on keeping their employer happy, and that their employee has a perverse incentive where the employer doesn't want the whole workforce to get sick. But to the extent that somebody is sick and capable of working, frankly, if the whole workforce could work, sick, and nobody is in a position to prove that they got sick at your establishment, because you incentivized your workers to come in, when they weren't, well, that the cost is externalized. They would be fine with it. And so that perverse incentive has infected our whole economy, such that everybody who is in some kind of Jeopardy was depending on their employer of feeling good about their work, anybody who is easily replaced because of the nature of their work,

**Heather** 32:16

or, especially, at least in the US, given our rather draconian health insurance and employment rules in place at the moment, if you're working less than half time, there's a very good chance that your hourly are not salaried, and that you don't have sick leave. And so what do you do? If you need to pay the rent? And you can you do, if you're actually at the level that you're going to need the next paycheck in order to make it yep. And skipping out means not just not just losing a day, but potentially antagonizing a boss, who has lots of other hungry people who probably want this probably not very well paying job, that doesn't come with sick basically, if it's, it's a terrible, terrible choice. And those of us who have lived most of our adult lives, with either salaries or with enough of a cushion, such that we aren't that close to the border, can can sympathize, and can recognize that this is a tremendous problem, but have a harder time actually being in the space of having to decide neither you nor I have ever had to decide, do I go to work while I'm sick. Because if I don't, I may not have a paycheck next month. And neither neither of us has ever had that position. The last time I work, that kind of job was in college.

**Bret** 33:43

But the point I was heading towards is that the the folks who are attempting to maximize narrow, trivial liberties at this moment, are becoming the suckers who really benefits from us going back to normal and polluting the data. So we can't tell how many people die and not worrying so much about it. And yes, we're gonna lose people. But wink wink, they're old. So they were on the way out anyway, that style of thinking is actually I would say, in the interests of people whose economic establishments have been idled, but who themselves are in a position to insulate from the virus. In other words, if you're living a cushy existence, and you've got you know, you own some fast food franchise Corporation, if you're a partial owner of that, or you're a CEO of it or something, then the point is actually, you don't mind a certain amount of death among the little people in order to get stuff humming again, and if we've got to collectively rationalize that there's really no depth coming out of this because it's not as serious as we're claiming. then so be it. And so I have the sense that Have these people who have fallen into this, you know, not only do we need to go back to work, but we don't need to do it carefully that I would say knee jerk mindset is actually cryptically, the sort of corporate dream here is that we will stop obsessing over, you know, the death of little people in order for the economic machine to go back to doing what it does. And this is also there for a moment for us to recognize that we actually are in the same boat. And you know, to the extent of us, you me, all of us, right? You're coughing on somebody, because you're confused about how dangerous this is, then that cough, you may be asymptomatic, you may cough on somebody, they may transmit it to somebody and somebody you care about may die downstream of that you may be doing this to yourself and have no idea. Yeah. So anyway, the the politicization is really the, the the frightening thing here and I and I, I feel compelled to say I know every time we take Trump to task we are we anger a certain fraction of the people who otherwise might be listening to us. But if there's one thing that I would say, I have not seen broken during his presidency, it is his commitment to the political, that you can say, he needs to do that, because the deep state or whatever is so frighteningly powerful that this is the this is the only weapon he's got. But I don't see it that way. He is politicizing this because it's the game, he is the master. Right? He's very good at that game. And, you know, if I had to bet, I'd say he's gonna win 2020, because he is very good about it. But to politicize things at this moment, is actually to create a tremendous amount of misery. And actually, we have no way of guessing how much it's going to be. Because to the extent that more people get sick, because of policies that are dismissive of the danger, that gives the virus more landscape in which to evolve and learn new tricks. We don't know if this is going to go away in a year. But you know, we could be stuck with this permanently, because it's learned new tricks now.

**Heather** 37:22

Because his his brilliance is genius, if you will, his politics. But he appears to be almost a political savant, right? he is, he is so good in this realm. And he does not appear to know how to surround himself with advisors who are excellent in other realms and to keep them stable, you're around him. So if that's right, and let's just don't throw that out there as a possibility that he's a kind of political savant. We're left, left, unfortunately, the position that politics is inherently social. So just like, again, just like the social justice left, that is mired the postmodern left that is mired in confusion about the nature of reality and thinks that just by wishing it true, they can create any seven sexes and all of this garbage. Now, having someone who's whose primary, if not close to, you know, sole tool in their arsenal is one that is social, it's about changing minds, that can't go up against a biological reality, like a virus effectively, could get lucky, he could get unlucky. So far, it seems like he's mostly gotten unlucky by making the kinds of choices he has against this virus. And it's, none of none of the things he's doing can actually can actually respond directly to it because he's wielding social tools. And it, it doesn't care. Right. It doesn't care about whether or not he changes people's attitudes towards him. And in fact, it's going to make it more powerful if, you know if if when lockdown eases with lockdown easing, people are taking off their masks because they think that masks make you sheep and make you not true. Not true. Americans actually going to spread this thing farther, he's actually going to have been working on behalf of the virus.

**Bret** 39:17

Yeah, working on behalf of the virus is exactly my thinking as well. And I think we don't have the proper terminology for the component of hygiene that is socially mediated. Maybe Maybe we do have a term and I'm just not thinking of it. But the fact is, when a person uses the toilet, and they do not wash their hands, the chances of them causing themselves a problem are very close to zero. But the chances of them causing someone else a problem are high. The thing that causes you to wash your hands is the shame of taking that risk, which ultimately, you know, for those of us who had the right upbringing, I guess it just gets built in and you don't think about it, you don't know, of course you wash your hands. And if there's an opportunity to wash your hands, you think, Oh, God,

**Heather** 40:14

I know what I'm doing. Like I'm walking around with these hands, I can't touch my face.

**Bret** 40:18

Exactly. So. So there's something that just becomes encoded, it's becomes second nature. And to have a political entity, whoever it is, right, whether you know, it's our president, or it's some corporate thing that is itchy to get its factory back online. That thing is creating the equivalent of bad hygiene that may be literally creating bad hygiene, which literally has consequences for human health, that are unacceptable and completely unnecessary. I mean, really imagine that this other this third position existed. And the third position was, there are some things we can go back to doing right away. There's nothing we could be doing exactly as we were doing it before, because even if it's safe today, we don't want to give the virus any extra opportunity to learn tricks. So let's be careful outdoors, even though the data at the moment suggests it's not likely to be transmitted to almost impossible is what the data that we have currently says. So that means Hey, you can take some extra Liberty here, here's a place we need to be extra cautious. I don't know what we do with subway trains, public transit in general, probably that's not a good idea to bring back on line. Or if you were going to do it, you would want to think about a very careful policy about how

**Heather** 41:36

that mean that that sounds impossible for many urban centers. For the vast majority of people who again, have high overlap with people with with the group of people who are also not salaried, or hourly workers who absolutely 100% depend on every paycheck. These are the people most likely to be dependent on mass transit, in big urban centers, like New York, London, Paris.

**Bret** 42:00

I agree. And I'm concerned that actually, in part, each side is amping up something that is untrue, in an effort not to let the other side get a foothold, and that standing down both sides instinct to exaggerate is necessary in order in order for us to understand where we are, in other words, COVID-19 reveals all sorts of things that were true. You know, last March, before there was a COVID-19,

**Heather** 42:37

March 2020 or March 2019, which was last March 2019. Yeah, I

**Bret** 42:41

don't mean last March, I mean, the march previous before, presumably this thing was in the world, in its present form, before it was infecting human beings. All of these interconnected pieces were true, right? People were behaving badly who had the flu, it was killing people's grandparents. It was something that they went to work with sometimes, because they couldn't afford not to, because feeding their family was a higher priority to them. Then the risk they put other people's elderly parents and grandparents that people were

**Heather** 43:17

behaving badly with regard to the flu, everyone knows that the flu kills people. And it is also true, that so far as we know, right now, the flu is less transmissible than SARS, cov. Two, and has a lower case fatality rate by four or five times at least.

**Bret** 43:33

Right. But if we look at what the New York Times did the other day, and I must say, I'm very conflicted about it, that front page with an

**Heather** 43:40

image of the Sunday new york times in which they said there are 100,000 deaths now in the US, right, and they went through, or they went through papers and obits across the country and just chose 100 100 1000 names. And I don't know exactly how they did it. They didn't quite clarify. But they I think they tried to choose across various demographics, geographic sex, race, socio economics, age, especially. And they just listed the names, the place of their death, their age, and maybe a sentence about them. Yeah phrase from from their obits. And it went went house probably four or five full pages of the front section of the New York Times above the fold, and below the fold on the front page of the Sunday New York Times, which is, you know, was paper of record Leo is, is by most measures, still probably the biggest newspaper in the world. Yeah. So it was impressive. It was hard to ignore

**Bret** 44:42

well, and it was an obvious allusion to what happens in a smaller disaster, right, an airline crash, there is the inevitable list of the victims of the crash and often there'll be pictures after 911 they did this. I would

**Heather** 44:56

say Actually, it's an allusion to war because you know, pandemic and war are Our sister ideas. Yeah, I haven't thought of it. And they they come at you unexpected. In fact, there's something in here when I read a little bit more, but not right now. But I think it's been a long time since I read can't lose the plague. But this essay by Williams reminded me of it. I believe that he he makes that connection, that one of the things about both is that you don't see it coming. There are people with glimmers glimmerings of it. And there are people who are preparing and there are people who are mocking the ones preparing Yep. But when it's finally at your door, it's basically too late to do any of the work that you might have done in advance.

**Bret** 45:39

Yeah, it does. They even the style of the front page looked like a memorial wall with just the endless list of names and not very much information. But there was something about it that didn't sit quite right with me. So on the one hand, I think it is important to say, you know, how many airline crashes a week is this the equivalent of if we take all of the people the excess, that's how many airline crashes a week is it. On the other hand, I find something very disingenuous about the fact that changes in policy, very frequently kill an airline airliner worth of people relatively quickly, right? We just don't know who they are. And we don't care. Now, we should care. But we don't because we don't have to. And if we did start caring at that level, we'd be overwhelmed by so the fact that this is

**Heather** 46:33

like easing environment regulations that cause more particulate matter to be in the air in a particular place such that more children end up with later and adults coming down with lung cancer. There's no way to track it for sure. Right? You just you don't know if any individual case of cancer was due to those changes and regulations early on to probabilistic Yeah.

**Bret** 46:54

So we can say this number die, but we can't say who they were. Because even that can't be established, or things that create Jeopardy that result. I mean, you know, the thing that you were pointing out about the way people's lives are hooked up. People, a lot of people are close to the bottom of the ladder, where if you fall just one rung too low, it's very hard to get back onto it. And then once once you become homeless, right, once it's hard to get a shower once you don't have multiple sets of clothes and can't get them clean, right? Even if you had the skills to keep a job, it's very hard to get one, right. So anyway, how many people policies that are cruel with respect to taking people's misfortune and allowing it to plague them for the rest of their life, and then shortening those lives by leaving them exposed to the elements, these things kill a lot of people, they don't get a New York Times front page listing their names just because they died. So there's a way in which I think the New York Times is broadcasting these names to give us a sense of the magnitude of this crisis. And that is legitimate, but in some sense, it invites a question about what else we do that is creating, you know, death and misery needlessly, and what role good governance would play in preventing it? And, you know, we talked in our last live stream about why the term progressive is not anathema to us, even though many of the things that modern progressives are advocating are not things we would advocate. And the answer is, we need progress. We are actually in mortal Jeopardy if we don't find it, but the the point I was trying to get to, and I think I've wandered from it, but COVID-19 reveals the interconnectedness and the difficulty of good policy, right, we are now all grappling with it in real time, because it affects whether or not we can go out and get a cup of coffee, right? But those things are in play 20 473 65. And decisions are being made on our behalf by people who do not share our interests, and they are having terrible consequences that are creating tremendous misery for people that did nothing to invite it. And somehow, the corporate entity wants to talk about COVID-19 it has a perspective about what it wants to occur. But it doesn't want to talk about the larger picture, which is what this reveals about the needless misery and interconnectedness of us and the role that good enlightened policy which actually liberates people in the rich sense of the term, not the narrow sense of the term would look like

**Heather** 49:46

the the broad sense of enriches Is that what you mean?

**Bret** 49:49

Well, I've used this term realized liberty, I don't

**Heather** 49:53

realize about liberty, they're the broad sense of liberty, not the broad sense of enriching,

**Bret** 49:57

right? No, no, I want people living In the same way that I would argue, FAA regulations liberate us to travel and that that liberty is worth the draconian regulations that allow airplanes to be so damn reliable. That's an enlightened kind of liberty, I want the liberty that comes from the regulation. And frankly, I want us to look at the entire the entirety of civilization this way, I do think liberty is special. And that in some sense, it's the only value that you can argue to maximize. But the reason you can argue to maximize it is because it integrates all the others, if you're sick, if you're poor, you're not really understanding and attracting with the externalities. Yes, and if you actually had a proper definition of it, and enlightened definition of it, you'd find that when you had maximized liberty, you would have solved all of the solvable problems that live beneath it. In order to liberate people, you would have to address these other concerns, you'd have to return the externalities and

**Heather** 50:55

all that doesn't look like people going out and coughing away. It really does just, it just does. Allow me to read a couple of more short sections from this, Thomas chariton Williams article on harbors. pandemic, if you were fortunate enough not to be hospitalized or killed by it wears you down by other more subtle measures. It administers by 1000 cuts of kind of spiritual and psychological incapacitation. It sends your awareness level and holiday open ended enough to make you crave the rhythms and arteries of labor. by stripping you of the most basic knowledge at the world water main predictable, stable in the morning, it makes you all too aware of just how good you once had it, and that no such assurance was ever promised to you in the first place. And then later in the same paragraph, it is our great strength as well as our terrible weakness to live most fully in the past and in the future. But pestilences rob us of the sanctuary of both of these states, forcing us into the totalizing, uncertainty and silence of the present. This struck me as so deep. So that's Williams, not kemu, although it's emerging from his reading, rereading Kambou, while in lockdown with his family, and they had the they had the foresight to, they're in France to go into lockdown with another family. So he's in the countryside, in France, with two families with young children, but still still enduring what most of us in the world are enduring. And the idea that we are all almost all of us living in some moment that is not now is of course, an idea that is repeated in many spiritual traditions, most famously Buddhism, right. And the Furthermore, the idea that a locked down, slows time makes it hard to track time makes us all simply be in the moment for for, for much of it, you know, he he like us, as has no immediate worry about his own ability to feed his family, right. He's concerned about how this how this will play out for him and his future and his livelihood. He does intellectual work and all of this, but he's not worried about being on the streets or are starving for him or his children or for his family. So those those concerns aside, once you deal with sort of that level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and learning how to be present with yourself, to take in the sensory information around you, is actually completely excruciating for many people. And it is not something that especially given the Ghost in the Machine, that is social media, which is where you started this. The most people by age adults seem to know how to do the to be comfortable, satisfied, being with themselves in the moment, without certainty about what will come. And this is something that we need to become able to at least try to be in that space.

**Bret** 54:06

Alright, several, several things that follow from that. One, I do think there's something very rich in the idea that a plague forces you into some moment that has contracted from both sides, right? Because the relevance of the way you used to live is not clear. And where you're headed is not clear. And so you are sort of forced into this very narrow slice. And it is very jarring, I think, for all of us. You know, I feel compelled to say, as terrible as this is, you and I are just because of the way we have chosen to prioritize things in our life. We're very well situated. Not for this not to drive us crazy. I think it's still driving us a little crazy, but no totally but we have birds. Yeah, we've got birds and lots of them and

**Heather** 54:59

but As a proxy for everything else that's here,

**Bret** 55:01

right, right. But on the one hand, this Ghost in the Machine, and the machine I'm talking about is not the internet, the machine I'm talking about is the natural process that human beings use to tune into each other's thinking in order to navigate novel circumstances like this very odd pandemic, right? That machine has a bug in it. And the bug is the internet. It's the platforms and their perspective, they're, frankly, absurd perspective that they understand well enough, what the borders of reasonable discussion are, that they get to intervene. And you know, it's troubling enough, when they do this in plain sight. And we know, for example, that they've tossed you know, MEGAN MURPHY off of Twitter, because she thinks men and women are two different things, right? That we can see. And we can, we can mock it enough that at least we retained that piece of sanity, right? Many of us get that men and women are different things. And that it would be absurd to banish somebody for saying so. But what we can't see are the subtle biases, right? Where they just put a little shackle around the ankle of some idea that they don't like and it doesn't matter. The problem is often they will do this because they're well intentioned. Now it's still naive to think that they know what to fact what ideas to liberate and amplify and what ideas to to slow down. But they will also do it when they have a conflict of interest. Because once they've built the mechanism that corrupts thinking in a direction that they think would be noble, then they have the tools to corrupt thinking in the direction that is lucrative and there is no process by which that is going to result in them doing only those things that they see are honorable that is that would be they will do both. And so to what extent are we out in the world trying to navigate this very confusing situation, ending up coughing on each other or shouting at somebody as if they're an animal to get them out of a supermarket? To what extent is this the consequence of the fact that our natural conscious process is corrupted by this economic process on the outside of it that has effects on our thinking that we can't begin to fathom?

**Heather** 57:19

I think you and I are in agreement on this and no we can't fully fathom it but I will say that I know for sure that when I have allowed myself to be free of this ghost these ghosts in this machine are these machines for you know it's it hasn't happened for more than a couple of weeks at a time in recent years back when we were doing field research my field site as you know because you were there for one of my field seasons with me was completely remote and this was before internet was was much you know this was late 90s but still going and living in a tent in the rain forest on a little island off the coast of Madagascar which itself had no single movie theater in it even though it's bigger than California. So really your view was showing in a waterfall spending days hiking the forest and marking and studying Prague's super remote and it brings you it just focuses you to this okay well this is the this is the research I'm doing we have to make rice in order to eat and we're you know, if it starts raining, we have to bring our clothes in under the under the tarp. Right and we are both

**Bret** 58:35

still traumatized. Every time we hear rain start both of us jump like what what is it? What do we have outside that needs to be immediately pulled under cover? Yeah,

**Heather** 58:44

exactly. And, you know, in more in since basically since we started evergreen, since we've had children, which happened very quickly, one after another. I've managed to do several week study abroad. And we did this final Level II study abroad, which still because we were to hop in and out of Quito, we would only have a week, really 10 days at the most without any connection to the internet and then back again. But even those 10 days is enough to remind you how different your brain looks when you're not constantly being dragged by forces that are actually economic. And we had this experience most recently in January of this year, which I cannot believe that was this year. But when we were actually back in the most remote spot and the Ecuador Amazon that that I've seen, it's extraordinary and we were at tiburtina for 12 days, which has no internet and it was glorious. It was but

**Bret** 59:50

men have various things to say one is when we used to go to Madagascar and I was only there for one field season but we went to three times. Yes four times. We used to tell Our families, you'll see us in three magnets. Yeah, you know? And they would say, can you please arrange to call us at some point in the middle? And we would say no, because it was so difficult to actually make a phone call off the island at that point that even you know, if we stood in line at the telephone office, we might wait an hour, and it might not work anyway, so we just wouldn't do it. However, the problem is that the Ghost in the Machine is growing more powerful, and more mysterious by the hour. And so even the difference? No, I remember, I used to love taking students to dry falls in eastern Washington. And at first, it was very hard to get cell service out there, which was great because all the students whether they liked it or not, were liberated from this corruption. And then it crept in

**Heather** 1:00:49

for a little while, you can only get cell service if you climbed on top of some difficult to climb rocks. So it's sort of enforced in forest a little bit of interesting physical risk taking to get yourself service that you want it so badly,

**Bret** 1:01:02

yes. And then very stupid risk taking because you're standing on top of some rock outcropping on a cell phone. And it's very easy to absent mindedly lose track of where you are, and that could be terrible, but it's never never happened ever happened, but it could. But you know, I will say, even though I'm almost embarrassed for Planet Earth to report the following thing, but our last trip to tiburtina completely broke our connection to the world as we knew that it would. That said, there is a canopy tower that sticks up from this, literally the most diverse habitat on are about as remote as you can get. There's a canopy tower 130 feet in the air, I think sticks up above the cap canopy. And employees of the field station could contact their families by climbing the tower. And you know, they had to have a particular cell phone carrier there's one antenna that was just barely in range. And you know, for them, I get it, they're staying in touch with their families, it makes total sense to me

**Heather** 1:02:02

is these are guys who are working I mean, they're being well treated by the Field Station, but they're working. What I think it's like it's something like three weeks on one week off, so they get to see their families one week a month. And it's you know, a many hour boat ride up the river to see them. It's not like they can just pop in. Yeah. So

**Bret** 1:02:21

but but and yet, the point is, you're not going to be safe from this menace to your thinking anywhere, right? And even if you can make yourself you know, you can with discipline, break your connection to it in order to figure out how you independently think in isolation from it. But the problem is, if civilization is being driven crazy by its connection, then how much good does it do you to be sane in the midst of this? spreading? insanity? Yep. All right.

1:02:54

Um,

**Bret** 1:02:56

I'd say there were a couple of things I wanted to discuss, but maybe we'll leave them for another time disabled. Yeah, I mean, I guess the one that's relevant here is I heard a friend pointed me to Joe Rogan's conversation with David Pakman. And in that conversation, they wrestled with the question of David's reporting that he was out on his bike or maybe running or maybe both, and probably not at the same time. But anyway, he was reporting how he's using his mask. And basically, he's ended up somewhere like you and I have where, you know, yes, masks

**Heather** 1:03:33

with him when he's outside. But he's not wearing it unless someone comes to our class. Yeah, we're

**Bret** 1:03:37

not when he's biking hard, or something like that. And Rogan is disbelieving of the evidence that actually this is difficult to transmit outdoors. And so his point is actually, I don't see any reason why droplets shouldn't be dangerous to you, if you're walking behind, if somebody runs by you, and they exhale some droplets, why shouldn't that be as dangerous as anything else? And I think that this is emblematic of exactly where we are, right? First of all, Rogan's instinct is exactly you're in my instance, this ought to be true. The fact that it is apparently not true isn't so surprising to us, because we've spent a lot of time thinking about complex systems and biology. And this kind of surprise is, you know, it's the norm, right? things that don't behave the way you expect them to behave. You know, you look at a tropical forest. And you think, look at all of this diversity in growth, this must be tremendously rich soil. Nope. incredibly poor soil in general. Right? Hmm. How does such poor soil give rise to such beautiful and aggressive diversity on top of it? Well, actually, like all paradoxes, it's not a real paradox. The forest is what it is, and it has sucked the nutrients out of the soil leaving it barren, right? The competitors are so strong that they've depleted the soil. That's the answer. But in any case, to Joe's point, this ought to be dangerous to us. Abdo. Apparently it isn't, if What if the data and the data comes from multiple sources Now, if the data is what we think it is, then it is apparently at the moment still very difficult to transmit outdoors, we ought to cherish that and protect it rather than disrupted by treating it carelessly. But I think watching Joe, wrestle with the complexity of this, Joe, you and I had a lot of experience with students. In various classes, Joe is like, the ultimate student, right? He's very hungry to understand things he's very broadly experienced, he's got nothing to prove. Right? Very good at thinking. Joe Rogan is becoming confused about COVID-19.

**Heather** 1:05:49

Why is he becoming confused?

**Bret** 1:05:51

I think he's becoming confused, because there is so much of this politics, and it is infused into the ghost in all of our machines. And it is making it impossible for people who in general do a very good job of thinking carefully to figure out what to pay attention to, and what to dismiss. It's doing it to all of us, even me included. So anyway, I just think there's a way in which Joe, obviously, in some sense, is the most important media voice in the world. His decision to move to Spotify is obviously not unrelated to this. In fact, if we were to take what alex jones reported about what Joe said to him about why he was leaving YouTube and going to Spotify, this is about the corruption and the danger of the power that Google holds over all of us, right. So this is in some sense of rejection of the Ghost in the Machine. And I must say, in that light, I'm hopeful that actually Joe is gonna accomplish what he's setting out to accomplish. I'm hopeful, and I think it's actually more plausible than it might seem. But that also leaves us with what to do today, dealing with this corruption of our thinking, watching, even those who in general, help us navigate the complex, failing to do a good job of it, because there's just too much pollution. That's the that's the amount of gravity that whatever force we're dealing with has to it. And you know, you and I have been arguing, the biggest danger to us is the politicization of this crisis. I think that is turning into a prophetic concern. And it's not too late, but it will be too late if we don't do something about it quickly. So especially given that this particular weird perspective, that the virus isn't as serious as we think and masks aren't necessary that that appears to be a largely American confusion. Let's take a step back and think about how to be good to each other, and how to reason through this together, and maybe we'll come out of it stronger. Okay, so we've reached the end of this portion of the program. We will return in about 15 minutes with a question and answer we will take your super chat questions. We will start with Super Chat questions from this first hour, we will get through as many as possible and then we will move to the Super Chat questions that come to us during the q&a. there anything else we need to say before we sign off for a few minutes?

**Heather** 1:08:25

Oh, one correction from last time with regard to I said that we had made a FOIA request a Freedom of Information Act request to evergreen and someone and I lost it probably in all the uploads and downloads of the episodes wrote in just to point out as you already knew, it wasn't it wouldn't have been for you, which is federal, it was a public records request. It's public records request. It's just a small but important legal distinction.

**Bret** 1:08:59

Good and actually as long as we're in that mindset, I'm not going to explain it now because we don't have time to do it. But something came across my desk that caused me to adjust my percentages with respect to the various possible origins of SARS Cove to time yeah and next time I will explain what it was it actually came from a viewer who contacted me alerted me to something I hadn't understood and it adjusted percentages not radically but it greatly elevated one of them and it reduced another and I think it's worth exploring it because the whole point of doing the model with percentages was that as new information changes your your expectations. You should go through the formal exercise of putting it on paper. Alright, wherever. Great, we will see you in 15 or so minutes. The link will be in the description.