Bret and Heather 62nd DarkHorse Podcast Livestream\_ Tyranny ...

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**SPEAKERS**

Bret, Heather

**Bret** 00:18

Hey folks welcome to the Dark Horse podcast live stream number is it 62

**Heather** 00:24

and a 62 wow

**Bret** 00:24

I'm amazed I got that right in light of where we are, things are moving at quite a pace in the world. And I must say in some ways this could be exactly the thing that the Dark Horse podcast leans well into you and I are two adults with a certain amount of expertise in the world and a certain amount of experience and we can talk things through and people seem to find that rewarding. On the other hand, it's very hard to know how to even process what's going on so I must admit I personally am feeling a bit discombobulated and off kilter even though at some level everything that is taking place not in its detail, but in its general in its general valence it has been predicted by us and others in numerous places, so I don't know exactly know why I'm so surprised. I think it has to do once again with the incredible speed, right? That is to say, even when you predicted some processes going to happen, you can be caught completely off guard by how quickly it unfolds. And there's something something important in that

**Heather** 01:33

indeed. I'd like to start though with some gratitude. Great and actually and and just point out where we're going today, although much, much of what we're going to be talking about today is exactly responsive to some of the main events that have happened this week, which puts you know, I think it's much more within your both wheelhouse and interest space and I was hoping to talk about sea stars this week. I don't think there will be time but perhaps in a later second Wait I got the connection. Okay, then you will you will give me a you know, my enthusiasm, my new renewed enthusiasm for sea stars as of this week, so shocking

**Bret** 02:16

revelation which you brought to me I this one, I didn't see coming right.

**Heather** 02:21

So so maybe we'll get there maybe we won't, but I want us to start with some words of gratitude. And and actually by talking by providing some words from the great Buddhist monk tick, not Han on fear and what its impact in the world are from his book of the same name fear from 2012 in which he is as usual prescient in the middle we're going to talk a whole lot about the lovely hypothesis and its entry into the mainstream conversation and of course the events at the Capitol on January 6 and the resulting events with regard to censorship in social media and it really tech space in general Apple Google the whole bet. But But first, we it is now January 9, it is now actually all parts of Christmas are now over. We have been informed we've been educated as to the the Epiphany ending oh boy have already forgotten is that actually the sixth? It might be the Epiphany, the the Christmas the 12 Days of Christmas, oh, I don't know this term. So it is over. But we because of delays and shipping due to COVID and overburdened shipping and such, we ended up receiving a number of things from from Darkhorse fans to our post office box and that that we just received this week and I and we wanted to say in response to your gratitude, thank you as well so we received many, many cards including people's Christmas cards that they were sending to their friends and family and they thought you know, why not send the notes and they're really wonderfully appreciate including not least the one that on the back is printed. Epstein didn't kill himself. We received that one today. Actually, that was festively printed. festively printed we Yeah, I I laughed out loud. That was good. I liked I appreciate that. We got cookies. And even though due to delays, they were they arrived rather a lot later than they were shipped. They were delicious. We received some wine we received and we have no idea who the wine is from exactly what I would love to know. Yeah. So if if that is in fact, one of y'all we'd love to know who that is because there's no indication

**Bret** 04:43

right? And I would say the wine was excellent. Not a great match with the cookies. You need a little rarely break. Yeah, but

**Heather** 04:53

yeah, although as we were drinking that we only drink one bottle of the wine. It was a French wine and upon putting it down for a while I picked back up my class and I said, I detect a little sugar cookie in in the flavor profile of the wine. So you should not be drinking the cookies with the wine. But sometimes you can find essence of cookie in the wine. Yeah, exactly. Even if no one has surreptitiously dipped their wine when they weren't looking. So yeah, that seems perhaps trivial cookies, wine, etc. But, but no, especially now when we see ourselves, our entire society, the world, and even within families, fracturing and splintering, and, you know, decoe, hearing in so many ways, it is ever more important to recognize the acts both large and small of others, that reveal our shared humanity and our appreciation for one another. So we really, we really appreciate that what we're doing here is being responded to with enthusiasm and gratitude. And in turn, we are grateful for you.

**Bret** 05:59

Yes, so I'm, I'm going to just wing a little addendum to that thread, you know, we are working once again without a net, because once again, she didn't show up for work. Never Never, she is not a hard worker, actually. But in any case, I would say there is something delightful about people, revealing their gratitude, I don't want to say this is just about gifts or anything, but it is so nice when people alert us that what we're doing is meaningful to them. Right? I mean, even just to know that a small number of people find it a significant fact in their week that it makes them feel better about the world more grounded, all of these things, is incredibly rewarding. And it is also fascinating and marvelous to see when people you know, put their creative energies in motion and generate art pieces, which go on to our walls, and, and other things. So

**Heather** 07:04

sorry, I should have mentioned this, that those things didn't happen to come in the last week or two. But we have received some amazing art from people and maybe at some point, we should perhaps, you know, photograph and share some of it, but really, truly wonderful wood carvings and some some sculptural pieces, really remarkable,

**Bret** 07:24

beautiful stuff. And I would say there's something in it, you know, I think this should be obvious, and probably the conscious part of it is, but there's something that's easily lost where human beings, because of the way the modern world works don't get an opportunity to be important to each other very easily, right, just not an opportunity that exists in people's lives. So people tend to become frankly, COVID. To make that even harder. It has made it even harder, although I've seen lots of people, you know, pioneer new ways of reaching out to so you know, it cuts both ways. But I think the thing is, you know, where we are hunter gatherers, or where we, you know, pastoralists, you know, carving living out of the, the earth or whatever the various, recent or more deeply ancestral ways of being that one could have found themselves and the, you know, I think the common experience would have been to be important to a small number of people in your town or in your tribe. Absolutely. And that there's something just so alienating about a style of life that, in fact, just doesn't offer that possibility. Because, you know, most of your time, you're preoccupied with earning a living by, you know, doing things that aren't important to you, because somebody else will pay you to do them. And

**Heather** 08:49

it may, in fact, you know, often are not important to the world or even bad for the world, but serve, you know, some small number of people's bottom line, profit motive of a few people as opposed to doing serving any greater good.

**Bret** 09:01

Yes, I'm reminded Actually, I find David graeber a mixed figure. He died this year.

**Heather** 09:09

I didn't know that. Yeah, he does. A few words about who he is.

**Bret** 09:13

So he actually was very particular about how he was described. I think what he said was something like anarchism is not something you are something you do, and so he didn't like being called an anarchist. He clearly had those leanings. And I must say, I don't share those leanings with him, though, you know, as nr Kisco. He was a pretty sophisticated thinker. He was, I would say, you know, centuries this is, you know, people do not like it when you're honest about the dead but he was atrocious when it came to evolutionary analysis. He just got it really, really wrong. On the other hand, his article bullshit Jobs was really quite spectacular, and it made the point that what most people do, can I really be explained in even classical economic terms, right? That basically we have a society that preoccupies people on nonsense. It's so ephemeral, it's hard to imagine why it's even being done.

**Heather** 10:12

So if I were listening to this, and I never heard of him before, some of the words I'd like to hear to inform you of who he has, before you say more about him is that he was, I believe, a professor of anthropology. And that the work by which I came to know about him was this massive book called debt. And in fact, I looked it up its debt, the subject as subtitle is the first 5000 years. Yeah, from 10 years ago. Yep. So in sort of an economic anthropology, of, of the history of what it is to exchange for humans.

**Bret** 10:46

So he was he was a professor, and he was also a founder of the occupy movement. So anyway, all of these things paint a kind of a picture. But something about the bullshit jobs article, which was quite a short to the point piece, I'm sure it's easily find a ball, you know, speaks to the fact that there's just something about the way this amazing machine like thing that we call civilization sidelines, our humanity and sets us about other things. And you know, at some level, you may not have a lot of choice about whether or not you're employed as a cog. But it certainly makes sense to notice that that's happening to you, and maybe to take up arms against it.

**Heather** 11:28

Yeah, and the, the legitimate feelings of frustration and futility, which can manifest in illegitimate ways. We've been seeing from the so called left all summer and fall. And on Wednesday, in the capital we saw from, you know, maybe it's the actual right, maybe the so called right. And it's, it's emerging from a similar human place. And by saying that I'm not in any way justifying the behavior of the riders on either side. But the there's legitimate sense of futility and lack of connection. Because Because we are living such disconnected anonymous lives,

**Bret** 12:08

which raises a couple of things that I should probably mentioned somewhere in here. I was on trigger pod trigonometry, this week, talking about the events at the Capitol.

**Heather** 12:21

They live streamed with you on Thursday, the day after the events, right? Yep.

**Bret** 12:25

It has been pretty widely circulated. And anyway, we talked a bit about the fact you know, in some sense, one place that one should stand to understand what's going on, is that there is massive frustration around some vague sense that something is way off that the system is not functional. And many of us, including me, certainly believe that the system is rigged. I believe that it is rigged in many ways that are legal, and that that's not a defensive of those things, is certainly sometimes rigged in ways that are illegal, that we get hints of, which of course, means that there is no end of false conspiracy allegations. And it's very difficult to sort between which ones are valid and which ones aren't valid, which, of course, requires a skill set that at some point we should talk about. And we have talked about, you know, we've talked about the fact that you know, the word theory and the more I think about it, the abuse of the word theory is at the heart of so many of our dysfunctions that really as annoying as it is to have, you know, these semantic concerns brought to the fore in the midst of a crisis. In this particular case, if we were careful about if we just simply agreed across the board, hey, theory has a definition hypothesis has a definition. And we are all obligated to just sort of stick to them and not blur that distinction. Because it's a really important one, we would be way ahead in so many different places from I mean, I

**Heather** 14:01

agree with your point about the abuse of the word, but I don't think that would help right now. I don't I don't think that's fundamental enough to the problem. To You know, I don't think solving the language problem would address any serious issues at the moment.

**Bret** 14:15

Well, I think it would in the sense that to the extent that one wants to convince you of something and cause you to act, and they invoke the term theory, because it carries power, right? To the extent that somebody making a analogous argument uses the term hypothesis, they've already told you what rules they've signed up for. When somebody says they're involved in critical theory. I don't know what rules they've

**Heather** 14:43

signed. I don't I don't think this is where we want to spend time today, really, but I will say that pretty much anyone hearing the word hypothesis does have the sense of what it means. But that theory has been so abused that you know, you hear people say, Oh, well that's just my theory. That's you know, and so you know, it means everything and without The counterpoint hypothesis, I don't think it actually carries the kind of weight that you think it does. And I'm not saying that that hasn't hindered the conversation, when, you know, conspiracy theory is the word of the day as opposed to conspiracy hypothesis, but I don't think resolving that actually helps us much. But I think we should move

**Bret** 15:18

Hold on, I just want to make the point that we are dealing, you know, in so many different realms with the downstream consequences of this, right, where we have, you know, string theory effectively owns modern physics. And the question is, it is jumping, it is not even a hypothesis in the sense that we don't have any predictions from and so to the extent that it is effectively taken over a field. And the point is, it has taken over a field from a very weak position.

**Heather** 15:49

You're not, you're not telling me anything I don't agree with I we disagree about whether or not this is the important conversation to be having right now. I just don't think it is all right,

**Bret** 15:57

I will continue to fight this quick.

**Heather** 16:02

You can beat them, I just don't think that drum is going to rise to the top of the importance ladder. Alright, it's not I think I didn't make any sense that didn't work.

**Bret** 16:12

It worked well enough. I mean, for you know, for live internet discourse, I suppose

**Heather** 16:18

you're gonna say something about David graeber, I think or maybe well, I

**Bret** 16:21

was gonna say that this was really a riff on your, your made about gratitude, which is that many people have, have arrived at the conclusion that there's something wrong with human interaction. And one thing that seems to be wrong is that our ability to find ways to be important to each other is just severely curtailed. And, you know, you and I are lucky in the sense that the modern era has delivered us tools to be important to a lot more people than we would ever meet under normal circumstances. That's pretty cool, right? But the point is, it's also just a weird and very arbitrary concentration of A kind of value where, you know, we can tap into reaching a lot of people, whereas most people have a hard time reaching anyone just because of the economic realities of modernity. So anyway, thank you for alerting us to the fact that we are doing something positive in your lives. And the gifts are very, very meaningful. And we do spend time thinking about each of them. Yeah. And sharing them with our children who one of our children is obviously hard at work and the other worm clicking away making this podcast happen. That's right. All right. So there's a question about where we should go first. And I think the first place to go is or second place to go. is to talk about the progress with the lab leak hypothesis that occurred in the last week.

**Heather** 18:00

Yeah. Well, my notes suggest in which a conspiracy hypothesis is accepted by the mainstream with no acknowledgement that that is what has happened. And yes, this was published in the New York in New York Magazine on why is there no date? Firstly, oh, January 4 2021. So yeah, in within the last week of

**Bret** 18:23

January 4, so roughly a lifetime ago, by

**Heather** 18:27

Nicholson Baker called the lovely hypothesis. Yes. And it's quite good. I mean, maybe it's action. Put it up? Yeah,

**Bret** 18:34

I think he should I send him a link to exactly want to, it's also

**Heather** 18:37

on my screen, if you want to show it there.

**Bret** 18:38

Okay. So this article is very, very well written. And it covers a lot of the people that I hold in high esteem, who have been both courageous in discussing the lab leak hypothesis, including Yuri Dagon, who was on the Dark Horse podcast. And some others who I've become aware of who have bucked the academic trend and talked about this. And what it does is it takes the lab leak hypothesis, and it legitimize it so that now anybody can discuss it. And the reason that this is so important, is that we have this period, between which it was obvious that there was something to discuss, and the mainstream has effectively been forced to admit that and that period is going to be lost to history. I have a feeling but its significance is hard to overstate. And

**Heather** 19:41

I mean, I am flabbergasted that this is a point that needs to be made. But when you say there's a period during which, between which was obvious that there was something to be discussed, and now it's entered the mainstream and so we're sort of allowed to discuss it and this is a period that lasted well, more than half a year because we be Again talking about on this podcast in April of 2020. What you said is exactly right. But this nuance, which is not really No, that's what we missed by some people, it is obvious that there was something to be discussed. What you have said is not it is obvious that it is true. This is in fact, your distinction between theory and hypothesis, right? That the idea that it is a possibility that we should be considering on the table, as opposed to we've got an idea that is true. It's that this is a, you know, this there was a an animal in the market in Wu Han. And that's what that's the origin of this virus. That is the only thing we're allowed to consider. At the point back in April, May, June, etc, of last year, that you had scientists, no less credential scientists working as scientists earning their pay as scientists who said there was one and only one possible explanation for where this virus came from. And if you think anything else is irresponsible, that right there is anti scientific, because what scientists do is they observe something and they say, what are all the possible explanations for this thing, and lab leak was obviously a possibility from the very beginning. And by saying it was obviously a possibility is not saying it was obviously true, saying it was obviously a possibility.

**Bret** 21:18

So it was obviously a possibility. And interestingly, you can see, it was captured in my Twitter feed exactly how early It was obvious that it was a possibility. And so the percentage likelihood that it was the explanation for for the pandemic has changed for me, and presumably for everybody checking in with that idea. But Zach, you want to show the screenshot of my Twitter feed from February 4. screenshot of my Twitter feed from February 4 seems really specific. So there are two screenshots here. Boy, can you put that on a bigger screen Zack?

**Bret** 22:14

Okay, so I will just start telling you what's here, and okay. So let us set the stage here for a second. Heather. You and I were in the Amazon.

**Heather** 22:28

February 4 2020. February, like less than a week after we got back from Ecuador.

**Bret** 22:33

I think I was hoping you'd know the exact date offhand. Maybe you don't budge date. Why that we left the Amazon the data which we went from being completely without communication in the Yasuni in Ecuador, to returning I mean cell phone reception again becomes possible at the military checkpoint. When you are transitioning back to the town, affectionately known as coca, that's gonna have been January 24. January 24. Okay, and then we came back to the to the US on January 28. So the fact of the Coronavirus, what was then called novel Coronavirus, was unknown to us while we were in the Amazon, we emerged and at while we were in otavalo. In the Andes in the Andes, decompressing and getting ready to return home

**Heather** 23:31

literally decompressing given the lower air pressure up there.

**Bret** 23:34

Wow. Yes, we were decompressing in the Andes, looking at hummingbirds and all sorts of other stuff. But in any case, we emerged from the Amazon, the world had begun to grapple with the idea of a novel Coronavirus. And, you know, if you think back to where you as a listener were to the novel Coronavirus at that point, you know, there have been a number of these emergent viruses, you know, SARS and MERS and bird flu and things like this. And you know, so there's always this question about Oh, no, there's this virus. It's been spotted. What's going to happen? Is it going to take over the world is it going to burn itself out? And so it's very hard to tell at the point that we caught wind of the novel Coronavirus how bad it was going to be? There was a nature paper

**Heather** 24:22

and that what you're referencing here and what's on screen here?

**Bret** 24:24

Yes, there was a nature paper that outlined the the wet market hypothesis and the fact that it had been that the virus had come from bats. And I thought as a bat researcher, I thought it made sense for me to look at this paper. I'm always a little bit troubled when diseases are associated with bats because people don't know how to calibrate it. There's so many species of bats and yes, bats do vector A lot of diseases because they fly and therefore they're good vectors. But you know, people don't understand that, you know, the little

**Heather** 24:56

brown bat in your backyard if you're listening to this in the United States, is not that During these diseases,

**Bret** 25:01

right? It's not likely to and it's not likely to carry rabies either though that's a possibility possibility.

**Heather** 25:06

But unlikely unlikely. But

**Bret** 25:07

in any case, the The fact is the viruses are the enemy of the bats too. So in some sense, we're on the same side and I don't like to see bats demonized, but anyway, I thought I would look at the paper, I would read it, it said, you know, bat borne Coronavirus, blue on seafood market. And I just thought I would weigh in and say, I've looked at it, it makes sense to me. And I did. And that was at 1030 in the morning of February 4. And I immediately got pushback from followers, who said, Oh, so it's just a coincidence that there's a bio safety level for laboratory studying back coronaviruses in Wuhan, where the drivers emerged, right?

**Heather** 25:54

I didn't affect about what you were previously unaware, completely.

**Bret** 25:57

Sure. And I thought, that's a hell of a coincidence. There's probably something about the story, I don't know at least I need to understand why that coincidence is not stunning, right? And that piece

**Heather** 26:11

of information, puts this hypothesis on the table as something that obviously needs to be considered,

**Bret** 26:17

obviously needs to be considered. And as Yuri de Dagon pointed out, when I talked to him and as I thought, one of the things you need to know, you know, I wasn't really deeply thinking about what a bio safety level four laboratory was. And I had no idea how many of them there were, you know, if there were 1000 such laboratories, and the fact that there's one in Wuhan may not be significant. It's just a coincidence. You know, if there's one and it happens to be in Wuhan, it's a spectacular coincidence and it happens. There are a handful, but that one of the two primary ones studying Coronavirus, bat borne Coronavirus is in Wu Han is certainly a stunning fact. And many, many of us who are on the heterodox side of this question have had this exact same experience, which is, as soon as you realize that Wu Han is the location of such a lab that it was studying exactly these viruses and it is the first place that humanity becomes aware of this virus, you know that there if you're an honest broker, you know that there's something that has to be considered.

**Heather** 27:19

Yeah. So this, this purpose articles magazine article that's out this week in the New York Magazine, cites a piece from 2012 as published in the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, which I would love to read just the first two paragraphs from because it's directly relevant for so 2000 sure if you want to it's on my screen. It's called the unacceptable risks of a manmade pandemic by Lynn Klotz and Edward Sylvester. For those of you looking I don't know why the first paragraph is partially replicated. So I'm reading the first two paragraphs even though it looks like I just skipped one. Now the world attention finally has been focused on the potentially human contagious h5 and one Asian bird flu virus. Remember, this is written in 2012. The international research community should take steps to deal with three other potential pandemic pathogens to or among history's nightmares, smallpox, which killed or maimed millions of people over centuries that ravaged the world, and the resurrected 1918 pandemic flu virus, which may have killed 50 million people worldwide over just two years. The third is severe acute respiratory syndrome, or SARS, a newcomer that proved how lethal it could be in one natural outbreak during 2002 and 2003. When it killed 9.6% of those infected if fatality rate almost four times higher than the 1918 flus these potential pandemic pathogens or ppps. pose a danger that goes well beyond the potential of other hazardous microbes that have made the news that ppps are all extremely deadly, highly contagious, or potentially highly contagious and humans and not currently present in human populations, meaning it would be a disaster to reintroduce them into the population. Of the three smallpox research it only two facilities in the world by international agreement poses the smallest threat of laboratory escape. At Russia's vector and the US Centers for Disease Control. Lab workers have been vaccinated to prevent infections themselves it might spread to others outside the lab. In stark contrast to the strict controls on smallpox research, whoever SARS, the 1918 flu virus and potentially human contagious h5 and one bird flu are studied in laboratories throughout the world using less than the highest bio containment known as biosafety level four or BSL four and there was no approved and stockpiled vaccine for any of them.

**Bret** 29:31

So, yes, the there is awareness of the hazard which in fact resulted in an intense effort to study about Corona viruses. And there has also been a competing awareness of the danger of studying them and in particular of studying using techniques called gain of function research where viruses are enhanced to see what they will be like when they become truly infectious, which and the iPod Since the lab leak hypothesis, I think for all of us who have tracted carefully is not. There is a version of it in which the virus simply ends up in a laboratory and unmodified escapes from the laboratory into the world. That's a very unlikely to be true, because the virus that would have ended up in that laboratory would not have been highly transmissible between people. And if there's one thing you can say, about SARS, COBie two, it's that it is highly transmissible between humans, right? It's a trick. It's very, very good at him. So the question is, where did that happen?

**Heather** 30:30

And while possible, the idea of this virus happened to be in a lab, it was unmodified, is less parsimonious than this virus was out and in the wild and transmitted without having an intermediate step in a lab,

**Bret** 30:42

right? Well, there one would expect an evolutionary period in which the virus either picked up a skill through recombination with some other viruses,

**Heather** 30:53

so time to evolve without human artificial selection,

**Bret** 30:56

right? So you there's a number of things you would expect, and we have evidence for exactly none of them, right? It doesn't have a long period of time in which it learned to go from person to person, it doesn't have you know, many people have hypothesized things like pangolins, and other intermediaries. But there's no evidence that this actually occurred. So anyway, there's there's a whole lot of mystery, but what I wanted to point out about these screenshots is that they actually happen to document a thought process and give it a timestamp. So February 4 1030. I tweet I have looked at the nature paper cited here and the evidence that the novel Coronavirus came from bats, possibly rhinolophus affinis or another species Sorry, it's at a distance it's hard for me to read it or another species that shares rousse with it is fairly compelling. How it jumped to humans is less clear, but what markets are likely. Okay, that was 1030. By my next tweet, which was 1129. I said several followers have pointed to a competing hypothesis and the nature paper does not allow us to distinguish between the two, the virus likely comes from bats. That much is true. The bushmeat trade is dangerous, also true. Those things may well be unrelated in this case. Now my reference to the bushmeat trade is obliquely about HIV, which the best explanation for how HIV ended up in humans is basically chimp butchery that resulted in the virus transmitting to a human. So in any case, that's less than an hour by one minute. Right? The between your to my between my two tweets. The fact of the BSL four lab in Wuhan is sufficient to raise the skepticism of an honest broker thinking in a scientific mode, it didn't mean that it was the probable answer there. Now, the irony is, as the lab leak hypothesis has been defended by courageous people willing to take the risk of being dismissed as conspiracy theorists or Trump loyalists, or whatever it is that the accusations have been, as that hypothesis has, you know, clawed its way into grudging acknowledgement by the mainstream, that it is something that reasonable people might consider. The explanations that were offered as official have fallen, right, everybody, including China acknowledges the wet market had nothing to do with that there weren't bats for sale there. So the point is, the other hypotheses have crumbled, even as this one has gained steam right? Now. A person could have a wild conspiracy theorist That is to say somebody who is not exerting any sort of analytical discipline could have landed on the right answer here. And they would turn out to have been, I won't say, right, because we still don't know that the lab leak is what happened, but would turn out to be in this credible position almost by accident, right? A person who was methodical and careful and just simply following the logic and the evidence where it led would have ended up here too. So you can't really distinguish those two things. But over time, one of these hypotheses has gained ground because it is impossible to refute so far, and the circumstantial evidence is very strong. There's no direct evidence, but the circumstantial evidence is incredibly strong.

**Heather** 34:31

As we iteratively failed to falsify or falsify a hypothesis, it looks ever more likely to be an accurate representation of underlying reality,

**Bret** 34:39

right? And what's more, if it turns out lab leak is not the explanation. All of the things that we will have learned in the attempt to falsify that hypothesis are now basically a description of what a better hypothesis would have to explain in order to take the lead. And so people All remember back in would have been June or July. I said that one of the ways to deal with this stuff responsibly is to rank to give a percentage chance that you think some possibility if you have competing hypotheses, what you think the percentage chances and I made a little flowchart and I went through all of the things that I could think of that could possibly explain where this virus had come from. And I ranked lab league as very high something

**Heather** 35:28

I think this was far there. I think this may, frankly, may have

**Bret** 35:31

been anyway, may have been made. But in any case, there's a way to do this. And there's a way to do it responsibly. And the amazing thing is when you do it responsibly even when you have you know a credential, that means that somebody has agreed that you have the toolkit with which to do such a thing, even then you face these amazing appalling accusations of being a conspiracy theorist, right? being irresponsible spreading false information. You know, I mean, even Peter Dasha, who it turns out was central to the funding pipeline that resulted in the money that allowed this Coronavirus to be or these Coronavirus has to be studied in the Wu Han Han lab, this guy with this incredible conflict of interest, right? He was leveling accusations of conspiracy theorist against anybody including us for for talking about this stuff. So the point here is two things. And

**Heather** 36:29

as usual, you know, follow the actual conflict. It's easy to accuse people of having, you know, having secret financial connections, and some people presumably do or being grifters or whatever. But when there's a known conflict of interest by someone who is accusing other people of spreading information for which there was no support, but you can actually point to the support or the failure to falsify, well, then the conflict of interest speaks really loudly.

**Bret** 36:56

Yes, the conflict of interest is deafening at some level. And in Peter datrix case, it's just amazing how far he has gone to ridicule and erode the credibility of anybody who even raised this possibility in public, but so this comes up here for two reasons. One, this is the week in which this hypothesis has become mainstream. And suddenly you should expect a very different level of conversation about it. Because effectively people have been signaled that it is now safe to acknowledge the obvious, right? safe to acknowledge the obvious now, how many topics do we face? This kind of secure? Why is it ever unsafe to acknowledge the obvious ever?

**Heather** 37:41

Gosh, I just happen this image of someone like peering out from a storm cellar door, is it safe to acknowledge the obvious,

**Bret** 37:47

right? Is it safe to acknowledge the obvious Is it is it safe, you know, to acknowledge that men and women are different phenomena? You know, well, we'll get back to you. Right, not all that safe at the moment. Maybe we'll get there. But the question, really, and the interesting thing is is just happenstance that this arises in the same week as the insurrection at the Capitol. And if need be, I will defend that word in a moment here, but the insurrection of the Capitol and what may be much more important, which is the downstream at least narrative consequences. So things have been moving incredibly fast in the last day. And ostensibly that is the result of the the invasion of the Capitol Building. Some of it can't possibly be I, frankly, didn't have enough time in becoming aware of the fact of a new anti terrorism bill that is ostensibly the result of or responsive to the events at the Capitol. You know, I wasn't able to look at it, but this can't possibly be responsive, it has to have been ready to go in large measure. And

**Heather** 39:03

then some giant many, many, many page bill that was that someone is arguing was created in response. Yeah, it happened on Wednesday. So I don't know anything about this. Well, the number

**Bret** 39:14

I've seen was something like 20,000 pages now that could just be rumor. I'd like somebody to validate that I went looking for it and time ran out on me before the livestream, but nonetheless, yes, there does appear to have been a lot of stuff ready to go. And then the events of the capital seem to have created pretext for it to be unleashed. And what I so i what i want our listeners to do, is to keep what has happened with the lab leak hypothesis. And then what is you know, the latest chapter is it has gone mainstream, I want them to keep that in mind as they try to grapple with what is taking place. Ostensibly, as a result of an egregious breach at the Capitol Building. All right, so all right how to put this in context. So what has happened just for the sake of catching people up, there was a rally encouraged by the president at the Capitol. Now this rally was apparently much larger than most people understand the number of people who entered the Capitol Building was relatively small, the number of people who were president present in this rally was quite huge. And we are in the awkward position. We have been working, in fact, overnight, trying to get processed and ready for release an interview I did yesterday with Jeremy Lee Quinn, who people will remember when I interviewed before, Jeremy Lee Quinn happened to have been in Washington at that rally as a journalist, and actually went into the Capitol and witnessed what took place firsthand. And what he has to say, is quite shocking, and quite a good corrective to the narrative that that is circulating.

**Heather** 41:12

So that very long conversation that you had with an eyewitness journalist to the scene should be up both on YouTube and as a podcast. momentarily. Frankly,

41:23

YouTube is telling me that video processing is taking longer than expected.

**Bret** 41:26

So YouTube is telling us that video processing is taking longer than expected. I don't know what to make of it, probably video processing is just taking longer than expected. But in any case, please do take a look at that interview, I think you'll find it fascinating. And I think you'll find it very hard to dismiss as a resident in some part of the political spectrum. The fact is, Jeremy Lee Quinn is a a progressive lefty self described pacifist anarchist, I'm a person of the what I would call the intellectual left. And here we are, you know, discussing people who were decidedly on the right, who breached the Capitol for many different reasons. You know, it was not one of the things we talked about is that it was not a coherent event that people had, you know, there were people there, who were engaged in what they thought was a coup. And there were people there trying to prevent what they thought was a coup, right. And they were somehow in the same, the same protest. So it's a you know, it's an it's an event that really requires people to think very carefully about, about what its nature was,

**Heather** 42:40

and indecipherable from one another in photographs, presumably.

**Bret** 42:43

Right. And in fact, you know, I do think there's, I haven't been able to put my finger on exactly how to think about it or phrase it but there's some interesting Yin Yang, you know, the anarchists, the an Tifa Black Bloc, anarchists that we have seen rioting all summer, make an effort to de individuated. And they, you know, they become the Black Bloc, right? And this is about not displaying their identity. Now, if you pay close attention, it's clear that to them, they do have identities and you know, so they still can earn credit with each other. But from the point of view of the outsiders, it's just a bunch of people wearing so much black that you can't deduce who they are. Whereas in the insurrection at the Capitol, you know, you have a dude in a Viking helmets. I mean, yeah, it's, it's so there was a whole lot of it's basically a much more libertarian perspective, and the fact that everybody, you know, I was not aware that in the insurrection there were, you know, grandmothers, Trump's supporting grandmothers who entered the Capitol and didn't know that. So you know, you've got dudes and Viking helmets, you've got grandmothers, you got people carrying the Confederate flag. You know, it's it's not a clear message. It's it's a bunch of different frustration. But at some level I

**Heather** 44:13

Well, it's not, it's not coherent. And you know, in this way, I think there is something in many ways there is something analogous to the protests, which reliably became riots that were taking place in Portland almost every night for well over half a year, and in other cities as well, with some less regularity in that. There are, you know, and the treatment obviously, from the media of these, these two sets of events is wildly wildly different. But in both cases, it is not a single uniform group. And so just as people on the right, decrying every single person who went out into the streets to support Black Lives Matter, were wrong to do so because this was not a single unit uniform force and Not by far the vast majority of people who were protesting on the streets, in in Portland, for instance and elsewhere, did not become riders, but a reliable portion of people almost every night did. And it sounds like I don't know what the ratios are, we may never know. But you know, just as there was some rally, that that included a wide variety of people, most of whom had never had no intention of and would not have gotten wrapped up into what you're calling an insurrection, siege on the capital. But that doesn't mean that some small proportion of people didn't do that. And in both cases, the rioting whether or not it's on a federal building in downtown Portland, or the actual Capitol building in Washington, DC, is totally unacceptable.

**Bret** 45:47

Oh, completely unacceptable. Now, one does have to deal with. And I talked about this on the trigonometry podcast, one does have to deal with the fact that the United States was born in an insurrection. And so there is an acknowledgment in our, you know, our foundational principles that there are there are events that call for something well beyond civil disobedience.

**Heather** 46:15

In fact, can we just show very quickly here, Zach, my screen, Wall Street Journal op ed from three days ago, actually from a former Princeton fellow as well and zubia, called the founders guide to knock down drag out fighting. The sub title. The sub headline here being the ratification debates of 1787 88 are colored by quote, patriotic enthusiasms verging on violent chaos. Again, not a justification, just an historical correction of sorts, that are our rosy image of history, as if the US was born, you know, sort of Aphrodite, like on the half shell, and everyone was thrilled with that is certainly not true.

**Bret** 46:56

Yeah, certainly certainly not true. But, you know, so I will say this whole conversation takes place with a certain amount of, you know, I'm tempted to say trepidation, but let's just call it fear, there's a certain amount of fear that what is taking place on the major platforms is coming for us, and that the important points that we are trying to make will not only be lost, but that are attempting to make them may hasten, what will likely come for us, not for the first time. So we will come back to this but but in any case, I want to, I want to somehow make this point, and to the extent that dark horse might disappear from this platform, I want you to remember that I made it. Okay. And the point is, you have a lot of people responding to a garbagey understanding of what is taking place, right? You have the queue anon. Right? Right, which has a misunderstanding about where we are not that there, I don't know almost anything about the detail of the content of q&a. But it's an overly packaged view of what has gone wrong, it is filled a vacuum of information about what really runs society. This is, again, the counterpart of the confused understanding over on the BLM and Tifa, Black Bloc left, right, which has the sense that our civilization is so evil, and so far above others with respect to how much harm it has done, that the only response to it is to tear down at structures, right, that that cannot possibly make things worse, and will inevitably make things better. It has an equally confused understanding of where we are. And so you cannot have a society in which every individual gets to decide for themself, when you have reached a moment that you are obligated to rebel against the structures and tear them down. Right? You can't have everybody waking up each morning and deciding whether they're in a unabomber mood or not. Right. So to the extent that the founders of the country, rebelled against a tyrannical governance structure, they were very clear headed on why they were doing it, and they were united and it was clearly justified. And what we have here is a small insurrection into the capital. That is somehow the fringe I mean, it's almost physically the fringe of this much larger protest that was at the Capitol, which is itself the fringe of the conservative movement, right? So anyway, you've got these things. It's like a physical gradient and you've got the people who are you know, Wearing the Viking helmets and carrying the Confederate flags breaching the Capitol. That's obviously completely unacceptable. And it is an insurrection even according to many of them, right? You'll see this in in what they say into cameras. However, I think it is also incumbent on us to recognize there are some very I know nothing about the improvised explosive devices that we're, we are told were found at the Capitol, I did see an image of somebody who appeared to be a protester, who had zip ties of the kind you would use to bind somebody's hands. These are very troubling facts as are the Confederate flag, the camp Auschwitz, t shirt, you know, these are hallmarks of something completely out of control. On the other hand, completely unhinged. On the other hand, what I didn't see, these are right wingers.

**Bret** 51:09

Were any of them armed? I assume they must have been. But one did not see a lot of firearms in the circumstance. So what you have is an insurrection a an egregious violation of the law, one that is not justified by our circumstances, but done in a way that is clearly intended to be in some sense, symbolic, right? So I'm not justifying it. But what I'm saying is that a, an honest broker would have to parse all of this nuance, and that, unfortunately, what we are getting this idea that we can decide what, who's right enough to listen to, that we can take anybody who is engaging, any idea that has been formally dismissed and tossed them off platforms and things, is going to result in the worsening of the problem that caused the writing this summer. And the worsening of the problem that caused the breach of the Capitol, which is people don't have good information to go on. Why don't they have good information to go on lots of different reasons, including mundane algorithm stuff. But But the point is, this is what happens in the vacuum of analysis is you get this kind of confusion, you get q&a and confusion on the one side and an Tifa confusion on the other side. And if you want this not to characterize the way we are going forward, the thing to do is not to try to police speech online, that's a perfectly insane response to this is going to make it worse, the right thing to do is to let those of us who know how to engage these difficult questions responsibly, do it. Well, we make errors, of course, but that's the nature of civilization.

**Heather** 52:53

So may I speak a little bit to someone else, who we know online, who I think is engaging these things responsibly. And I don't always agree with her. But I would just want to share some of one of Caitlin johnstones most recent pieces here. Zach, just briefly share. So this is an independent journalist who publishes on medium, and she's done several pieces in the last several days, this one called the boot is coming down hard and fast. So excuse me, if I may have my screen back, Zachary. Thank you. the very final paragraph of what she's written here is the correct response to a huge section of the citizenry. doubting an electoral system that we've known for years is garbage would have been more transparency, not shoving the process through and silencing people who voiced doubts and making that entire faction more paranoid and crazy. This is in a piece which she begins by pointing out that Biden was in fact, the original framer of what would become the Patriot Act. And in alongside that fact, she provides us Caitlin Johnstone, the journalist who's written this piece provides us a clip from an appearance on Morning Joe, with the CIA, CIA analyst and former times now house representative Alyssa Slotkin who is informing us that the real battle against terrorism is now inside America's border. She says, quote, the post 911 era is over the single greatest national security threat right now is our internal division, the threat of domestic terrorism, the polarization that threatens our democracy. If we don't reconnect our to America's the threats will not have to come from the outside. And one, I find, excuse me. totally appropriate response to this is from a woman named Whitney Webb. I don't know her, who quote tweet Slotkin. Again, the current house representative, who was a CIA analyst. Web says before Congress, Alyssa worked for the CIA and the Pentagon and helped destabilize the Middle East during the bush and obama era. administration's what she says here is essentially an open announcement that the US has moved from the war on foreign terror to the war on domestic terror. This is terrifying. And we you know, we should be considering that, you know, as you I don't I have not seen this this bill that you have referenced, I don't know anything about it. That has apparently been produced in record time. Right. But it is likely to be something like back in the mid 90s, Biden produced something apparently right before actually the Oklahoma bombing, produce something that was, you know, put up there taken down sort of disappeared, and then repurposed effectively as the Patriot Act after 911. Where did the bill that is being trotted out right now start and by whom? And to what purpose? Hopefully we come to know the answer to that. One more thing about this, though, I'm sure you have a lot to say. Returning to Representative slatkin's claim of two Americas. I think this is actually a further divisive and dangerous formulation. And it's it's it's old, right that we know where this two party system, there's red and blue, there's Republicans and Democrats, but I at least see no evidence of their being to America's I see a much much, much more fractured, fractured state. And at the very least we have three, you know, at the very least, because when when Trump ascended there were many in the republican party who said No way No, how am I never Trump or I'm not going there. And similarly, as the democrats have become woken intersectional list and embraced, frankly, the the riots on the streets of America and

**Heather** 56:45

and, you know, other nonsense. There are many of us on the left who have said, That's not my left, I still consider myself of the left, but not that way. And so, you know, we have talked often about finding much common cause and many common values, but disagreeing about the current state of where we're at. With regard to reasonable people on the right, there are a lot of recent people on the left, who disavow the sort of anti fog Black Bloc stuff, and there are many reasonable people on the right, who disavow Beowulf, you know, in the Capitol, and that makes at least three Americans and formulating this as to America's if set effectively. 100% says that if I start to critique and Tifa, anyone else gets to say, well, then you're in the America that embraces Trump. And if someone on the right says, I am criticizing Trump, then they are therefore in the antiva camp. No, it's not America is not an Tifa versus Trump. No way. No, how that's not the America we live in. And if it is, we're doomed. But that's that's not what we see. You know, there there are there are, I still believe a majority, and I hope it's a strong majority of people who are actually in the vast middle, identified as left or right, different views on how to solve the problems we have fine, but not antiva. Not insurrectionist at the Capitol, something far more interested in actually collaborating and coming together as a country.

**Bret** 58:18

All right there the two important points that we have to cover in reference to what you're describing, right, so there are two Americas and there aren't and how to describe this. So we know and we have frequently talked about the hidden tribes report that says there's 67% of us that are in broad agreement about essentially nuanced and non extreme versions of the answers to all of the problems that are supposed to divide us. irreconcilably, irreconcilably that is clearly true. And for you and me, we have had the gift of our you know, our the story that brought us to public attention has put us in contact with so many people on the center, right, that we know for sure because we have met them hundreds and hundreds of people, right, who we are supposed to be on the other side of an unbridgeable gap. And it turns out actually, we are in broad agreement and we have to search for things that we actually have substantial disagreement over so that thing is real. What is also real, is that narratively speaking, it's almost like I'm imagining there's some substance that you can drop into a roomful of people who are in that vast exhausted middle described by the hidden tribes, and you drop that thing in, and they simply polarize to other sides, because narratively speaking, we are two different Americas, right? Yeah, they're not the same place. And so the fact of having an exemption from you know, we can cry No Man's Land and not get shot at In fact, we're more frequently shot out from our home side than from the other side, which often embraces us with, you know, curiosity if, you know not a little bit of perplexity, but but whatever, right? Being able to transition across this boundary tells you Oh, yeah, that that agreement is real. But the other thing there are humans on the other side, there are humans. Yes. In fact, there are humans everywhere. Most of the people on the other side are every bit as recognizable. And yes, they're confused, but it's, where's the quadrant where people aren't and

**Heather** 1:00:34

the extremists on both sides are the ones that are difficult to grok and reckoned with,

**Bret** 1:00:39

right? They are, they are driving the system and they are causing the narrative to be unreconcilable are irreconcilable. Okay, the other point that I want to make, so there are two Americas and there aren't is one the other point I want to make is that every time I hear the word terrorism invoked, it sends shivers down my spine. And the reason is, because I know it is a legally special word, it has been made into a legally special word. And what it causes us to happen is the suspension of all of the protections that would normally be afforded to people. And so here, Zack, you want to put up that screenshot here is the Washington Post. And I would remind you that the washington post is a Jeff Bezos property which connects it to Amazon, which is connected to the CIA, I have no idea what that has to do with what they do and don't believe in what they do and don't publish. But nonetheless,

**Heather** 1:01:32

what's one of the most terrifying sentences yet today?

**Bret** 1:01:34

Well, yeah, it's a rough one. And the thing is, I want you to pay close attention. I didn't say that I have an understanding of what goes on inside the Washington Post and why all I can say is that it's not hard to connect the superficial dots and that just like the fact of a biosafety level four Coronavirus lab in Wuhan forces you to ask the question, the connection of the washington post to you know, intelligence is one that it raises questions. Maybe there's some perfectly satisfying answer, but I don't know it. In any case, invoking the term terrorism causes all sorts of specially

**Heather** 1:02:10

read for people who are just listening with this headline. So

**Bret** 1:02:14

the headline says what happened at the Capitol was domestic terrorism lawmaker, and experts say now, again, under normal circumstances, what we would make of what happened at the Capitol. I don't think it's terrorism. Now I did call it an insurrection, right. And insurrection is the most serious of crimes. But I actually made this point in an article that I think was put so long ago, I don't remember I think it was published in common dreams after was at the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris. And my point was, look, terror is a tactic. It's sin Kuan non is that an entity that doesn't have the military strength to hurt you does have potentially the ability to make you hurt yourself, if it can spook you. And so the reason that terror is at the center of that word, is that terror causes you to behave in a way that is self destructive, much like a bee does not have the power to kill you. But it might have the power to induce you into an immune reaction that might kill you bees. Yeah. And you know, the bee doesn't have an interest in doing that. But the point is, if you know, it's not the bee sting that kills you, it's your immune reaction to it that kills you if you die from a bee sting. Terrorism is psychologically, it's a psyop. Right? And so the point is, you know, people can be induced to doing self harm through fear. Now, the question is, is what happened at the Capitol? Was that designed to induce fear in Americans? I don't think so. It was an insurrection. But it was not. You know, it was not designed to be terrifying. And that thing means I believe that those who would say it's obviously terrorism, and what they're really saying is, you agree, it's very, very bad, and therefore it's terrorism. And I do not agree that that which is very, very bad is inherently terrorist.

**Heather** 1:04:20

Right. I'm new to the point. This representative Slotkin, who seems to be suggesting that we need to move away from considering outside forces is the biggest threat to us to considering inside forces. Add to that, the observation that researchers say in quotes, that most domestic terrorism is from the right and you know, in what way is that established, I have no idea but I can guarantee you I don't have much faith in those methods, that if you know these researchers are the same ones who helped turn the splc into an organization that has no credibility anymore, then You know, on what basis are a bunch of organizations being called domestic terrorist organizations on the right, but not on the left, there's probably almost certainly political bias there. Therefore, if we are being told by representatives that the biggest threat is coming from the inside, and it has already been established in quotes, through pseudo scientific means to trust the authorities, that most of that domestic threat from the inside is from the right, well, then it's not hard to get to therefore, we need to be concerned about the threats from the right. And, and that's it.

**Bret** 1:05:36

Perfect. Now, for those of you looking for balance. I can't remember when it would have been, but somebody may find it, they will recall that I also blanched when an Tifa was accused of being a terrorist organization. Now I blanched at it for the very same reason. And I would point out what I said at the time was, I remember when occupy was taking place, and I will speak only for myself, I participated in occupy, I should have bailed on it earlier, because it got taken over by anarchists with whom I had no agreement. But nonetheless, as a person protesting the TARP program, and too big to fail, and the financial crisis and all that led to it, to have the government say, Oh, these are domestic terror, this is a terrorist threat, right, and therefore avail itself of all of these extraordinary exemptions and tools was truly frightening. And I don't like seeing that weapon pointed at anybody who isn't an actual terrorist. Now, the argument with respect to an Tifa, and Black Bloc is stronger, I believe, because in fact, it's not terror in the sense of a big explosion that causes people to misunderstand the danger that they themselves are going to be blown up. But there is rushing through

**Heather** 1:06:54

neighborhoods with lights and yelling at people, breaking windows, waking people

**Bret** 1:06:57

up in the middle of the night in the homes and harassing them does induce fear. So at least, you know, there's some sort of connection. But again, I think the thing is, hey, that's a magic word terrorism is a magic word. And when you hear people invoking it, because it then justifies the next thing that they do against somebody that maybe you don't like, boy, this is the moment that you need to stand up and say, actually, what are you doing? And so is

**Heather** 1:07:23

there I mean, is there sort of a Russell Russell conjugation analog for terrorism that we could slot in here? I'm not sure I'm not sure there is. I'm not sure there's a simple word that we can use instead here? Well,

**Bret** 1:07:37

I mean, unfortunately, what there is quite a little bit more language. Yes, I think the thing is, there are a lot of terms for things that don't rise to the level of terrorism,

**Heather** 1:07:46

right, but no, like big category that can be slotted in at the same level of inclusiveness?

**Bret** 1:07:51

Yeah, I? I don't think so. And so I think the answer is, it's actually it's a category that either applies narrowly, to those who would avail themselves of a tactic that causes people to miss calibrate a hazard to themselves and overreact. So for example, you know, the 911 attacks killed 3000 Americans, and we lost more than 6000 people fighting on foreign battlefields and spent, you know, many more dollars in fighting off those terrorists than than the harm the terrorists were able to inflict. But watching buildings collapse was distorting, right, it's very hard to calibrate how serious a threat the people who were able to make that happen. Were to the US. And so in some sense, we reacted in a way that did, you know, I'm not, we reacted in a way that did more measurable harm to us than the terrorists were able to marshal. Right. We can talk about whether or not the harm we did to ourselves was worthwhile. Obviously, what happened in Iraq was an abomination as a result of the fact that it was under false pretenses, etc, etc.

**Heather** 1:09:05

that that was just a lie. Yep.

**Bret** 1:09:07

But in any case, so terrorism is a special word. Every time you hear somebody invoke it, you're really need to ask the question whether or not they're invoking it, because the thing that they're pointing it at is clearly terrorism, or they're invoking it because of all of the things that allows them to do next. And that's the thing that worries me. Most

**Heather** 1:09:25

Yeah. Are you communicating? Or are you creating a tool, giving yourself power with use of a tool that you will then use in ways that we can probably foresee but we will not be able to stop once you've invoked the tool?

**Bret** 1:09:37

Right now, this brings us to the final piece, which is the breathtaking purge of people from social media that has been taking place, please, I don't know exactly how many hours it would be but since sometime yesterday, there has been a breath purge, that purge has included the president, it has included the president, not only in his private account, but his official presidential account, and every other account he would attempt to use to communicate. And this has been, of course, cheered by all sorts of people who, you know, see only if this is bad for Trump, then I like it. Who are of course,

**Heather** 1:10:27

somehow forgetting that censorship that you like, is always followed by censorship that you don't

**Bret** 1:10:33

write, either. They never learned about the rauzein veil of ignorance, or they've forgotten the lesson. But my goodness, is this going to be used in ways that you don't like down the road? And it's a question about why, why it's happening in the way it is, of course, many of the people who are being tossed off the major platforms are conservatives. And the problem is that laws, a lot of people who are not conservatives into imagining that whatever is going on is is an academic concern, because it won't come for them. But right. Let me point out a couple things about it. One is that could you put up the screenshot of the articles of unity account. So this is a screenshot from today of the articles of unity Twitter account, the articles of unity Twitter account was the official account of the Unity movement that at the time, was advancing a plan to fend off both the republicans and the democrats and put the presidency in the hands of a left right partnership team. That would be above politics and non ideological, and actually patriotic, actually patriotic. The three characteristics were patriot capable, courageous patriots, that was qualifications for the job. Now,

**Heather** 1:11:56

I feel like a few of those people still remain.

**Bret** 1:11:58

A few of those people still are right, they do. But here's the point. If you think that this censorious instinct of Twitter and Facebook and Google is about people whose beliefs we all understand, to be anathema, wrong, dangerous, etc, then you need to grapple with the fact that it is only months ago that these very same entities took up arms against a decidedly non partisan non ideological effort, which you may have liked, you may have disliked it, but the point is, they availed themselves of the right to close down this account. Why did they do it? Well, they said we violated the rules, we went through an intense investigation to find evidence of what they had said we had done, it wasn't there, it didn't result in them on suspending the account, it remains suspended. So this account was suspended without a justifiable explanation and remains so to this day. Right? That tells you something I wish we had more examples. There are a few but I wish we had more examples of a high profile so that people could understand that while it's going to tell you what it's doing is getting rid of dangerous conservatives who are espousing views that will cause people you know, will cause harm what it is really doing is getting rid of people that are inconvenient for it, and yes, many of those people are conservatives, but it is not in any way. The thing that is at the center of these purges

**Heather** 1:13:32

and, and the Overton window of what is inconvenient, will of course shift

**Bret** 1:13:37

the Overton Well, it will be shifted to whatever is convenient. And I would point out, hey, Zack, can you put up the Facebook, the tweet about Facebook? Okay, so here is another case, this is not about articles of unity officially. But viewers will remember that my facebook account which I barely used, at one point I was a user of Facebook, but walked away from it largely after the Evergreen debacle, Facebook tossed me off said that they had already done an internal review that there was no going back that I was permanently having my account suspended. I raised a ruckus publicly, which brought down a lot of heat on them. And then they gave a preposterous explanation and said I had triggered algorithms that were looking for inauthentic behavior. And they were sorry. Now where do I you know, I learned this on Twitter. I'd never gotten the official communication or anything now. Okay.

**Heather** 1:14:38

That's without your audience you would have had no recourse.

**Bret** 1:14:40

Right? Okay, so I have, you know, 400 plus 1000 Twitter followers that allows me to generate a fair amount of heat but the point is the very same weapons are directed at people who just don't happen to be lucky enough to have that many followers and so they remain suspended and our good friend Jordan green Hall has been suspended from Facebook without explanation, I believe he remained suspended. The Dr. Roller Gator satire account was suspended for

**Heather** 1:15:10

saying it was caps wasn't suspended for using

**Bret** 1:15:14

was suspended for not using his indoor voice. I mean, crocodiles never use crocodilian they don't have an indoor

**Heather** 1:15:20

voice. I don't I don't know what the pretense was. I'm not sure that the the guy who runs the account ever found out either

**Bret** 1:15:25

Well, they they were some tweets they wanted him to remove. But tellingly, the very things in those tweets that they claimed violated their rules were quotes of other accounts that were still up and had not been suspended for saying them. So anyway, a completely preposterous and inconsistent explanation. But oh, Zack Do you want to so this also is not just about tech platforms, you want to show the Harper screenshot. So this, I have not had time to delve deeply here. I learned about this just before the live stream. This person was fired shortly after writing this article for Harper's I started reading it.

**Heather** 1:16:10

This is from 2018. Alright, missing something, well, it says 2018 archive 2018.

**Bret** 1:16:19

I hope I'm not making an error here.

1:16:21

I don't see that.

**Bret** 1:16:24

She's talking about in the URL.

**Heather** 1:16:30

just died. So Walter Kern is an excellent writer. And he used to do a lot of the opening essays. I don't know anything about this story at all. But anyway, he you may. I don't know what to say about this. I don't know about your stories.

**Bret** 1:16:46

And your question. I don't want to make a mistake. If If I'm getting wind of something now, that is actually not relevant to our current situation. But even if this story is not what I thought it was, we have at least one case of a musician being canceled by their their record company, the record label, for apparently the crime of holding conservative viewpoints. So anyway, what are we to make of all this? Well, a couple things. One, I would point out, we are living in a completely novel circumstance that is not anticipated by our Constitution. And we are forever caught in the following bind. We hold freedom of speech as a high value. But we are arbitrarily held to the protections that were delivered to us by the founders who could not possibly have imagined a world of tech platforms that would control the equivalent of paper and ink. And

**Heather** 1:17:53

right they they they only knew to name the press in the First Amendment, for instance,

**Bret** 1:17:59

well, they knew to protect us from government incursion, which they saw as the most dangerous threat to the freedom of exchange. And the problem is, and this is the place where the conservatives inevitably trip up, which is okay. Free speech is important. Why? It's important because it is the mechanism through which we hash out what is true what we must consider. It is basically the realm in which nuance is dealt with. There's a ton of garbage in speech. Probably most things that are spoken are garbage. But the point is you cannot separate out the fact of heterodox speech from nonsense speech, there is no rule you can apply there's nobody with expertise good enough to surgically separate the two so that what you're left with is the high quality heterodoxy and you are freed from the noise right can't be done. It's not a job that can be done in light of the fact that it can't be done. We have to be free to talk about anything and everything and then in retrospect, we can say what the important heterodoxy was. So just simply the idea of free speech is important. Okay. Once you have the idea that free speech is necessary to the functioning of a society like ours, especially one in which consent of the governed is the basis of legitimate government, then the question is, how do you protect it? And the fact that the founders protected us from government incursion and didn't protect us from private incursion is just an accident of history. The fact is, they heterodox speech needs to be protected in the environment in which it takes place, and conservatives will very frequently say, well, these are private platforms. they're entitled to bar people as they will. And the answer is actually this analysis doesn't hold for one thing. They're private players. forums in a sense, but they are traveling on an internet that we publicly financed the construction of. Right? What's more, they function as a public square,

**Heather** 1:20:12

especially in the era of COVID. I mean, even more so. And we will go back to a moment in which we can actually convene in a public square, but they they are, for many of us, the only thing we've got,

**Bret** 1:20:26

well, even at the point that the public square is, again, the public square, the public square doesn't have the scale, right, in order to allow us to have a conversation at the scale at which we need to be governed. Right. And so the idea of these private concerns having absolutely arbitrary rights do interfere with anybody's speech, including the President. And yes, the President can hold a press conference, but you know, where will that press conference be seen how many people will get wind of it? You know, in effect, yes, there's a technical ability to, to speak it out. And you can shout out your window. And if people really want to hear you, maybe they'll, you know, come stand outside your building. But that is not a meaningful, a meaningful challenge to the control that the tech platforms now have. And I would point out that in effect, what conservatives are very likely to leap on, which is the essentially private property rights that are the basis of the argument that if you own a platform, you don't have to let just anybody speak on it, you know, and obviously, that's true at one level, if you and I started a, you know, a small, you know, Mom and Pop publishing house, we don't have to publish anybody who, you know, wants to throw our manifesto our way. But these things are functioning in a different way. They're they although Twitter and Facebook and Google are not monopolies individually, because each one as the other in its sphere together, they effectively functioning as a monopoly. And they are acting in concert here to limit the access of certain voices to the audience, right.

**Heather** 1:21:57

I mean, one, one piece of evidence to that point in the last 72 hours, is that the conservative leading alternative to Twitter parler, has had its app removed by Google from whatever the equivalent of the, you know, the Apple Store over on Google is, and apparently Apple is likely to do the same thing from the Apple Store. So at the point that, that there is a competitor to Twitter, but it has an ideological bent that may be the mirror image of what Twitter's ideological bent is at least in terms of what the CEO is willing to do and say, the fact that other big tech is willing to step in and say No, we won't distribute, we won't we won't facilitate this thing being out there in the world. That that looks like collusion. Yep. And it looks you know, it's not actually interested the legal meaning, the legal meaning of the term monopoly. It's not monopolistic, but it's, it's a kind of de facto monopoly.

**Bret** 1:22:59

It's a defect. It's a de facto monopoly. And the fact that you don't have any diversity about political leanings of these gigantic platforms, and you know, tech companies, you know, that the idea that you know, Apple and Twitter because they are traveling in the same political circles can act in concert. Oh, Twitter's gonna shove you off Twitter. Maybe you go to parlor, and then Apple's gonna shut down parlor? Yeah. Right. So the point is, yeah, it's functioning as a monopoly, right. And if the law isn't caught up to it, then we need to fix the law. But that's not what's happening. What's happening is, you've got the blue team, which is now in control of two of the three official branches of government, right? It's in control of or will be in control of the executive and both houses of Congress. The courts are still potentially independent. But this this reduces checks and balances.

**Heather** 1:23:55

Well, that's an interesting use of the term independent What you mean is red team.

**Bret** 1:24:01

I don't really mean red team. I just mean not.

**Heather** 1:24:04

So you're not talking about the Supreme Court, particularly right. I think about the courts across the land. Now there's a diversity of political leanings of the judges. Precisely because the judges, we know as in SCOTUS, but specifically across the land have been our appointees, or have been voted in by electorates across many, many years. So actually have diversity of

**Bret** 1:24:31

politics. They potentially have independence. And I just

**Heather** 1:24:35

I'm curious, I'm not sure why using the word independent when you say there's democrats here and then there's independence like it just seems like a strange because I furcation that

**Bret** 1:24:44

you're what I'm seeing is an unnatural alignment on the blue team. It's not there's no natural diversity of opinion. It's not like Google is sympathetic with Democrats but holds a strongly free speech position. And you know, Twitter is is much more interested in censorship.

**Heather** 1:25:02

So I mean, we just we want, we need checks and balances in the system. And you're arguing that it seems like the courts writ large still have enough diversity that they effectively can act as checks and balances perhaps if you know if need be as you go up towards towards the Supreme Court, but that there is very little evidence for checks and balances at this point, as of, you know, the end of January, executive branch, legislative branch, big tech, academia, etc. Well,

**Bret** 1:25:37

so this is this is what I'm getting. Okay. I think the courts are unknown how effective the courts can be in holding back, the blue team's power grab, which I think is what we are watching unfold in real time, remains to be seen. But what I would point out is that this view, that there are three branches of government, and that's where checks and balances come from, has only one of the branches potentially independent enough to exert a check. And what we have is effectively defacto new branches of government. Now that's a very imprecise way of saying it, but we have things that exert power as if they were branches of government that are unanticipated on our founding documents, and so, you know, it's a little bit naive to think that, you know, the three branches of government and one of those branches remain retaining enough independence to exert a check is sufficient in a world where in effect, what you have is executive, legislative, judicial, but then you also have the so called Fourth Estate, the press, which is on the blue team, you have academia, which is on the blue team, you have the deep state there, I say it, which appears to be on the blue team, and you have big tech, which appears to be on the blue team now.

**Heather** 1:27:04

So just you know, you're gonna get clipped but you've been talking about deep state for well over a decade. Yep. And it was challenging and irritating at the point that Trump showed up on the scene and started using that language, often imprecisely as a as a sort of a political cudgel rather than as a patriot. And you know, we're well over an hour and a half at this point, I think, so we should really be wrapping it up. But do you, I feel like if you're going to use that phrase, in the current environment, you should spend a minute or two saying what you mean by

**Bret** 1:27:42

what I'm saying is that there is some entity which is not accountable by virtue of the fact that it doesn't, it's not transparent, so we can't see it, and it's not accountable. And it is, you know, it is the reason that we fight over, you know, things like Snowden and, and Assange and the things that they have alerted us to. But anyway, there's some thing which doesn't transition with the shifts in belief structure, there's something that maintains a presence of administration after administration. And so anyway, you know, we can argue about the details of it. But I think it's, it's hard to argue about the fact of it. And in any case, it is a powerful force. And it's one that is not anticipated in the Constitution, the Constitution could not have understood the high tech world of espionage and what would happen when you empower these, you know, these organizations to start, you know, reaching and bending laws, you know, in the interests of the nation, what do they ultimately end up doing? And, you know, we've seen all kinds of shenanigans, like the, you know, the Five Eyes mechanism for escaping the protections that US citizens are supposed to have from government surveillance, right? This was just a simple shell game, which was, if the US government is forbidden to spy on its own citizens, but it is allowed to spy on British citizens and the British are not allowed to spy on their own citizens, but they can spy on American citizens, then there's an obvious trade, right? Okay, that evades the protection that was supposed to be there, and you know, it exists. So anyway, I don't want to belabor the point. All I would say is, the founding documents are not in a position to protect the values that they correctly highlighted. And the reason that they're not in a position to do it is because the world has changed radically and so the fact of the judiciary may be having the power to check a, you know, the other two branches of government which are now going to be in the hands of the same party. His reason for hope, but it has to be placed in the context of Yes, but there are these other forces that appear to be in the hands of the same party. And they exert a tremendous force in the other direction. And we're seeing that unfold online over the last 24 hours.

**Heather** 1:30:17

Right? Yeah, obviously the most you can ever hope for with regard to the division and a two party system between three branches of government is to to one. But your point is that so many of the other forces that are aligned in the world that are extra governmental, are in fact, in this living in the same ideology, which is one that is claiming to be liberal, but that we recognize as an extremist branch, that is also authoritarian, authoritarian, authoritarian, authoritarian branch of democratic party that is ascending rapidly.

**Bret** 1:30:52

It is ascending rapidly. And so I want to make a last point. One of the things that is so troubling about the way the tech platforms work, and the way it is interfacing with this, this power grab and this shoving large numbers of people out the door, is that the way they shove you out the door, obliterates what you did when you were there. And so it makes a the history impossible, or nearly impossible to recover. That is to say, you know, initially Facebook when you decided that it was too toxic, and you left, it disappeared you from all the conversations that you had been in an untagged, you and every photograph that you had once been tagged in, and this was a disincentive for people to leave. But now this is turning into a mechanism for allowing one side to shape the narrative falsely. Right. So it is difficult. I don't know what the President's sympathies are. I don't trust him. And I think he did encourage a protest at the Capitol. In fact, it's clear that he encouraged it and what he thought of those who broke in I can't set. But there is a question about whether or not he actually encouraged the breaking of the law that is much harder to establish, because he was clearly abiding by at least a technical standard with respect to what he said. But having disappeared him from Twitter, what you get is the absence of the evidence that women ordinarily want to go through in order to figure out if what Nancy Pelosi is saying that he said, actually came out of his mouth at some point or so. My point is that the very fact of the tech platforms not only having the ability to prevent you from speaking going forward, but to effectively erase what you have said, and therefore allows your detractors to imply that you have said things that you may or may not have actually said, that is a very dangerous process. And

**Heather** 1:33:00

it's one with which we should be well familiar. From 20th century history from Orwell's dystopian vision of 20th century history. And more Yeah,

**Bret** 1:33:11

yes. The the airbrushing people out of photographs is is not a legitimate process under any circumstances.

**Heather** 1:33:20

Can we finish by talking a little bit about fear, and how to overcome it, and I feel like you've you have, you've spent a lot of time there, but tick, not Han, who's a Buddhist monk, and has written several books, including this 2012 book called fear, essential wisdom for getting through the storm is really an extraordinary, extraordinary man. And I was lucky enough to spend a couple of weeks with him back in high school, actually. I had a creative writing teacher, Peter Lovett, who was a poet and also a Buddhist who invited me to this retreat at this school that was the school where we met actually where we were friends at the time. And it was otherwise felt I was by far the youngest person there. It was filled with beat poets and an occasional ceramicist and, and painter, and, and, and me this high school kid aspiring writer at the time, and tech, not Han, who I'd never heard of before and he led us this is at a retreat center in Ohio, California. He led us in three sitting and one walking meditations every day for for two weeks, and slept in tents and did our our char writing and quotes together. And you know, in some ways, it was, I think it actually fought helped me form my idea for field trips later on when we would be when both of us came to teach as professors at evergreen, but just a very brief two page excerpt from this book in a chapter called the opposite of fear to little sections. deep listening and loving speech. When communication is cut off, we all suffer. When no one listens to us or understands us, we are like bombs ready to explode. compassionate listening brings about healing. Sometimes only 10 minutes of listening deeply can transform us and bring a smile back to our lips. Many of us have lost our capacity for listening and using loving speech and our families. It may be that no one is capable of listening to anyone else. So we feel very lonely even within our own families, we go to a therapist hoping that she will be able to listen to us. But many therapists also have deep suffering within. Sometimes they cannot listen as deeply as they would like. So if we really love someone, we need to train ourselves to be deep listeners. We also need to train ourselves to use loving speech. We have lost our capacity to say things calmly, we get irritated too easily. Every time we open our mouths our speeches, sour or bitter, we have lost our capacity for speaking with kindness. Without this ability, we cannot succeed in restoring harmony, love and happiness. In Buddhism, we speak of Bodhisattvas, wise and compassionate beings who stay on earth to alleviate the suffering of others. The Bodhisattva avalokitesvara, also called Kuan Yin, has a great capacity for listening with compassion and true presence. Kuan Yin is the Bodhisattva who can listen and understand the sounds of the world the cries of suffering. You have to practice breathing mindfully in and out so that compassion always stays with you. You listen without giving advice or passing judgment, you can say to yourself about the other person, person, I am listening to him just because I want to relieve his suffering. This is called compassionate listening. You have to listen in such a way that compassion remains with you the whole time you are listening. That is the art. If halfway through listening, irritation or anger comes up then you cannot listen deeply anymore. You have to practice in such a way that every time the energy of irritation, anger comes up, you can breathe in and out mindfully and continuing to hold compassion within you. No matter what the other person says. Even if there's a lot of injustice in his way of seeing things. Even if he condemns or blames do you continue to sit very quietly, breathing in and out. If you are not in good shape. If you don't feel that you can go on listening in this way, let the other person know, ask your friend, dear one, can we continue in a few days, I need to renew myself, I need to practice so that I can listen to you in the best way I can practice more walking meditation, more mindful breathing, and more sitting meditation to restore your capacity for compassionate listening.

**Heather** 1:37:32

Walking with the Sangha. One wonderful thing to do with your community is walking meditation. When we are physically active together moving and it's easy to feel supported by the collective energy, it is good to begin your practice of walking meditation with a group to get the support, you can ask a friend to go with you. Or you can even take the hand of a child and walk with him or her. To practice mindful walking on your own, you can begin by making a contract with a staircase, you vow that you will always go up or down that staircase mindfully with very solid steps. If it happens that halfway up, you realize that one of your steps didn't have your true presence in it, you go down and begin again and up on that staircase a very long time. If you can do it successfully with that staircase, then wherever you go, you'll be able to dwell in the present moment. You also can make a contract with a particular distance perhaps from your work area to the restroom, and vow that when you walk that distance, every step will be solid and mindful. Otherwise, you will go back and do it again. It's a wonderful way to learn how to live every moment of your daily life deeply resisting, being carried away by your habit, energy, walk with your feet, not with your head, bring your attention to your feet and walk. Walk in such a way that joy and real life are possible right here. And now. When we do walking meditation as a group, we produce a collective energy of mindfulness and peace that nourishes us and helps heal us. So that's obviously in a language that we don't tend to use between us or are here on dark horse. But I think he is he is approaching through Buddhism, what I in particular approached, you know, having having learned from him when I was very young, through animal behavior, the act of of going outside of being present in your body of being understanding that you are a physical being with instantiation in the real world, and observing without interpretation as much as possible, be in your body first. And this isn't something that you will be doing all the time and it will get in the way of analysis and interpretation and creativity to some degree, but especially when you're hot when you're emotionally hot as I think almost all of us are, at least sometimes now given what is going on. Being able to return back to self and physical reality and breathing. And trying to just observe or hear or be in a place without interpretation is a way to reduce fear.

**Bret** 1:39:57

Yes, I think it's it's excellent and tuning in, you know, tuning into your environment and tuning into others who are tuned into their environment is in some sense, the antidote. And, you know, as is so often the case with Buddhism, you know, it takes a while to figure out why the approach is what it is and what the what the deeper point is. But once you see it, it's, it is a, it's universal. And I guess, we're not getting to see stars, we're gonna have to do that next time to save sea stars. We're gonna save sea stars. Okay, so I guess I, in light of your reading, I would like to say something to our audience that I said to my class, the last time I met with them, ever, ever before, we were forced to leave evergreen. We were in a public park, actually. And what I said to them was, pay very close attention to what is happening. I don't think we will pass this way again. And I think that's, that's where we are something utterly dramatic is afoot and how it comes out. We do not know but it certainly makes sense to note everything because this is history happening.

**Heather** 1:41:22

That's right. That's right. So I think we will forego most of the announcements that we would normally make and that will say that good conversations happen on the discord server, which you can find it either by Patreon and that after a 15 minute break for those who are watching rather than just listening. We will be back to answer your questions in the second hour.

**Bret** 1:41:42

All right. Be well everyone will see you shortly.