Title: Lindypress Bug Fix

PubDate: Wed, 22 Feb 2023 12:04:07 -0500

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/updates/lindypress-bug-fix/

Content

Just a brief note that for the past couple of days, you mightve been unable to buy books on LindyPress.net if you are in the United States, Canada or Australia (which is a lot of you). This has now been fixed, so you can place your orders now!

The issue was that there was a silent API update that kept addresses from validating states and provinces. Note that if your order placed, its all okay, this is only for people for whom the site would not let place an order.

Theres a chance that there mightve been another country which might not be validating correctly, so if you input your entire address and get a non-descript error message, just tell me. Ive tried most countries we get the most orders from and they validate fine.

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Title: I'll visit South-East Europe (Greece, Albania, Montenegro, Constantinople) this Summer

PubDate: Sat, 28 Jan 2023 23:25:49 -0500

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/updates/greece-albania-montenegro-2023-summer/

Content

Ill be in south eastern Europe this summer (of 2023) in late June and early July.

Specific plans are still in the air, but Ill be visiting Greece, Albania, Montenegro and possibly the European side of Turkey. Ill also be in Kosovo, and while I know I have some fans in Serbia, Im not sure I can cross into Serbia proper easily since the US accepts Kosovo as independent, but I believe that being there would be an illegal entrance into Serbia in the eyes of the Serbian government. Not sure about the specifics. You can elucidate me, but either way Ill be in the region. If you guys start shooting each other, either way, that leg of the journey will be canceled so play nice until after this summer!

I do know some people who live in or frequent the region. Now is your time to contact me if youll be there then. People I dont know are welcome to contact me if they want to arrange a small public meet-up, which I am theoretically open to. I will be with other people in a group though, so dont expect to separate me from my group for too long. Im sure theyd come along if youre not creeps.

I have a short list of Orthodox Churches and monastaries I intend to visit (although this is not a pilgrimage, and the people Ill be with are not Orthodox), and also some other attractions. Suggestions of places to go, whether natural or man-made, religious are secular are welcome. Hints for good and cheap living in the region are invited as well, since Ill again be with several people and I want to economize for everyone since we may be around several weeks. I think for a good portion of the time, well just be hanging out in the area.

Contact me quick though, because were about to start buying tickets and making concrete plans and such.

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Title: Retiring My Fiat Donation Portal

PubDate: Fri, 16 Dec 2022 10:35:42 -0500

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/updates/retiring-fiat-donation-portal/

Content

Ive decided to retire my fiat donation portal at donate.lukesmith.xyz, where people could donate to me via debit and credit cards. This will happen by the end of this calendar year.

Its more in keeping with my principles of free software, self-ownership and everything else to only allow cryptocurrency donations. This also is a subtle nudge to people who want to donate in streams to get into Bitcoin and Monero, as opposed to using fiat online. You have no excuse now that they are cheap again!

So the fiat donation portal will open for a couple more weeks. It still works if you want to give a good-bye donation, but you might want to get some Bitcoin/Monero first if you dont.

Note that I now have my Bitcoin and Monero addresses in the footers of this site now. Much more minimal than running a payment gateway on a server!

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Title: I will be at Southeast Linuxfest 2022 (June 10-12) in Charlotte, NC.

PubDate: Fri, 27 May 2022 23:11:04 -0400

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/updates/linuxfest-2022-announcement/

Content

Title says the gist.

In 2018, I went to Southeast Linuxfest and gave a presentation which you can see here or . It was nice meeting the (shockingly normal) people who knew me from the interest last time.

Im going to be attending again this year, as the title says June 10-12 in Charlotte, NC. Ive already had one talk confirmed (and might actually be giving two).

If you are interested in going, see their site. The conference itself is at the Sheraton near the Charlotte Airport and they still have some rooms on their block left now, but order ASAP if you want to stay in the building. Obviously there are many other hotels to stay at nearby too (I stayed elsewhere last time).

Last time, I went with a group of others and skipped the presentations on Sunday morning to go to church services. Ill probably do that again, although obviously this time well attend an Orthodox church TBD so come with some reverent attire.

Title: Based.Cooking has become more grandma-usable.

PubDate: Fri, 27 May 2022 08:32:47 -0400

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/updates/based-cooking-hugo-search/

Content

Over the past month, Ive taken some off-time to tinker with Based.Cooking, the cooking site I/we made a year or so ago as a proof of concept for a simple and unintrusive recipe website. There have been over 250 recipes submitted, but the hobbled-together static site generator originally used proved unable to keep up and with all the submissions, there was a big issue of content organization.

There have been two big changes. Firstly, I ported the entire site to use Hugo, which I believe I mentioned already. Hugo is just a very fast static site generator written in Go, and I particularly liked it for the ease of tagging articles. Originally, the only content sorting on Based.Cooking was a tagcloud at the top of the main page and Related pages at the bottom of each page.

Secondly, there had been a PR a while ago to add a search filter for the mainpage with a few lines of Javascript. I think its actually a fantastic and it allows users to instantaneously to search existing recipes by title and tag without extra page loads and with handy responsive CSS.

Note also that tags now can be assigned emojis (via CSS, weirdly enough). Im just playing around with this. It might be visually jarring for some, so I might change it.

I might make some more strides to make the site more normie-friendly, since I see it more than a proof-of-concept. Keep in mind that the Github repo is here if you want to add recipes or suggest other changes. I had said earlier that I

wanted to cut down on the acceptance of new recipes for fear of crowding the main page. This is less of an issue with the search filter, so feel free to submit whatever you think it worthy.

If you cook something on the site without a photo (or at least without a good one), feel free to submit that as well.

Title: Important notes for LARBS users

PubDate: Sun, 14 Nov 2021 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/updates/important-notes-for-larbs-users/

Content

Two notes for LARBS users:

Xorg went through some updates last week that changed how it calculates dots-per-inch (DPI) on screens. There's a chance that you might update and find your font extra large or small. If so, you can just manually add xrandr –dpi 96 to the beginning of your xprofile to set the DPI to the typical 96 (or whatever number looks best).

I have no switched new installs of LARBS from using Pulseaudio to Pipewire as an audio backend, although it will also come with pipewire-pulse to maintain compatibility with Pulseaudio programs. If you would like to update the dotfiles, remember to install the pipewire and pipewire-pulse packages. There should be no major difference in user experience, although using Pipewire will avoid some silly Pulseaudio bugs.

Title: Bringing back old-school web pins and buttons

PubDate: Fri, 13 Aug 2021 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/updates/bringing-back-oldschool-web-pins-and-buttons/

Content

Back in the not-quite-as-bad-old-days (at least as far back as the 90's), every good website had a small 'ad' gif that fans of the site could use as a colorful link. These are called 'buttons' or sometimes 'pins.'

You can see sites that collect these internet artifacts (both the good ones and boring ones) here and here.

Most people would have dozens of these at the bottom of their site, linking to all their favorite sites, back when people actually linked to things because search engines hadn't taken over the internet.

The only rules are:

It has to be 88 by 31 pixels.

It has to be a .gif.

And it should be animated, colorful or memorable (but some people do the gray ones to be ironic or boring).

Since we're all trying to Reject the Modernity of the current internet, I figure I should do my part to bring these back.

I made a little button for LARBS, which you can see here:

Nice, simple, noticeable and memorable. Best of all, at 88x31, it's very small. Adding dozens of these to your site is a great way to link creatively without using more than 90's bandwidth. After I get a good collection of them, I might link my favorite sites with them.

So I encourage you to make some of these for sites you like. You're even welcome to make some for my sites: LandChad.net, Not Related, heck, even Based.Cooking, or even my personal website for that matter.

I might talk about these things in a video later because it's one of those aethetical niceities that has been lost to time.

(PS: GIMP can make gifs, look it up, and remember to 'Optimize for gifs' after you're almost done to make the filesize super low.)

Title: Important: LindyPress undergoing some updates

PubDate: Thu, 29 Jul 2021 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/updates/important-lindypress-undergoing-some-updates/

Content

Although I haven't announced in a video on the YouTube channel yet, I'm glad that there's been a lot of interest in LindyPress.net. I haven't done a video on it just because there are some details in the site coding we're still figuring out, but books are already printing, shipping and arriving at some of your houses.

Just a couple technical notes:

I switched the Stripe backend of the site over the weekend. This makes no changes for you, but if you have site cookies from a previous visit, it will cause the site to break on checkout. Clear your cookies for the site or use a private browsing instance to solve this problem.

We've had a couple errors processing some, but not all cryptocurrency payments. If you bought books with BTC, ETH or XMR, just shoot me an email and provide the transaction ID (and exact amount as well if XMR) and I'll check for you. There's a small chance that your payment went through, but did not

queue an order. In that case, I will promptly refund your fundos to the whatever address you'd like.

Have people been receiving tracking number emails? If you have, say so. You should get an email right after placing the order, then one several days later after the book is printed with the tracking number.

In general, the site is working great, and once we're sure it's bugfree, I'll announce it on the channel and start adding more and more books. I have many underway already.

Title: YouTube stream now

PubDate: Fri, 23 Jul 2021 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/updates/youtube-stream-now/

Content

I'll be streaming on YouTube momentarily: https://youtu.be/Aj6-ASqhSEY

Title: The classical book reprinting site is live! LindyPress.net

PubDate: Thu, 22 Jul 2021 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/updates/the-classical-book-reprinting-site-is-live-lindypressnet/

Content

For a while, I've hinted that I've been contributing to a project to reprint out-of-print classical and medieval texts that are of hidden value, sometimes even in their original languages. I've worked on this project for a while and now it's live and you can browse the first five books available.

See the site at https://lindypress.net. All works have been reformatted in XeLaTeX so that the text is grade-A in readability and has nice little flourishes to make it a little more elegant. A lot of other reprinting companies have their work done with less care.

Here are a list of the books available now:

Marcus Aurelius's Meditations (in English): a personal log that Emperor and Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius kept. This is still commonly read as a kind of a book of proverbs and motivation, and is the only book of these where you can commonly find other reprints of this book, but they usually have textual errors and aren't as nice. This is a pocket book, making it easy to port around and read leisurely.

Antimodernist Papal Encyclicals (in English): A collection of six major Catholic writings against liberalism, modernism, communism and for the chastity of marriage and the economic model now called 'distributism.'

The Books of Enoch and the Book of Jubilees: Hard to find extra-Biblical books on the esoteric life and ascension of Enoch, the Nephilim, the true story of the Flood and much more, all well-formatted, translated from Ge'ez, Slavonic and Hebrew and in one volume.

Isidore of Seville's book on Etymologies (in Latin): an encyclopedia was used as a textbook for centuries in late antiquity and the middle ages. It's a great compendium of information on every topic and is a 400+ page hardback which can still be openned and read at any point. I recommend this even more strongly for Latin-learners because it's written in the simplest and clearest prose and is instructive in nature and will help people acquire vocabulary while practicing the language. Might even be a good choice for an intermediate Latin class.

Roger Bacon's Compendium Studii Theologiae (in Latin): It's extremely hard to find any prints of Roger Bacon's philosophical, theological or alchemical works, so this is the first I've prepared for reprinting. I'll soon finish his Opus Tertium as well. CST is a another portable pocket book.

Check out the site for more information.

The site accepts either credit cards or Bitcoin/Monero/Ethereum for payment. It works with the lightning network too.

(Note that this uses a print-on-demand service, so you might take a couple days to print your books.)

I will make this site known on my YouTube channel in several days, but for now, you can browse and get what you want.

There are many other books already in the works, but email me with suggestions for more if you have them.

I really want to focus on things that are nearly impossible to find in print in a presentable way. Compilations are also possible, similar to the encyclical compilation.

Title: Late livestream on YouTube ASAP

PubDate: Fri, 18 Jun 2021 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/updates/late-livestream-on-youtube-asap/

Content

Link is here: https://youtu.be/OU84HrX8D8Q

I'll begin before the top of the hour.

Title: I appeared on Monero Talk

PubDate: Tue, 08 Jun 2021 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/updates/i-appeared-on-monero-talk/

Content

I was invited to be interviewed on Monero Talk and it's just been released. Monero Talk is a podcast on, well... Monero the actually private cryptocurrency, which I've written and done videos on in the past.

See the full interview on one of the following:

Monero Talk's YouTube channel

Odysee Repost

My PeerTube instance

We discuss a lot of topic on private and free/open source monetary technology and dab on Boomercoiners. Some topics of discussion:

The difference between truly decentralized self-propelling cryptocurrency projects and companies that use blockchains just for crowdfunding.

The generally overlooked problems of the blossoming cyberpunk surveillence dystopia we are coming to live in.

The various issues with Bitcoin, including the imaginary Layer 2 coping mechanism as an excuse for not fixing obvious problems.

Even Ted Kazynski and technology

I might post segmented clips of it later if I find something notable when I watch it.

Title: Livestream on YouTube right now

PubDate: Tue, 25 May 2021 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/updates/livestream-on-youtube-right-now/

Content

Link here: https://youtu.be/GZi0gmDcuAc

Title: Odysee stream over, worked well!

PubDate: Thu, 13 May 2021 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/updates/odysee-stream-over-worked-well/

Content

Just finished by first stream on LBRY/Odysee. If you missed it, don't sweat it, we didn't talk about anything too interesting, just trying Odysee's new streaming abilities.

There was some bandwidth problems on my end, but Odysee itself seemed to handle the stream very well.

Title: Testing out the Odysee Livestreaming; Check it out NOW!

PubDate: Thu, 13 May 2021 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/updates/testing-out-the-odysee-livestreaming-check-it-out-now/

Content

As the title says, see here: https://odysee.com/@Luke:7/nginx-restream-luke-smith-test:b

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Title: Livestream on YouTube within an hour or so

PubDate: Sun, 02 May 2021 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/updates/livestream-on-youtube-within-an-hour-or-so/

Content

See the link here:

https://youtu.be/Jq9ZKvsJSJI

Title: My searx instance has changed domains

PubDate: Sat, 01 May 2021 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/updates/my-searx-instance-has-changed-domains/

Content

For those that use my SearX instance (which was formerly searx.lukesmith.xyz), I have now relocated it to searx.cedars.xyz, so if you use it as a default search engine, remember to change its url.

For those who don't know what SearX is, it's a metasearch engine that polls whatever search engines you want and aggregates the results. It is free software that can be installed by anyone on any server.

Read more about it on their website, or find another instance to use, or install it on your own server.

Title: Stay frosty: possible test stream on PeerTube and YouTube in a bit

PubDate: Sat, 24 Apr 2021 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/updates/stay-frosty-possible-test-stream-on-peertube-and-youtube-in-a-bit/

Content

I'm going to probably be doing a test livestream in a bit. Hopefully I fixed the issue in the previous stream with Pulseaudio and buffering.

I'll probably go live on PeerTube first, test it there, then test it on YouTube. I'm mobile and on limit battery though, so it won't be a super long stream if everything works out.

PeerTube stream will be at this link: https://videos.lukesmith.xyz/videos/watch/c6feba6e-0221-4373-b9e8-9e50a4c035e9

Title: My blog system now has tagging (all pure POSIX shell of course)

PubDate: Wed, 21 Apr 2021 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/updates/my-blog-system-now-has-tagging-all-pure-posix-shell-of-course/

Content

This isn't live on the old blog system's Github, but partially inspired by by Based Cooking's tag system which is based on blogit, I've added in the feature to tag articles.

I've been wanting to write more articles and informational pages on my website, but doing that with no organization is somewhat impratical. I now have a tagcloud on my homepage.

My issue with blogit, the tool used for Based.Cooking is that it is slow, mainly due to the fact that for every file, it has multiple system/program calls (grep, sed, etc. might be called for each article or tag).

Here's an example of what I do, just for info. Instead of looking through each file and calling grep and friends each time to get file information, the title, the tags, etc., I merely run awk and sed once to get all the info from all files:

Then, instead of recursing and reading every file and manually running the same grep or sed commands each time, just recurse through the output of that previous command stored in $output < /code > . < /p >< p >$
$Actually, I realize in the title of this post, I lied! It actually isn't POSIX shell, but bash, but for a very good reason. Ba$

10

inthatcapitalizesstrings :< /p >< *pre* >< *code* > name=luke $ echo
'${name^}' Luke

POSIX shell lacks such a feature and would have to call an external program
like sed or tr to capitalize strings, which I would need when later in the script
recursing through tag names. This actually is a good case of when bash is faster
to use, since it has the feature built into it, without needing to call external
programs.

Of course I'm sure someone will email me saying that there is some (albeit
perhaps less elegant) way of capitalizing the first character of a string in POSIX
sh. . .

I might make my new blog system Makefile-based like blogit to get the perks of
that, but I've always found Makefile syntax in a kind of disturbing and confusing
uncanny valley. I know that's a silly thing to say.

Title: YouTube Channel Deletion

PubDate: Fri, 26 Mar 2021 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/updates/deletion/

Content

Google is prepping to delete my YouTube channel. As of today (March 26,
2021), I now cannot post for another two weeks. YouTube 'strikes' which are
functionally unappealable (automatically rejected) last for 3 months. If they
give thee concurrent strikes, you channel is permanently deleted.

If YouTube Jannies delete my YouTube channel, remember that 100% of my
videos are still easily viewable, including new videos I will make. You have no
excuse to whine if all you know how to do is consoooming product on YouTube's
walled garden:

Follow me on Odysee: https://odysee.com/@Luke:7

Follow me on PeerTube: https://videos.lukesmith.xyz

Follow me on RSS: https://lukesmith.xyz/rss.xml

I can and have already done livestreams on PeerTube. Expect those as well.
LBRY/Odysee will probably have livestreams too soon.

'When you're banned from YouTube will you keep making videos?'

Yes, at Odysee and PeerTube. I will also probably actually bring back Not
Related! for real this time because the first reason I made a podcast was to
communicate with people using less bandwidth.

I suppose my only regret is not shilling RSS, webrings and other classical internet
technology to free us from social media companies.

The 'importance' of YouTube

YouTube ad revenue by itself is a nice thing to have, but it is not a huge loss if I lose it (less than minimum wagies make). Very few megachannels actually make decent money on it and frankly, it's a kind of bloodmoney if you ask me.

The only concern for me is that YouTube is still the vehicle by which people find out about me and use other stuff I offer and that can mean other sources of income for me.

While I try to push people into a decentralized internet, use RSS feeds, superior platforms like Odysee and PeerTube, and encourage them to have websites and the like, most people still passively use YouTube recommendations and curation.

How you can help.

Encourage YouTube followers to follow me in proper places.

If you have friends who watch my YouTube channel or know of people on other sites who do, make sure they:

Follow me on RSS: https://lukesmith.xyz/rss.xml

Follow me on PeerTube: https://videos.lukesmith.xyz

Follow me on Odysee: https://odysee.com/@Luke:7

Google is not going to be accidentally recommending new people to me after they ban me. That's your job.

Donate

You can donate to me even without having extra money by using my affiliate links.

If you do have spare money:

Donate money to me. You can easily make a monthly pledge for stability's sake.

Donate Bitcoin (QR): bc1qyvkzw7hrtp9ecxd2pa3w7p5dfg09tv6jfrs0df

Donate Monero QR): 48jewbtxe4jU3MnzJFjTs3gVFWh2nRrAMWdUuUd7Ubo375LL4SjLTnMRKBrXburvEh38

You can donate BAT on this site, or LBC on Odysee/LBRY.

'What are they giving you strikes for?'

To be clear, before this year, I never received any strikes, but now I've received a warning and two strikes all for old videos.

I will emphasize that this is merely the sign of either: (1) coordinated third-party mass-reports or (2) YouTube specifically and arbitrarily adopting new standards in a bid to remove the channel.

The strikes are for the following very innocent videos:

For a video I put up in either 2016 or 2017 where I made an ffmpeg slideshow with a bunch of Pepe memes set to music. Deleted for 'inciting violence.' I can't find the original video of this, I might've deleted it.

For a video I did sometime in 2020 when I in passing made jokes about low-quality Indian tech channels that used to dominate YouTube. Deleted for 'inciting violence.' Here is the video so you can see how innocuous (also true) it was.

For a video I made maybe in 2018 or 2019 on youtube-dl. Here is the video. The absurdity is that I recommend people to use this tool to back up my YouTube channel (and all of my videos are in licensed permissively via Creative Commons). I guess it's a crime to distribute my own videos on a video distribution platform!

This is the arbitrariness of Google today. If my channel survives the storm of these strikes (which I severely doubt) expect me to be using PeerTube and Odysee as primary platforms. From now on, my YouTube exists to lead people to more healthy places.

Title: Consciousness and Materialism

PubDate: Mon, 16 Jan 2023 08:05:18 -0500

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/consciousness-and-materialism/

Content

Humes Parallel

David Hume has often been quoted for his Is vs. Ought distinction. The argument is that fact and morality are two different domains, and from no accumulation of statements of fact alone can we ever jump to a statement of morality.

We can say statements of fact such as:

To be murdered is potentially painful.

To be murdered is irreversible.

Murder causes social dysfunction.

Etc. hellip;

By merely my collecting these, we havent proven that Murder is evil. That is an entirely different statement that cannot be inducted from statements about the description of murder.

Certainly we can derive moral statements from other moral statements accompanied by factual statements. For example, if we assume that the moral statement To kill a living being is immoral. we can derive new moral facts from it:

To kill a living being is immoral.

Unborn children in the womb are living beings.

Abortion is immoral.

Orhellip;

To kill a living being is immoral.

Animals are living beings.

Killing animals is immoral.

Whether you find Humes argument ironclad, it proposes that mere fact and morality are ultimately two domains and substances, and while they can interact, importantly, morality itselfwhatever it isis made of different stuff than just empirical statements. There requires some extra jump.

Consciousness

I bring this up because it is a logical analog to the reality of consciousness.

Some would incorrectly say that the issue of consciousness is the Hardest Problem in Science. Thats premature because it presupposes that science has even begun to properly ask the question, or has any idea of a vector to approach the issue, or any tools to attack the problem.

One funny thing, evenperhaps especially true about the institutionalized academic venues for the study of consciousness, is that they are rife with pseudoscience.

Go to a scientific conference or institute and however many serious scientists you see, you will find no fewer Hindu gurus. This is because there are simply no scientific methods for even approaching the issue of the origin and nature of consciousness and many scientists are at least honest enough to recognize they have little to no performative advantage in the field over pagan lore or even esotericist scammers.

Consciousness from a Humean Perspective

In the same way that Hume argued that morality must be a different substance from fact, I will state flatly that consciousness, in its essence, must be a totally different substance from matter.

Materialist science is self-limited to what is ultimately the syntactic interactions of atoms more or less bumping into each other, at whatever level of abstraction. In the same way that Hume could say that no as-of-yet unknown facts could generate a foundational moral statement, I say that no as-of-yet unknown material configuration generates this ontologically new category of self-perception.

Now when Hume, as a skeptic, suggested that fact and morality were different domains, a part of that skepticism is the suggestion that morality, since it is not grounded in fact, might actually just be a worthless enterprise. That solves the philosophical problems of morality by saying it ultimately has no independent ontology, i.e. it doesnt really exist, so we dont really have to talk about it.

Consciousness cannot be discarded in the same fashion. Consciousness is not just something we observe, but it is the only thing we observe. It is the basis of all of our other observations and it is the most inexplicable thing.

Mere computation?

You might interpret my statement here as a denial of the so-called Computational Theory of Mind which, among other things, alleges that consciousness itself is a side-effect of the configuration of the brain to compute and process reality.

After all, computation is merely the processing rules of a formal game. Saying computational operations can generate consciousness by themselves is no sillier than saying that a game of Monopoly can generate consciousness. (There are some who have argued themselves into corners where they will affirm that such Monopoly games can be conscious).

It might be that some syntactic configurations might resonate in such a way to summon consciousness from another dimension. That is not my point, my point is the more obvious one: consciousness itself, qualia, sense in itself are obviously something different than matter.

Theres an unfortunate temptation to describe things that consciousness seems to interact with or do or correlate with, mistaking that to be an explanation of the sensation of consciousness itself. To do that is to forget the question altogether, replacing it with something trivial.

Matter over Mind?

To be clear, it is very obvious that material conditions affect consciousness. This is no different from how Hume admitted that factual statements can affect derivations of moral statements.

Chemicals can induce other states of consciousness. Injuries can affect the state of self-perception.

For a while I assumed the error of thinking that because these statements were true, that must mean that consciousness itself must be merely material as well.

This is fallacious reasoning because we can just as easily say that the physical components of the brain are receivers of a signal of consciousness.

In the same way that smashing a T.V. doesnt destroy the signal it receives, damaging the brain or distorting its physical reactions in such a way to affect consciousness doesnt mean the consciousness itself has an origin in the physical brain.

That might sound other-worldly, as if it entails consciousness must be something from another dimension, but its even similar to the way people approach their non-solutions in the Computational Theory of Mind.

Other-worldly

I will say that I have come to grips with the idea that consciousness must be something literally other-worldly.

Before pan-physicalists and atheists throw their computers aside in disgust, remember that this is almost a tautology or truism, and it is really the essence of my argument here. It also doesnt even require any more metaphysics than are required to remain consistent.

Physicalism and materialism assume that the core of the universe is familiar atomic matter and other physical forces and energies. Consciousness is simply something ontologically apart from these things.

In making philosophically physicalist models for consciousness, we are trying to build paper-flat two-dimensional scaffolding to hold an immensely oblong three-dimensional object. That might teach us something about consciousness in a pedagogical sense, but the operations of atoms and forces are just different stuff than consciousness and even with clever emergent arguments, never suffice to explain it.

It is one thing to say that complex computational systems can emerge from simple interactions of matter. This is a mere issue of complexity. It is a totally different thing to say that the very realm of the cognitive theater, including qualia and sense itself are mere complex atom-bumpings. This is an addition of that same third dimension.

While nearly everything in the universe can be attacked with a materialist model, and even though we can correlate matter with conscious states, the appearance of the qualia of things in the mind is not just something we can reduce to material corollaries, because the material corollaries are not the interesting or crucial aspect.

Youre already a dualist anyway.

There is an obvious sense in which even a rigid materialist should realize the wide scope of the universe is pretty wide, nearly certainly wider than we now anticipate.

Familiar matter and energy has formed the physical sciences, but that in no way means that part of, in fact, most of reality is actually other types of forces and substances.

Remember that modern materialism before used to be mechanicalism. Before Newton, many thought that atoms alone were sufficient to describe reality, specifically, atoms exerting direct force on one another.

Newton proposed an elegant theory that was involved an occult force: Gravity that acted counter-mechanically over long distances via an unknownand still totally unknownmeans. The theory solved significant problems and unified much, but its central assumption was other-worldly and totally unjustified and unexplained.

How can a force act over long distances seemingly instantly? The fact that we dont dismiss gravity immediately as spiritualism is only a testament to the multi-generational coping mechanism has made this new force mundane.

Now Newtons concept of gravity is thought of as being real and physical and within the realm of science despite the fact that it upended the physicalist assumptions of the day of how matter and atoms can interact.

All of this is to say that old-school atomists (Democritus, Lucretius, etc.) promoted a highly obsolete science that not even modern materialists endorse. At that, new occult and spiritual forces, like gravity, after repeated observations and theories come under purview of science and thus become physical even though they are clearly of a totally different substance than traditional atoms and matter.

That said, the universe has many different substances and forces that are not necessarily commensurable. They may interact, but that in no ways makes them the same substance. When we realize that, we have already dismissed philosophical monism. Some forces are familiar enough to make models of, thus they become unsurprising, regular and subject to science. Other forces of the universe might be wider than experimental tests can harness, so irregular as to avoid sensible-sounding theories and different enough to still seem miraculous forever.

So in saying that consciousness is a totally different substance, of a non-material reality and cannot be accounted for from narrowly material computation is not an unreasonable statement. I would say that it is a self-evidently true statement regardless of philosophical assumptions, and I think it would behoove people who purport to study consciousness to acknowledge it as such, rather than attempting to muddy the waters and reduce conscious theater to something it is not, so they can pretend to study it.

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Title: Why I Won't Go to Restaurants in 2023

PubDate: Fri, 23 Dec 2022 18:18:40 -0500

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/no-restaurants-in-2023/

Content

Ive decided after some consideration to not go to restaurants at all in 2023. You can call this a New Years Resolution. Itll require at least some sacrifice, pain, annoyance to myself and perhaps others, but Im going to stick by it and I think it will have a good effect.

Restaurants are a drastically over-used creature comfort of the consumerist economyhellip; even worse, nowadays theyre not even comfortablehellip;

Especially now that portions are smaller more expensive than ever, its hard to go to a restaurant without feeling cheated.

All of this is fortunate, though, since relying on the ease of restaurants is a vice. It is now easier than ever to quit it without missing anything but disappointment.

Here Are the Rules.

When I travel alone, I will flatly never eat at a restaurant, no matter what. I will pack food, or prepare food bought at a grocery store.

At time when I might usually offer to go to restaurants out with people, I will serve them at home.

Ill get in the habit of preparing and carrying foodnot snacksbut food when I will need it. This will include trips.

If I have not prepared food while out, I will go hungry. Oh well!

I have even already forewarned people in my life about my adherence to this.

Im not saying Im going to throw a Richard Stallman-style sperg-out when asked to go to a restaurant, but I will find a novel alternative. If I do go physically to a restaurant with people, obviously I will order nothing and eat nothing, not even free tortilla chips (because its not just about the money, either).

Things even worse that restaurants

Obviously take-out counts as a restaurant, in fact, is even worse.

There are some things even worse than restaurants that I dont use now and wont start. (I say this because some might be tempted to comply with the letter, but not the spirit of the law.)

I will get no take-out.

I will buy no food from gas stations, convenience stores or delis.

I will have no junk food.

I will also count coffee shops and other such things as restaurants and thus subject to exclusion.

What not Going to Restaurants Will Get Me.

The first and obvious advantage is that I will be saving money.

The wider goal is to make sure that I am more comfortable with preparing food for people on short notice, having spontaneous picnics, planning in advance for things and thereby acting less impulsive in food consumption.

It might be weird to unironically suggest in the 21st century that picnics can be an alternative to restaurants, but however corny they may sound to our ears, they are infinitely more social, customizable and economical. Doing all of this make a new habit to permanently displace compulsive restauranting.

My goal is not to minimize alimentary social outingsbut to improve them by minimizing cost and maximizing the possibilities of what I can end up doing.

How Rigorous Will I be?

People in real life have questioned how rigorous I will be in this resolution. Ive said I will reserve the right to go to a restaurant on a highly exceptional occassion which is certainly not a part of everyday habit.

For example, earlier this year, I went out to a nice restaurant with some friends and subscribers during Linuxfestthis is the kind of outing/event I might exempt. Even in those circumstances, I want to consider social alternatives to restaurant-going though.

Ive talked to other people and restaurants have become a continuing disappointment to many in the days of shrinkflation. Since I can barely go to one and be filled for less than $35, I dont think Im going to look back from this.

Title: Blockchain Blasphemy and the Technological Antichrist

PubDate: Sat, 10 Dec 2022 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/blockchain-blasphemy/

Content

Theres a meme YouTube video by Leonardo of Biz (here) where the villainous Bogs refer to their desire to attain something called The Akashic Records using blockchain technology.

This random aside not just shows the attention to detail Leonardo gives what would otherwise be silly videos, but articulates something deeply troubling about a war unfolding over Bitcoin, Ethereum and other blockchain technology, but also technology generally.

Most normal people see this comment and askhellip;

What are the Akashic Records?

In the late 1800s, there emerged a group of spiritualists and scammers called Theosophists, principally followers of the eccentric Helena Blavatsky.

This New Age religion was a mishmash of perennialism and invented secret eastern teachings (which Blavatsky claimed to have learned in a fabricated part of her life in Tibet), with significant parallels with other universalist sects like Freemasonry. It was one of the many spiritual vultures preying on the spiritually empty as the power of Christendom waned.

The Akashic Records were their idea of a cosmic repository of all reality, past, present and future. They contain every event of the universe from all past and all future. Theosophist psychics tried to tap into these records to attain universal and specific knowledge.

Blockchain as Akashic Record

To explain aloud Leonardos subtle joke: blockchains, as they come to maturity, are functioning as Akashic Records of our own invention.

Bitcoins blockchain is a necessarily public ledger of all past transactions, the origin of their funds, the wallets they interact with and more. People often erroneously think that the crypto in cryptocurrency means that information about it is somehow cryptic or hidden, but this is just ignorance.

Bitcoin is substantially worse for privacy than even the most corporate credit cards, since even then credit cards dont broadcast your transactions publicly on the internet as bitcoin must do for all submitted transactions.

As time has gone on and projects such has Ethereum have developed, blockchain technology is employing these public ledgers for an ever wide range of tasks: decentralized computing, contracting and much morehellip;

If blockchains continue developing as they are, they will gradually record and make publicly available every transaction, action and for that matteridle word of every human. There are projects and coins for every segment of digital life, including storing and accessing files, watching videos, interacting with the internet of things and more. A combination of greed, stupidity and neophilia are leading us to disaster world that might not be able to be undone.

The technologization of society is accelerating for most. Less and less of human life occurs without the filter, approval and overwatch of internet-connected technology. As more of this becomes part of the Blockchain, more of it becomes an issue of common knowledge.

A normal human reacts in fear at the idea that God the Dread Judge has a Book of Life with all actions and thoughts of all men and will judge them accordingly. A delusional theosophist might pine for the power that such knowledge would give them over others, but they neednt pine long, since this is exactly the weaponry we are creating and leaving in the open with blockchain technologyhellip;

Technology and Will-to-Power

The greatest threat to good programming, human freedom and humanity itself is the love of technology just for technologys sake.

There is no shortage of visionary programmers who can imagine niche uses for novel technology. But unfortunately for these people Can I? is a common question, but Should I? is fairly rare.

Pride and lust for power are the true motivations of many visionary programmers. It doesnt feel like lust for power when you experience it, but there is a very Nietzschean muscle a programmer exercises when he sees a large and exploitable dataset. When you see masses of metadata, and you know you have the means at your fingertips to create something new with it, the temptation is almost always too difficult to resist.

Only the most mercenary and depraved programmer sets out to write software

to enslave. Still, when even a semi-competent programmer sees an interesting dataset of GPS coordinates, cell-phone metadata, Bitcoin transaction data or something else, there often arises an insatiable desire to deploy this dataset in a clever and useful way.

This is the pinnacle of the useful idiot phenomenon. In design alone, the technology is morally and socially inert, but no technology is morally or socially inert in implementation. This is even more the case when many evil actors, governments, the media, organized power weaponize clever and useful projects to actualize private and hidden goals.

There is a deep undercurrent in modernity to have smart technology. Refrigerators and appliances often now connect to the internet and download software patches from their vendors. Simple finger-operated light switches have apparently been ruled pass, while voice-operated light switches that communicate with Amazon servers are the new thing.

The reason that people like Richard Stallman continue ending up sounding prophetic about the dangerous of proprietary software is because they are serious enough to realize that programming is the closest mankind has ever come to wizardry and dark arts. With such supreme power and with such a lack of oversight (either by writing closed-source code or otherwise), even the most noble programmer can be easily seduced into flexing their Will-to-Power to do the absurd.

The Antichrist and Digital Hyperreality

As we further encroach creating the Akashic Records by hand, this all might remind you of that one Voltaire quotehellip;

You know, that one that millennial gamers will know from the ending of Deus Ex if you decide to merge yourself with the omniscient and omnipotent AI panopticon:

If there were no God, it would be necessary to invent him.

The zeitgeist of modernity is certainly atheistic, but at the same time, every movement in it seems to bend like pliable reeds to the desire to create a God of its own design.

Positivism rejects or scientifically dismisses the very metaphysical reality of truth and falsity themselves. It then encourages the assumptive jump from personal or informational subjectivity to the denial of transcendent objectivity altogether. Since this is an absurd crime even against logic, we have a natural deep-seated desire to instead create a new layer of reality on which objective and undeniable truth can be restored. This is the newly created digital realm. This is mans electronic equivalent of Gods Book of Life which logs all truth in digital databases and blockchains.

Actual reality is messy, organic and is perceived subjectivelyAnd mankind is only a part of that creation. But in the digital world, we can arrange our new

lives with inviolable programs and smart contracts that have a new enforced objectivity.

Mankind is creator and omnipotent in this lesser reality, but our desire for power is so great that we want to elevate this lesser reality to something greater than reality itself. Wouldnt it be nice to have the kinds of superpowers we can achieve with computer programming in our waking lives? If so, why not insert our waking consciousnesses into this reduced reality to wield this fantasy power?

Worst of all, you now have a class of Jordan Petersonian intellects denigrating and obfuscating reality to such a degree as to make the new digital Antichrist sounds like it was what we were talking about the whole time! God has been reduced to and confused with the idea of God or the most powerful thing in creation. The mentalistic world of archetypes has become the world of digital imagination, which is now held up as a replacement for the very idea of reality beyond atoms bumping into each other. Were all theosophists! Were all Free Masons now!

It is now held as an ideal to create our Creator and imbue digital technology with as much power and omniscience as possible. People will soon unironically call themselves religious because they worship a created techno-god because they have been duped into believing this is what God always meant.

Its naturally common for Christians to interpret the singular final antichrist to be an individual person, but at this point, a much more obvious beast system to marvel at is a technological system in itself consummated in something that looks like God.

Transhumanism and Singularity as Pattern Extrapolation

This entire budding techno-futurist religion has a simple origin. The human mind sees patterns.

In every moment of history, every society manages to see patterns by extrapolating the past presented to them, just adding on a couple extra steps (also presented to them). Do not mistake your extrapolation of recent events to be a foundational direction of the universe.

For example, John von Neumann, the most notable polymath of the 20th century took the geometric proliferation of nuclear arms and their Game Theoretics seriouslyand unironically recommended immediate nuclear war. His obituary in Life (Feb 25, 1957; p. 96) says of his thinking the following:

[He] observed at that time: With the Russians it is not a question of whether but when. A hard-boiled strategist, he was one of the few scientists to advocate for preemptive war, and in 1950 he was remarking, If you say why not bomb them tomorrow, I say why not today? If you say today at 5 oclock, I say why not 1 oclock?

Thankfully most people lacked the iron-clad logic of von Neumann and we avoided nuclear holocaust.

In our modern world, this lazy tendency of extrapolation often manifests in a kind of Transhumanism or belief in technological Singularity.

This is a utopian or millenarian belief that we can eternally extrapolate geometric increases in increased technological or computational power to a point where technological improvement becomes instant, effortless, yet infinite. Technology seems to have significantly accelerated in human life, so it seems to these people that we should assume it continues to do so, apparently with the idea that there is no factor in human psychology, physiological, neuroscience or even economy that could ever be a principled boundary for this tumorous growth.

Transhumanists, as their name suggests, ultimately believe in what they might glowingly describe as humans transcending their biology and psychology or other cloudy terms. In reality, these people are pining for the death of humanity, or as some absurdly put it, human civilization surviving [sic] in human-created AI.

They imagine husks of biological humanity, perfectly climate-controlled by vaccines, augmentations, and directly-injected stimulation and entertainment, embedded in a casket of metal for their entire lives. They imagine human-created robots, then totally de-tethered from their creators, exploring the universe and installing robot colonies on distant planets. In some perverted way, they call this genocidal conquest of humanity humanity itself, or humanity improved.

This is the Gnostic Heresy reborn, but worse than original Gnostics, who at least believed in the structure beyond matter, and who consistently denigrated matter compared to it. These new Gnostics believe in creating this realm of ideas, but destroying and mutilating the human mind and body that they believe to be the very metric of value of this new realm. In a literal sense, they want to destroy nature, mankind and the universe as they know it.

Cucked by Inevitability

Transhumanists take a page from Marxs book in passing of their true desire as being a scientific inevitability. They argue that singularity will happen, therefore, by some leap of logic, it should, or even its many consequences or birth-pangs are therefore good. This is absurd.

If, after all, an asteroid were hurdling towards this planet capable of wiping out human life, only a moron refuse to act saying that Its inevitable, or Its the clear direction of history. At that, the trajectory of an asteroid is an issue of math, while any alleged trajectory of history is an issue of pure fantasy.

I mention this to say that transhumanists often try to pass of their fantasies of the future as being inevitable, when in fact, they are merely titillating ideas that appeal to their imaginations formed for years under the influence of interesting fantasy futurism in film, fiction and modern culture.

So, our state of affairshellip;

The influence of technology is at a local high point now. It has become over-encompassing enough to be reminiscent of omnipotence and omniscience.

In our godless age, this power naturally breeds a kind of worship from godless people. It provides not only a pseudo-divinity, but a new arena for a new objectivity that out-classes the skepticism of post-modernity.

There are psychological (and material) incentives for people to continue expanding the power of this technological system, and build it new powers to monitor and control people.

There are utopian and millennialist sects going by various names that concoct rationalizations to expand the power of this technological system, expand its range and shield it from questioning.

I will leave for the future why I so quickly dismiss the supposed inevitability of singularity. Perhaps in the next episodehellip;

Title: 'Based' Paganism vs. Christianity

PubDate: Fri, 29 Jul 2022 07:53:20 -0400

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/christianity-based-paganism/

Content

Ive been meaning to write about Paganism recently. I will frame it as a response to an email I received within the past day or so:

Hey Luke,

First off, I would like to thank you for all your efforts in making everything you know accessible to everyone. You have exposed me to some of the most thought-provoking people on the internet and Varg is one of them. I was wondering if you can write an article or make a video on what you think about Vargs Paganism in relation to you choosing Orthodox Christianity. I know that you briefly talked about it in one of your livestreams, however, I would like to better understand why you dont practice Paganism yourself. My background is Serbian and most Serbians follow the Serbian Orthodox Church, but after watching Vargs videos, Im conflicted. I agree with a lot of what Varg says about Christianity, but my father long ago told me to follow the Serbian Orthodox Church if I were to become religious. Im sure that many people feel the same way after watching Vargs videos, and your thoughts on it would greatly help people like me make up their minds.

Best,

redacted

I will sum up my answer to this email in bullet points, then explain what I mean.

Modern paganism is not a real thing and has nothing to do with paganism in history.

The most direct cultural link between modern man and antiquity is the orthodox Christian Church.

Truth mattersPicking a religion on personal preferences is brain-dead and self-refuting.

Your Average Pagan

Many people probably dont know who Varg Vikernes is, but since the email brings him up, I will talk about him as an example of where paganism leads. Modern paganism is not an authentic tradition handed down over the ages. It is an attempt of modern disconnected people to recreate or re-engineer a culture, time and place they have absolutely no contact with. This ultimately makes paganism a modernist Rorschach test where individuals can more-or-less create the religion they want.

Paganism with modern goggles

Vargs particular paganism is a kind of scientific euhemerism: he doesnt actually believe in gods in the way an ancient pagan would have, but that the concepts of the gods represent scientific or other knowledge. (This is where the placenta meme around him comes from after all, when he and his wife related assorted pagan myths and items to the tree-like appearance of a human placenta.) He has also reduced classical abstract spiritual concepts into hormones and other related things. In essence, he has created a pseudo-paganism that is compatible with modern materialism.

Varg had cited and recommended works such as Frazers Golden Bough as influential on his thought which is of a similar vein. This book was part of a wider movement in the English-speaking rationalist world to rationalize and explain myth. It goes without saying that I think this all comes from the assumption of modern man that all ancient people underlyingly thought like Neil deGrasse Tyson.

How long until legend becomes myth?

More plausible is the viewpoint Ive spoken of in works such as Hamlets Mill. It alleges that one specific prehistoric civilization used myth to transmit scientific knowledge, but being thousands of years out from that civilization, the descendant stories are distorted, partial and can only be related after extensive study. They allege that Hamlet stories are similar in origin and actually carry astrological information, including the idea of the procession of the equinoxes.

But Vargs quasi-euhemerism makes a much stronger claim, that all our forebears (as he tends to call them) left an entire encyclopedia of scientific knowledge in stories that have remained unblemished and mostly unchanged over thousands or millions of years since the Neanderthals, who he views as the Trve Europeans.

This stronger claim should be absurd on its face, as it assumes that over the millennia, there is little to no addition, subtraction or change of folklore. The Hamlets Mill model admits that this does happen, but Varg is dealing with a

much longer scale and often makes very specific claims about some myths. What I think Varg is truly doing when he looks at a pagan myth and sees a placenta, he is seeing statistical noise and fitting that noise to the many possibilities in his head. (I will also say that this is somewhat the modus operandi of many capital-T Traditionalists in the vein of Evola or Gunon.)

This is principally a response to the theories that Varg put forth around 2016-2018 when I would occasionally watch his videos. I'm sure it's very possible that he endorses things very different now, since this "paganism" is not anything concrete.

Is Christianity a departure from European tradition?

One thing Ive tried to emphasize in some places is the general wrongness of the idea of the cultural quantum leap or discontinuity between Prechristian and Christian Europe. This is a highly important issue for many putative pagans, because they view the change of Europe over to Christianity as perhaps the start of the now constant and perpetual leftist cultural revolution.

This is the idea, which most people and based pagans have even by osmosis, that the Christianization of Europe was a radical break from history and tradition.

This is true only on the Christian metric: obviously the salvation of Europe is a quantum leap. However, melodramatic pagans will lament that this is when Europe have up its European soul and adopted a Jewish or desert religion which put the continent on a totally different and out-of-touch cultural direction.

Pagan Philosophy and Christianity

Christian theology, including Trinitarian theology has direct and undeniable pagan analogues and imitators: Neoplatonism expresses a kind of theological trinity as well (the One, the Intellect and the Soul), albeit one more similar to Origens trinity where a hierarchy of the three persons exist.

In the cosmogony of the Poemandres, a Hermetic work, shows a pagan creation myth wherein God creates the world via his Logos, as in the first chapter of St. Johns gospel, which also has a trinitarian and monotheistic unity with God (differing from Christianity in its panentheism).

As I mentioned in the linked podcast episode above, Stoic philosophy is a component needed to understand the opening of the gospel of John and is part of the philosophical backdrop of early Christian theology.

Medieval esoteric doctrines and alchemy viewed all of nature as trinitarian, possessing body, mind, and spirit (salt, sulfur and mercury), which was related directly to the Triune nature of God. Even specific mystical sects like Mithraism or the many forms of Gnosticism are tied closely to the development of Christianity.

All of these intellectual strands were intertwined with Christianity since the beginning of the written expression of Christian theology.

A pagan now has to ask himself: if Hermeticism or Mithraism had taken over as a universal religion of Europe, would they loathe it like they loathe Christianity and view it as a radical departure from paganism? Note that Hermeticism had an alleged Egyptian origin, and Mithraism had a orientalist/Iranic origin.

Note that none of my point here is specifically that Christianity influenced or created these other philosophies or that they influenced (providentially) Christianity. What is important is that looking at it dispassionately, we cannot deem Christianity as some cultural departure from real European culture without also throwing out this entire philosophical tradition as a whole.

Medieval Christians would often look at Greek Philosophy as another covenant of God established to prepare mankind intellectually for the revelation of the Trinity. (Note also that Dante and others represent Christians who viewed the Roman Empire also as part of a divine plan.)

Ultimately, the Christian religion is non-cultural and thus universal/catholic. There are cultural aspects associated with it, but theres a difference between essence and accidents. Of those cultural aspects, they are nearly all European, not, as some allege, Hebrew or Jewish. Most of the New Testament is quite literally an explication of why this religion which accepts the Hebrew Scriptures is markedly non-Jewish and why Jewish practices like circumcision and sacrifice are sacrilegious.

So the view we should get from this is that Christianization was no cultural leap into an alien worldview, but something whose intellectual side happened slowly over centuries and would only be viewed as spiritual, not culturally distinct from its environment.

Which change is good?

Note that even Varg admits that religious interpretation and practice changes with the centuries. In his interpretation and even in his RPG, MYFAROG (which is really just an expression of his paganism and worldview), characters can have one of two Life Stances or religious inclinations: Seir or satr. Seir tradition, represents a kind of animism, witchcraft or spell-casting, while satr represents the worship of pagan gods. Characters can choose either life stance, but one can only change from Seir to satr, which is a representation of the alleged historical shift in early history from animistic to polytheistic practices.

If we accept this cultural transition as legitimate in terms of cultural continuity, on what grounds could we also mark as verboten a shift from polytheism to monotheism? After all, the pagan philosophy of Plato and Aristotle even from the earliest was monotheistic at its core, and even today, the worlds one remaining polytheistic religion, Hinduism only appears so on the surface, but has at its core its own monad and final cause: Brahman.

Tradition vs. Inventing your own religion

To learn of Christian theology, thus, is to set oneself down a road of millennia

of learning with often with no delineation between Christian and Prechristian thought. By the same token, learning of secular philosophy, even as an atheist might lead you to Christianity, as was the case with me. There is no obvious discontinuity, either in thought or practice.

But modern day paganism does indeed have such a gap. To be a pagan does not involve communing with a centuries-old tradition passed down generation-to-generation from antiquity.

It is modern people imagining based on T.V. shows, books and their own creativity what Prechristian Europe was like and then putting on their own imitation of it. They might see something they dislike in the world, blame it on Christians and then imagine a world without it. This invariably comes with retrojecting their own modern values and assumptions on the past.

After all, we Christians can sit down with an Orthodox Priest or grow up in a Orthodox household and have a direct, personal contact with a tradition and understand how people who are part of it think and act. We have no tangible contact with Prechristian European paganism, even out of intellectual interest. Understanding how Europeans truly thought and acted is an issue of cultural reconstruction and theory. Traditional folklore and practices are still very much alive, but they are now decked in a Christian garb. We do celebrate Christmas for Our Lords birth, but everyone knows that nearly all of the practices of that season of the many nations of Europe predate Christianization.

The Worst Possible Decision.

All this said, the absolute worst self-own possible would be someone who has direct and easy access to the Orthodox Church and abandons it or leaves it for a false religion that doesnt even exist off of the internet and has no organic connection to reality, like Neo-Paganism.

So my recommendation to the emailer above should be obvious.

Being physically close to the Orthodox Church is a huge asset, but even being able to travel to one occasionally is a massive grace. Everyone should be taking advantage of that as often as possible.

Pagan Gurus

Because it is ungrounded and ahistorical, modern paganism thus naturally exists as a kind of extreme Protestant guru-centered feel-goodery where since there is absolutely no tether to a genuine preserved tradition, a man can make up an unfalsifiable claim about what true Paganism is and sell it as legit.

I mentioned Varg earlier, who has concocted a paganism that consists in claiming that their lore and practice embed scientific information. He doesnt believe in pagan gods, unless were talking about belief in a very evasive and meaningless Jordan Peterson kind of way. If we could actually transport a prehistoric pagan to our day and speak to him, he would probably either be confused or bemused by this very modern worldview, but we cant even do this.

Most pagans are not based like Varg anyway (he lives a minimalist and traditional lifestyle in rural France with an ever-growing family). Most pagans are leftists who like paganism because they hate God and nature and morality and imagine that pagans were demented sexual perverts like they are.

Truth

Notice that I had specifically avoided the most important issue: Truth.

Ive done this because when people are asking to convert to something just because its based, Truth is unfortunately not necessarily their concern, so Ive first addressed issues that do concern them.

The reality is, thankfully, that truth is the most based thing of allAnd it is entirely cringe to believe in something because it sounds cool to you. If you think you can decide your own truth, you are no different from someone who thinks they can decide their own pronouns, literally.

Even in the email above, he refers to me choosing orthodox Christianity as if it were an issue of personal taste. If I liked pop music and people rolling on the ground, perhaps I would be just as justified converting to some Pentecostal sect. This is silly.

The greatest deception is that religion is this separate category about feelings or preference and not truth. Atheist and spiritual R*dditor Stephen Jay Gould put this in words in the modern era, calling science and religion non-overlapping magesteria, declaring in a laughable attempt at big-braned centrism that nothing in material reality is relevant to religion and nothing in religion is relevant to material reality.

This is strange because people can research the philosophies I mentioned earlier, Platonism, Gnosticism, Stoicism, Hermeticism and can analyze and critique them and look at them as models of reality perfectly comparable to modern philosophical assumptions and approaches. But we have been taught to view Christianity as this separate category, that cant possibly be a model of reality, but is a something merely moral or personal or spiritual which are all terms that have been debased to mean nothing at all.

A Christian believes that Jesuss resurrection was a true historical event, and a prelude of a general resurrection to come and that he established a Church and sacraments which are his vehicles for having man recover from sin within this life to prepare for his roles in the next. The orthodox Christian Church is an unbroken chain since that period, and oft built on yet older philosophical and liturgical practices.

If you find this alien or God unbelieveable, you can do yourself the favor of prayer and visit a priest and see what happens.

They dont even believe it.

To contrast, pagans do not believe in pagan gods. Their brains are 100% modern

and materialistic in mindset, and if they ironically say they believe in gods, it is out of some kind of Petersonian fake metaphorical belief in a concept or that Zeus isnt a person, but is some kind of abstraction symbolizing the weather or something silly. The only thing sillier is for them to claim that people in the ancient world didnt really believe in them either, but practiced entire religions meta-ironically for some social reasons. If they believe in a spiritual nature, it is not one beyond or above matter, but instead derived from it: it is psychological, hormonal, etc.

Modern paganism is neither a tradition, nor a religion, nor even a belief. It is just a new identity which supposedly flexes some kind of disposition to the world which is not even consistent across pagans because there is no basis for any of it.

Real Baste European Pagans

Christians, however, do believe in pagan gods. Christians have always admitted the reality of spiritual beings, including the demonic. You can take the Michael Heiser/Divine Council pill on this if youre interested: While there is only one Creator and Supreme God, he created many among his heavenly host, and originally appointed them to the different races on earth. Many rebelled and set themselves up as specific gods of their appointed races.

One of the purposes of Christs coming was to vanquish these usurpers, and thus paganism/polytheism, which obviously has been successful. (Note that the Book of Enoch in Chapter 10 prophecies that these fallen angels would be judged 70 generations after the Enochian period, which cross-referencing with the Gospel of Luke, it is exactly 70 generations until Christ.) Now the issues of faith are not so much polytheism, but heresy and then atheism, which is a significant enough change in the cosmic dynamic.

Title: Minimizing Liabilities Is Making It.

PubDate: Sat, 16 Jul 2022 12:10:08 -0400

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/minimizing-liabilities-is-making-it/

Content

The default way to look at financial independence nowadays is to think that means making a lot of money. Thats understandable.

But then you see stuff like this:

Or this:

It takes until 30 for a person to be as rich as they were when they were born. (And this is average net worth, median would be significantly worse.)

The longer you mentally analyze the second picture, the more depressing it will get. Obviously the negative net worth early in life is kids losing around $10,000

a year in value by going to college, but the truly depressing thing is that after that period, their net worth increases only by an average of about $5,000 a year.

That means they might have $5,000 more in the bank or $5,000 paid off of their student loans or $5,000 going to equity in a house, but no combination greater than that.

How does this happen?

How is it that people alive in the period of the highest and most productive technology are working more than Medieval serfs?

Lets put it in simple terms by defining making it:

Making it:

Earning or having significantly more money than you spend or owe.

Or in pseudomath:

income - liabilities = comfortability

To increase comfortablity, you can increase your income or decrease your liabilities. This is a simple equation.

By liabilities I mean:

the cost of food you have to eat to live

the cost of the place you need to live

the payments for goods and services you actually need (power, or perhaps a car, etc.)

debts

The problem I would estimate is that people focus all of their time, money and interest on increasing their income and focus quite literally none on decreasing their liabilities, which is actually substantially easier anyway.

In fact, the modern economy, including all the bad advice it gives to people can generally be thought of a system that is desperately trying to increase everyones liabilities within it. Financial libabilities, debt and others, breed even more financial liabilities.

The Lifestory of Basically Everyone Nowadays

Lets illustrate this with the story of most people you know:

Im going to the best college I can because everyone told me to.

I need to pay off my $40,000+ in student loans, so I need to move to the city and get a good job.

I get paid well, so I need a better car and other stuff to match.

I still have loan debt, car debt and now credit card debt, but now I have a good credit score, so Ill use all my savings to pay 20% of an expensive house Ill be paying off for 25 years.

Oh my boss wants me to humiliate myself for sodomy month or get the Coofid vaccine or the Mark of the Beast to keep my job. I have at least a quarter of a mil invested in my life here, so I cant just leave. Be realistic.

Yeah the economy is really bad and I lost a lot of investments. Either way, this is my career and what Im trained for. Itd be hard to retrain. I made the right choices, I just got unlucky.

Well, Im 60 and its time for retirement! Now that my body is broken I can start enjoying life!

Dies of seed-oil-induced heart attack.

Itd be wrong to singularly blame student loans for all of this, but there is a tangible sense in which opening up any new massive monthly liability to the system encourages people to open up more to cover for it.

No one is ever told that this is the inevitable end of increasing liabilities: you need more and more liabilities.

Which way Millennial?

Millennials come in two financial categories: around 90% of them are extreme consoomers who cannot not spend every penny of their salaries on subscriptions, plastic toys and coffee and seem to view the fact they get calls from collections agencies as some unpreventable outcome of capitalism.

The other 10% are the exact opposite: they are contemplating living in the trunk of their 1990s Corolla parked in the parking lot of their job site so they can save 97% of their income. When they plan on buying a house or getting married, they are quixotically salivating on how much money they can save on monthly bills.

The Endgame

I will go ahead and say, I consider the ideal not even to be rich, but to not need money to live a comfortable life because you have put yourself in a geographic and behavioral position where you can survive on as little as possible.

Either way, my mindset (as the second type of millennial) has always been How can I absolutely minimize the amount of money I need to live?

What is the cheapest place to rent?

What is the cheapest-per-calorie real food for me to eat?

What needs are not really needs and can I go without?

The implicit goal was to live on as little as possible: thats what actually maximizes your lifes freedom. If you can live on less than, say, $500 a month, even working

as a part-time wagie, you will be plenty to pay bills, save a significant amount and have lots of free time.

For young single guys in computer science, this is especially ideal, since your hobbey/craft doesnt cost anything to tinker with.

In my late twenties, right before I bought my house, I was living in a college town with a monthly budget including my rent of around $400 ($300 was rent $100 was basically groceries). Probably went over that $100 most months, but never by much. This is also when I started churning credit cards to make a significant portion of my little expenditure back.

Behavioral Patterns over Life

As youre saving money to buy/pay off a permanent dwelling place, most important is cultivating permanent behaviors that will reduce your need for money and the system.

If you take the high-income, high-liability route, youre going to be establishing wasteful antipatterns your early life and when you need to buckle down and root those out, it will be more difficult because it will be the egotistically trying task of going from showly and easy pleasure spending to a Spartan budget.

Its much easier to have a solid foundation of low spending. I said in that video years ago on getting Trumpbux that all money you earn and spend should be directly weaponized to decrease your reliance on money. Property, tools, plants, skills. These are investments much more substantial than investing in boomer stocks because they lessen your need for money.

Worst Case Scenario

As a passing remark, Ill add that the other benefit of focusing on minimizing liabilities is that it makes you significantly less reliant on the system and more robust in the case of disaster.

Training to get a highly specific corporate job is not going to help you in all possible scenarios in the way that simple the simple craftsmanship of someone who fixes their own cars and things.

Title: The hardest technical solutions are right in front of your face.

PubDate: Tue, 12 Jul 2022 16:16:31 -0400

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/obvious-technical-solutions/

Content

Nassim Taleb had this old anecdote of the sheer absurdity that while the suitcase and other bags had existed for lifetimes, it was only in the 1990s that people had the idea to put wheels on the things so they didnt have to haul them around airports all day with their strength.

It reminds you of the fact that while children in the Incan Empire did indeed have some toys with wheels, apparently no one thought to use the wheel to make a simple cart or wagon to use in town or on the Incas extensive imperial roadways.

The proper response to hearing this should be the deserved angst that right now, there are make obvious technological improvements we could make to improve our lives significantly. Even worse, in lieu of these simple and obvious solutions which have lain hidden in plain site for centuries, we have no doubt developed a lot of inefficient technology to fill in the gap.

Since I was recently doing tutorials on Hugo, a static site generator, its funny to think that through the 90s, no one really thought to invent a computationally simple static-site generator as they exist now. People moved pretty much directly from manually edditing HTML files manually into massive proprietary WYSIWYG editors and web frameworks that regenerate web pages on every single visit.

This lack of vision and inability to see the simpler solution has largely produced the slow-loading, content-minimal web of today and the bizarre culture of modern webdevs whose diets consist in anti-patterns.

The shame of Bitcoin

Recently there was an interview released of me at Monerotopia with the Crypto Vigilate team. Unfortunately, the video cut off and doesnt have perhaps the best part which I now remember: our discussion on the possibility of obvious solutions that could conceivably replace proof-of-work in cryptocurrency.

Bitcoin, ultimately is a self-reinforcing behavioral Nash Equilibrium that uses the logic of proof-of-work mining to establish consensus while still remaining decentralized. The thing is, anyone who is not a delusional fanboy has to look at proof-of-work as some kind of incredible weird and inefficient abomination.

To establish decentralized consensus, we have to have an increasing farm of the worlds computers performing computations that do essentially nothing outside of secure the network.

There is no magic force in the universe that has ordained that the only possible way to establish decentralized consensus is Proof-of-Work. Proof-of-stake is obviously an alternative to it, but one whose long-term game theoretic nature is still an issue of significant controversy.

Regardless, an alien civilization observing us might view the issue of decentralized consensus similar to how we view the Inca who never thought to use wheels to make carts. It will be pretty absurd if most of the worlds computing power will soon be dedicated to proof-of-work mining only for some bratty kid or jaded cryptographer to come up with an obvious other way to establish a self-reinforcing system that can verify decentralized consensus that doesnt require the waste.

Take-aways

Technological opportunities are not just everywhere, they are right in front of your face.

The fact that a solution is obvious and simple is not reason for ruling it out because Someone must have thought of that and tried it before.

Never be happy with technology that is inelegant just because there is no obvious alternative now.

Title: Obscenities are symptoms of weak minds.

PubDate: Fri, 03 Sep 2021 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/obscenities-are-symptoms-of-weak-minds/

Content

Over the past few years, I made the decision to totally cut obscenities out from my speech. You might actually be able to find recordings of me cursing four or five years ago, but as of now, I really stand by my decision.

Obscenities are the linguistic equivalent of an trashy emaciated person entirely decked in tattoos, smoking cigarettes and wearing a shirt with nudity on it. They'll defend what they do on the idea that it's someone 'their right,' or 'expression,' as if they do what they do for some lofty philosophical reason. What everyone else sees is a person who is not in control of themselves or their vices, in fact, someone who views their vices as a good thing.

There's the atomistic and nihilistic tendency to give an 'intellectual' argument for obscenities: 'What's so special,' the argument goes, 'about obscenities in English? They're just a combination of arbitrary sounds! They don't have some objective magical harm in them.'

But the 'arbitrary sounds' in an obscenity do indeed have a special place in human psychology. Obscenities are produced and processed in the brain quite differently from non-obscene language, involving the more animalistic/reptilian parts of the brain. When assembling a well-thought out case, there is really never a temptation to litter it with curses.

When a person curses, it's a direct indication that they are thinking on a lower, more reactive, more emotional level.

I get a lot of email every day and most I don't answer for time constraints. I've gotten good at filtering out emails, and I have realized that obscenities are one of the best indications of a low quality content. I haven't gone so far as to totally block curse words with Spam Assassin, but it is genuinely rare that I receive an email of any quality with obscenities.

All of this is to say that obscenities are a great indication of reactive thinking. When someone is cursing, he is thinking at least in part like an animal. In

deciding not to curse, I have decided to be quiet first, then only evaluate things calmly afterwards.

For me, there is extra reason not to curse because I am in a position of an exemplar for many people on the internet. The internet is full of 'snarky' people cursing profusely and creating the idea that all 'famous' people should be highly arrogant and emotional.

There might be times when it's proper for someone to react in righteous anger, but those are in reality so rare as to only happen in life-and-death situations. Instead, a lot of modern nihilism is becoming just as emotionally transfixed on minor slights and imaginary problems, thus one spews out curses as if one is fighting some kind of crusade. This makes profuse cursers not only the type of people who are reactive and hard to relate to, but indicates how disordered their priorities are.

Title: Every Web Browser Absolutely Sucks.

PubDate: Sat, 28 Aug 2021 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/every-web-browser-absolutely-sucks/

Content

The title explains it all, you don't even have to read.

There are no good, even passable web browsers. None. Not a single one even comes close.

The weird thing is this: making a good browser should be easy! Among the existing web browsers, you could assemble all the parts necessary for a passable (if not perfect) browser. No one has ever bothered to do this, instead, people assembled 90% good stuff and 10% junk.

Here I will list:

Features a passable browser must have.

Features a good browser must have.

Again, no browser out there has all the traits of even a passable browser, but we might as well list them all here for the record.

Features a Passable Browser must have.

It must actually work on the modern web.

Sorry terminal browsers. lynx, w3m, you're out. There is some role for you in scripting and dumping HTML email as standard output, but no can get along using a terminal browser unless they are purposefully limiting themselves to a very small segment of the modern web. I wish this weren't the case, but it is.

Sorry also to niche independent browsers like Dillo. Nice concept, but not usable. I don't think Dillo can even handle my simple modern CSS on my website.

Free and open source software.

No reason to explain this. Absolutely insane to use a program to browse the internet whose source code isn't publicly auditable.

No unsolicited connections.

This will be literally the easiest point to comply with, but also the rarest thing in browsers:

Don't automatically connect to Google.com or Brave.org or some stupid start page or analytics page or Cloudflare or any other site on when I open the browser or at anytime while browsing unless I type the address in my URL bar.

Don't automatically connect to an 'autoupdate' site, and especially don't pull updates from it.

Don't send analytics. Don't make analytics. Actually, don't even ask me if I want to opt in to 'bug reports,' I don't. If something breaks, I'll tell you.

If you want analytics, I want you to beg for it on an obscure Settings page. Tell me your sob story about how it helps you get funding. And I will still not give you analytics because I don't let my file manager, email client, music player, video player, text editor or any other random program monitor me for no reason, least of all will I allow a browser, which often handles the most sensitive information.

It's a statement of just how bad the browser market is that this is even something we're talking about.

Ad-blocking must come with the browser.

No one opens up a browser to view ads. This is just not why browsers exist. No human in all of humanity has benefited from involuntary ads. 100% of people would be better off with browsers without ads, therefore, a sensible browser should block ads.

This is no more controversial than saying that if you rent a server from a company, it should come with sensible defaults, like an operating system, a solid root password that a Chinese script-kiddy isn't going to guess and maybe a firewall.

Ad-blocking must be universal, so should other sensible 'add-ons'/features. HTTPS everywhere is a sensible universal browser feature as well. There are no places where using HTTP is preferrable to using HTTPS if available. If there are reasons to ever use HTTP only or to view ads, they are so rare as to hide them away in the Settings Menu.

Brave (Le Shill Lion) has at least done us the favor of blocking ads by default (it also has HTTPS everywhere). Qutebrowser has a notional hosts ad-blocker that allegedly blocks I guess some things, but you will still get an add-full browsing

experience. GNU Icecat has a lot of sensible default add-ons (I forget if it blocks ads by default), but in truth, only developers have any reasons to use bare browsers without ad-blockers and other basic add-ons.

Basic options!

How long has Google Chrome and its clones been around? A decade? Why has literally no one in that period had a problem with the fact that none of these browsers have an option to not store history!

No, not Incognito mode, I want to keep cookies, but I don't want stupid browsing history showing up whenever I start typing.

No, I don't just want you to not suggest previous sites, but still store them all for some reason.

Thankfully, Firefox browsers at least have this basic option. Brave does too. Ungoogled Chromium doesn't. Useless. I like that it doesn't send my browsing history to Google and all, but I also don't want it broadcasting it to the people over my shoulder when I type a url. I honestly imagine that the mandatory 'we must keep history' aspect of Chrome is subtle social engineering. 'Oh you shouldn't have that choice, you want everything you do to be stored for reference!'

Internet browser history is really obsolete.

For normies on the modern web, there is really less and less purpose of browsing history with every passing year. In the better days of the internet, back when people actually browsed the internet and you would see dozens or hundreds of different websites a day, there is kind of a use to a constant log of history, in case you vaguely remember seeing a site, but couldn't remember how you got there and you couldn't search because there were no search engines.

Web history is basically obsolete for 99% of people because:

They use only Facebook or two other sites and quite simply never see any of the rest of the internet.

Bookmarks exist and are widely used for the few sites people do use.

People can use a search engine to find a site.

They are daily watching porn or simping for instathots or doing other abominable things for which they will be erasing their internet history anyway.

No clutter in the browser experience and Neutrality

Brave. Lol.

I complimented Brave for adding ad-blockers to their browser by default. The issue is that they also continually add more and more and more stuff to their browser of extremely niche orientation in every single update.

Update Brave and there'll be some new Crypto gadget on the main screen which is probably making some kind of unsolicited connections to something or another.

Brave has been dutiful enough to allow everything to be disabled, but none of this is browsing related. I want a browser. Stop giving me stuff that's not a browser. That's why I liked the idea of the ad-block, but it looks like Brave will need a feature-block as well.

Aside from Brave, about every browser from Pale Meme to unJewgled Chromium has a distracting stupid start page that advertises your history or suggests inane sites. When I open a fresh browser window, unless I have specifically created an HTML page which I have set as my homepage, I want to see a clean virgin page. I don't want to see giant soy blocks that show a links to my bank account or the Bitchute documentaries I was just watching. If I want to get there quick, I'll bookmark it, thank you.

I want a browser to be neutral, not personalized. Or at least neutral by default. I don't want it to advertise new features and software. I don't want it to change when I visit a site.

Do not clutter home!

Browsers routinely make messes in home directories. XDG Compliance. Know these directories:

~/.config/ for configuration files

~/.cache/ for your cache

~/.local/share for share files

This is where stuff goes so 100 useless folders don't clog up your home when you ls -a. No one seems to have told this to browser developers.

Chromium browsers give you this useless ~/.pki/ directory. If you're using a Furryfox clone, they are going to force at least ~/.mozilla/ on you, but you'll also get something else. Installed Librewolf? You'll get ~/.librewolf/ too.

I don't know how hardcoded Google and Mozilla made this annoyance, but if you can deGoogle Chrome, you can use the proper XDG directories.

Dishonorable mention definitely goes to Pale Moon. Being an independent browser, you would think they would jump at being less annoying. Nope: ~/.Moonchild Productions right in your home directory. Capital letters and whitespace: a big eff-yew to Unix-based operating systems. (I think they made this lower-case now?)

Must be written in a sensible language.

Aw, Dang!

Sorry, Qutebrowser, you thought you could make it all the way right?

Hey, that's okay, there are a lot of great aspects to being written in Python: it's easier for people to play around with your config file and script things into it, but let's be real: you're slow and buggy and take way more system resources than a

browser written in C or C++. That's just not going to cut it for a mainstream browser that old boomers are going to be watching YouTube and Netflix in with 250 other open tabs.

Maybe if you were written in Go? Or maybe you could get compiled in Cython or something? Idk, but as it is, it ain't cutting it.

Of course I realize that Qutebrowser does basically everything else well. If I had a computer with more CPU power and RAM, I might use Qutebrowser. It has gotten a lot better over the years.

Features a Good Browser must have.

Now that we've ascended past the summits of the bare minimum, we might as well discuss what additional features every browser should have.

A config file.

I don't care if only 2% of people know what a configuration file is, you need one. You can keep your Settings menu for normies, but it's nuts that browsers think it's okay to get by without a configuration file.

Once someone has their browser configured, all they have to do if they change computers or want to replicate their settings is to move one file. Or for someone like me, who has people wanting to install my system configuration a lot, it would be convenient to be able to have a single text message that assembles a browser with sensible settings. You just can do that though. You can sorta-kinda do that with some Furryfox settings, but for a Chromium browser, forget about it.

Either way, there needs to be a simple text file that can handle setting settings, like:

Add-on lists including links to the source (similar to a vim plugin manager)

Key bindings and custom shortcuts

Bookmarks

Search engine prefixes (combination of the two above).

Graphical settings, color appearance, organization of tabs and buttons

Font, language

Config files, even if 2% of people are going to use them now open up a new world of sharable and editable settings. This will solve a lot of tech support issues as well, frankly.

Actually. . .

After the configuration file, every other feature a browser should have comes for free. For example, it would be nice to get vim-like key-bindings for mouseless

browsing, but that is really dealt with custom key-binds (and I suppose a link hint feature).

In general, I feel that once you have the sensible defaults above and configuration file, you really have everything. Browsers suddenly become programs with the same level of usability and customizability and non-egregiousness of every other program on the computer.

Summary

A browser. . .

Must actually work.

Must be free and open source software.

Must make no unsollicited connections.

Must block unsollicited ads and other sensible defaults.

Must have sensible options for history and cookies.

Must not be cluttered by features irrelevant to browsing.

Must not clutter the filesystem.

Must be written in a fast language light on system resources.

Must have a configuration file.

Tell me when a browser finally meets these requirements.

Title: Matrix vs. XMPP

PubDate: Sat, 26 Jun 2021 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/matrix-vs-xmpp/

Content

What are XMPP and Matrix and what makes them special?

XMPP and Matrix are two decentralized and federated free sofware projects for chat, including true end-to-end encrypted chat.

Users can either install the software on their own server if they want, but they can also easily register on any public serverboth allow any XMPP or Matrix user to talk to users on their server or on any other one. In essence, it works like email: you might have an email account on a different site than your friend, but all accounts on all sites can communicate.

In a world where most communication is done on centralized proprietary platforms without end-to-end encryption like Facebook, Telegram and Google, Matrix and XMPP both are permanent solutions to communication privacy. Even based boomerware like IRC has to play second fiddle to them.

The only question is, 'Which is better? XMPP or Matrix?'

Matrix vs. XMPP: Which is better?

After timely research and experience, I will say that XMPP is superior to Matrix. I'll talk about why here, but I'll firstly discuss Matrix's apparent advantages over XMPP.

There are some use-cases where Matrix is preferrable to use and Matrix is somewhat easier for normal people to start using. However, Matrix, although it is still end-to-end encrypted has larger metadata liabilities. Although Matrix is decentralized, there are many issues that make it too reliant on the 'main' Matrix.org server. It also has more significant problems in that metadata is spread from server to server.

Matrix's advantages over XMPP

Matrix is more normie friendly.

Although there are many Matrix clients out there, there is one 'primary' one, Element (formerly called Riot). Element is a lot more streamlined and easier to use than most all other clients, and it is available on all platforms. This is because it is an odious Electron-based application, but that it is a big advantage to be able to tell your friends just about one program they can use on all platforms.

Matrix now comes End-to-end encrypted by default.

The standard Matrix-Synapse server now encrypts all chats and private rooms with end-to-end encryption by default. This is not the case for most XMPP servers. For example, OMEMO encryption can be used with XMPP servers, but it usually requires extra setting up and many XMPP clients do not have proper or easy compatibility with default End-to-end encryption (you may have to manually select to encrypt communications for each chat).

Matrix's default functionality is more 'intuitive.'

If someone sends you a message, you expect it to show up on all your devices, not just the one that checks first. When you install a new application on your phone, you sort of expect it to be able to view previous conversations in the chat. XMPP does not necessarily work like this by default (I should say that some XMPP servers do allow this), but in general Matrix chats are really more like entire chat histories that multiple people can edit and sync.

This makes Matrix a lot more familiar in functionality to old AOL/Google chats, or things like Discord or Telegram, which people are used to and find convenient. XMPP can indeed do all this, but it requires more setting up, and you are more likely to run into unexpected things when setting it up yourself.

XMPP's advantages over Matrix

But all that said, as I said above, XMPP is better than Matrix.

XMPP servers are easier to manage than Matrix.

The default Matrix server software is atrocious. Trying to do something 'simple' like deleting a user account from the command line is frustration. You might have to open up databases yourself and do it manually. There is a distinct lack of configuration options in Matrix compared to XMPP servers and XMPP server usually have a good command-line interface to do basic things.

XMPP is lightweight. Matrix is big bloatware.

I just logged into a VPS where I host both a Matrix and an XMPP server. It has about 1G of RAM. Right now, 27.7% of my memory is hogged by the Matrix server, while the XMPP server is only using 1.4%. That makes Matrix a major resource hog, while XMPP is the kind of thing you can spin up on your already-existing VPS and not really have to worry about it.

This is no big surprise because the default Matrix server is soyware written in Python. While the Matrix team is allegedly working on a better non-Python server-side, XMPP already has many different kinds of server software to choose from, some of the more popular ones being ejabberd and Prosody IM.

Matrix is less decentralized.

This might be somewhat related to the above issue, but very few people actually run their own Matrix servers and instead, just use Matrix.org, which is the Matrix server of the official company. This means that policies and blocks issued by Matrix the organization can functionally disconnect who they want from most Matrix users.

Additionally, the default settings in the Matrix server configuration use matrix.org and vector.im. These sites thus get a lot of independent metadata from other unsuspecting instances.

Matrix is a metadata disaster.

It gets worse. Because Matrix doesn't really just exchange individual messages, but because it syncs entire chats to all involved servers, this means that while all messages might be end-to-end encrypted, the conversation metadata is known to all servers, including what accounts are involved, when messages are sent and other account information made public (for example, users can add their emails and phone numbers to their accounts). See more here.

That means that all Matrix servers, especially Matrix.org, has a huge repository of metadata. Although chats are thankfully encrypted, encrypted chat logs are synced between all relevant servers, spreading metadata far and wide, and nearly always back to Matrix.org.

Privacy with Matrix used to be even worse. Passwords used to be verified on a centralized identity server, and much more.

You're probably wondering how any of this could get any worse...

...

Take a guess. . .

. . .

Matrix is linked to Israeli intelligence!

Matrix was developed and funded by a company Amdocs. Amdocs is an Israeli company that has since moved to America and has near total knowledge of American telephone communications.

You can read about the fun history of Amdocs here. More about Matrix and Amdocs here.

Since American telephone records have 'mysteriously' fallen into the hands of Israel, there are many questions as how this has happened. Perhaps this Israeli company which has had many Israeli military and intelligence officers involved with it and which also has all American telephone records might be involved?

Actually, this is just like Matrix. Amdocs does not have access to telephone audio (so far as I know), they only traffic in metadata (when calls are made and between whom). Matrix functions the same way. Chats are at least end-to-end encrypted (which still puts this Israeli honeypot lightyears ahead of proprietary spyware like Telegram), but Matrix metadata is easily available to server administrators.

Now to be clear, formally, since 2017, Amdocs no longer is the open sponsor of Matrix. It is instead funded by a break-off organization called Vector. But Matrix/Vector has somehow remained very, very well-funded for a 'community-driven' project: they raised $8.5 million, that's a lot for free stuff! Crowd-funding for relatively unknown open source software projects is apparently much more lucrative than I thought!

(Of course, we all know that this is a baseless and widely deboonkted anti-semitic conspiracy theory as Our Greatest Allyˆˆ Israel would never do anything bad to us at all.)

In conclusion

Matrix is federated and free software which is end-to-end encrypted, but it's bloated and the company behind it might be a privacy danger. Using Matrix is indisputably better than using Telegram or Google or Facebook on nearly every count, but XMPP outclasses Matrix on pretty much everything.

XMPP is minimal software that is easy to run on a small server. It requires more setup time and has the Linux-like 'problem' of there being a lot of 'fragmentation' (i.e. choices), but XMPP is a much better long-term tool despite the fact that it might require you to set a couple more settings to get it how you want. XMPP is also more scalable and customizeable.

I do run a Matrix server because I had to move some Telegram-using friends to something better and I was worried that the world of XMPP might be a little much. Retrospectively, I think I could've just switched them to XMPP, and I

might still in the future, but Matrix is simpler for people to grasp and install if they don't know too much about computers.

How the XMPP environment can be improved

It would be very nice to have a cross-platform XMPP chat platform. Obviously I don't want Electron trash like Matrix's Element (although Element is intuitive enough), but when I say cross-platform, that might just be several different XMPP clients (one Linux, one Android, one iOS, etc.) that decide to go for similar design principles and branding. This might sound stupid, but it makes the environment accessible to people unfamiliar with it because they know that one program (or 'branding') they can look up and recomend friends.

Other note

I suspect some people will be a little upset I 'only' talked about Matrix and XMPP as chat protocols. In reality, both are highly extensible and can to many more things. I'll talk about that when I feel it's relevant, but most people looking into them are looking for an actually secure chat system.

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Title: Modern "Freedom" Means Being a Slave to Impulses

PubDate: Thu, 06 May 2021 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/modern-freedom-means-being-a-slave-to-impulses/

Content

What does freedom mean?

See this article in video form here.

Which of the following two people is more free:

A drug addict.

A average man who is only not a drug addict because he lives in a country where drugs are regulated or shamed in a way to make them hard to obtain.

Most modern people will have a kind of cognitive dissonance, a kind of glitch in their matrix here. In the modern view of freedom, freedom means the ability to do what you want without the government or society telling you what to do, so (1), the drug addict, should be more 'free.'

But at the same time, this feels wrong. (2) probably lives a better life. He is more suited to make more and better decisions. Someone addicted to drugs is highly constrained in the kind of life they have to live to fulfill their addiction.

Even extreme libertarians will probably say (2) is in a better place, but might chalk things up to (1) needing to have more discipline and they'll make up some

just-so story as for why unambiguously bad drugs, or pornography, or dangerous things should be allowed anyway.

Classical freedom

In reality, since the Enlightenment, we have had a hobbled understanding of what 'freedom' is. Enlightenment 'freedom' is only the freedom to perfectly follow the whims of impulses and vices indiscriminately.

The Christian tradition

Christians stated the classical view of freedom very clearly. Paul writes that all men are either 'slaves to Christ' or 'slaves to sin.' The modern man wants to retort that he doesn't want to be a slave to anything, but wants to be his own master, but there is really no such thing.

One can be guided by Christ, or more generally, by consistent moral principles, restraint and forethought. Or one can abandon the pretense of morality and by definition follow his impulses to fornication, substance-abuse, and general reckless living.

These masters aren't equivalent either. Being a slave to one is nothing like being a slave to another. Slaves to sin are wrapped up into incoherent and uncontrollable behavior. Following one's sexual whims might be inconsistent and thoughtless behavior that one likes one second and is disgusted by the next. It might mean someone exploding in rage and emotion.

This 'free' man, a slave to sin, is only bound by the practical consideration that he might get caught or shamed by 'prudes' and that might dampen his ability to follow his inpulses more.

Impulses are not the man

If we look at the modern world as if it has desires and goals for us, it certainly seems like it is trying to induce as many people as possible into being slave to sin. People no long have identity in who they actually are, but in accidental preferences formed over years of impulse-seeking: their sexual fetishes, drugs of choice, their favorite TV show to consoom or their favorite music they constantly pump in their head to dampen the possibility that an original reflective thought might occur to them.

More than that, these people often can't even fathom of life without their master sins, and retort in rage when someone dares to direct them otherwise or 'judge' them. They don't just have a kind of Stockholm Syndrome with sin, but they can't comprehend the fact the people are something deeper than their pleasure habits.

Control of Impulses Leads to Freedom

However if one can constrain his impulses, he will be free to truly sit down and deliberate and make free decisions on what is best to do.

This is where true freedom begins. The concept is totally alien to the coomer, the slave to sin, because he can't even afford the mental space to think further than his constant service to sin.

To him, it is merely 'me having fun,' versus 'some haters who are against fun.'

Slaves to Vices are Slaves in General

If you indentify with your impulses, it's very easy to get you motivated to defend them with the same impulsivity if you are told that they are 'under attack.' While impulsive people might be hard to be around as individuals, they are easy to control as groups and can be herded around like unthinking sheep.

People who are reactive in politics are always the losers, and what is an impulsive life but one that is entirely reactive and therefore controllable?

The Kingly State

With the classical understanding of freedom, the goal of social conventions, traditional morality and the good government is to increase true liberty by minimizing one's temptation to vice. People are born with some tendency to vice (original sin to Chrisitians) that can be easily made worse. The goal of normal society is to lead people away from lasciviousness and impulsive behavior. (That is clearly not the goal of the modern West, however.)

A drug addict is not free. A teenager who gets home from school everyday, closes his door and watches internet pornography is not free. A person who compulsively checks their social media feed when they wake up or are minorly bored is not free. A woman who sleeps around throughout her twenties and is left with nothing is not free. A boy who stays up late because he has to 'grind' on a video game is not free.

No one can say that these people truly want what they do: no one fully consents to any impulsive behavior. This is actually why in the Catholic tradition, sins of incontinence are not as grave as deliberate sins. It's not a fair game.

Either way, the goal of the church, or a moral society and moral government generally, is to increase freedom by being a countervailing power to inborn vices.

The point of moral instruction is not to restrain man, but to make him more free by eliminating the true causes of his enslavement: his vices, his bad habits, his sexual paraphilias, his gluttony and greed.

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Title: Conspiratorial Thinking and "Multiple Outs"

PubDate: Wed, 05 May 2021 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/conspiratorial-thinking-and-multiple-outs/

Content

How to do magic tricks. . .

Magicians have this concept called 'Multiple Outs.' It's actually how you can do simple magic tricks. Suppose you have a person pick a card and say you will guess the suit of their card.

They pick a diamond card and announce it, and you tell them to check underneath their chair to reveal a slip of paper that says, 'You will pick a diamond card.'

That might sound like a nice trick, but if they had picked a spade, you have another piece of paper under the fruitbowl that says, 'You will pick a spade.' If they pick a club, you unbutton your shirt to reveal a giant club written on your undershirt, etc.

In essence, for any possible outcomes, you have a response planned that seems natural and predictive. This is one of the ways that magicians do what they do, often with more complicated mechanisms.

Applications

Multiple outs are actually real magic.

You've heard the expression 'hope for the best and plan for the worst,' but the concept of multiple outs is that one should be planning for all possible outcomes, including those that you yourself might not even anticipate now.

Every business plan should have multiple outs. Your major life decisions should be planned with multiple outs. You should even tacitly plan dates with multiple outs, so that unexpected events can be met with a confident, perhaps even better replacements.

Multiple outs in political power

Any longstanding group in political power is by the mere fact of their survival sure to have mastered the sleight of hand of 'multiple outs.'

This serves not only to continue in political power, but to cement their power further by the appearance of inevitability. A ruler or ruling class puts themselves in a position to benefit from any possible occurrence: be ready even to use disaster to your benefit, as Obama's chief of staff Rahm Emmanuel put it succinctly: 'You never let a serious crisis go to waste.'

Conspiracy?

People skeptical of the state sometimes devolve into thinking that every major political event is in one way or another is planned in advance. This is because they don't understand and apply the concept of multiple outs. They see that their rulers are good at benefiting from any chaos or unforeseen events, so assume these events must've been engineered.

Look at the corona virus: it's a great example of an event that has hugely benefited a small elite: it has bankrupted small businesses in favor of Amazon, destroyed churches and mom and pop stores in favor of passively consooming

digital infotainment from curated social media sites and more. It is a rationalization of state location and contact monitoring and things far beyond what anyone dreamed of. It was a rationalization for sending out unsolicited ballots to unverified voter rolls which had very obvious beneficiaries. It has produced a cult of doomsday believers crying for the state to lock them in their houses and make them wear fetishistic masks.

Seeing all this and asking who benefits, 'Cui bono?' might lead you to think that the whole thing was planned: perhaps the disease itself is fake, or maybe it was real, but spread on purpose, or perhaps it was engineered. You've probably seen stuff like this, and while I won't dismiss this kind of thinking out of hand, it's unnecessary.

In reality, the ruling classes of the West have openly prepared to benefit from a pandemic scenario. COVID19 was deemed 'closed enough' to a pandemic, and the momentum of the system took over. It's not even that they wanted it to happen, but they were prepped to benefit from it as a contingency plan if it might occur.

The Conspiracy Rabbit Hole and the Omnipotent Cathedral

There are some people who see how the ruling class is in a position to benefit from every school-shooting, police encounter, foreign entanglement, dissident politician and everything else and thus assume that everything they see must be arranged in advance. There is a logic behind believing this: it does seem way to convenient for all of this to happen at what retroactively seems to the best time, but this leads people to the much more uneconomical idea that the System is so omnipotent that it controls every event and every reaction to every event.

In reality, our rulers just know how to use multiple outs. When you know how to do that, it seems like you are always in control, and by nature, people attribute a kind of magical power to you. All you have to do is stay cool and play it off like you predicted it all.

This is why 'the System' always seem to win.

The system knows how to play with multiple outs.

There is a canned response, or at least a reasonably ad-libbed response, for every event and every possible event. They are in a position of antifragility and can gain from nearly any possible event. When they can't, the media can at least throw enough mud on public perception to inspire apathy or confusion.

There are certainly portions of the System which are 'conspiratorial.' Major news organizations usually coordinate on what editorial line to publish, but in general, their entrenched power comes from a detached ability to be flexible in new events.

The omnipotence and permanence of the Soystem is illusory. It comes from that flexibility.

Multiple outs in your life

Even aside from politics, it's important to behave yourself in a way that allow yourself to have multiple outs. Business, social life, major decisions and in everything else. Never tether yourself to one option; that's when you lose. Have a smart response to co-opt anything that can happen, no matter how good or bad.

Title: The Problems with Utilitarianism

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Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/the-problems-with-utilitarianism/

Content

I originally wrote this essay in 2014 or 2015 in a Chinese buffet in Athens, Georgia. I've changed some of it and am re-adding it here. I talk about the issues with Utilitarianism and a bad book by Sam Harris.

Utilitarianism

At a dumb intuitive level, the 'ethical' idea of Utilitarianism in principle gets pretty close to what most people reflexively want from social-political affairs: the greatest good for the greatest number of peoplewho doesn't want that?

The problem is that that intuitive idea is incoherent. It sounds good, but there's not really such a thing as 'the greatest good for the greatest number of people.' If there were, it wouldn't even be actionable.

'Maximizing'

So the first problem is one any mathematician will realize right off the bat: it's rarely possible to maximize a function for two variables.

If we had the means, we could maximize (1) the amount of good in society or (2) the number of people who feel that good, but nearly certainly not both (if we can it's a bizarre coincidence).

It's sort of like saying you want to find a house with the highest available altitude and the lowest available price; the highest house might not have the lowest price and vice versa, the same way the way of running society which maximizes happiness is nearly certainly not be the way which maximizes all individuals' happiness.

There are some classic moral puzzles that bring this out: Let's say there's a city where basically everyone is in absolute ecstasy, but their ecstasy can only take place if one particular person in the city is in intense and indescribable pain. Or to put it another way, to maximize my happiness, we might need to make everyone in the world my slave and allow me to rule as I please. Although this

might maximize my happiness, it might not maximize anyone else's (if it does however, we might want to consider it).

The Well-being of Conscious Creatures

So I recently read Sam Harris's The Moral Landscape which is either a failed attempt to bring Utilitarianism back to life or a misguided book simply ignorant of what the problems with it were. I don't actually recall Harris using the term 'utilitarianism,' although that is really just what he's arguing for.

Harris repeats one mantra basically every paragraph of the book: 'the well-being of conscious creaturesthe well-being of conscious creaturesthe well-being of conscious creatures.' In addition to being repetitive, the term is problematic for important reasons. So Harris wants our Utilitarian engineers to maximize 'the well-being of conscious creatures,' but the problem is we can't just add up enjoyment in the first place. There's no way of taking my enjoyment of candy, subtracting the pain of a broken nose and adding/subtracting an existential crisis or two.

Now his hope is eventually we'll understand the neurology of the brain enough to do just that. I don't take Harris for a fool, and he does have a Ph.D. in neuroscience (obviously I am being sarcastic), but I think he's ignoring all the important problems either to appeal to a public audience or just to convince himself. We can study the neurology of feelings and get readings of neural activity, but objective neural activity is certainly not subjective experience. Twice as much neural activity doesn't mean 'twice' the subjective experience.

We can no better look at brain activation to understand subjective experience any better than we can look at the hot parts of a computer to see what it's doing.

You can't do math with feelings

Of course one of the problems of qualia/subjective experience is that they are necessarily unquantifiable: imagine how you felt the last time you got a present you really enjoyednow imagine yourself feeling exactly twice as happynow 1.5 times as happynow 100 times as happy.

You can't do it, and even if you could, you couldn't compare that experience with other experiencesyou can't really understand what it means to be as happy as you were sad a month ago, and that prevents us from actually adding up your experiences into one number to be maximized.

But again even if we could it would be impossible to add that number up with someone else's experience. Humans have different subjective experiences: caffeine affects me demonstrably different than other people, but I can't quantify that; some people are more affected by pain (to my understanding, women seem to have a neurology more pain-prone than men), but how can we precisely relate the precise ratios of every individual person?

And of course, although Harris wants to maximize 'the well-being of conscious creatures,' we have no clue what kinds of conscious experiences define animal life, or how many animals are 'conscious' in any recognizable sense. As Thomas Nagel noted, we can't even begin to imagine what it's like to be a bat, but to quantify their experiences and compare them to our own? Forget about it!

Douglas Adams in his Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy presented the idea of a genetically engineered cow which not only was made to be able to speak, but to enjoy the prospect of being eaten and encourage others to kill and eat him. Experience itself is not some kind of thing arbiter of morality. Pain, in fact, might be a negligible or incomplete guide to what is not good. Children have to put up with being drug around to do many things they don't enjoy. That doesn't mean some immorality in anything.

The philosophical problems here are so endless as to make any kind of objective application of Utilitarianism based on neuroscience far beyond even fancy. I will be so bold as to say that this will simply never be possible, regardless of what chips Elon Musk wants to put in your brain.

To repeat:

We cannot quantify any particular feeling.

On top of that, we cannot compare the values of different feelings.

On top of that, we certainly not weigh the subjective feelings of all humans or beasts against other humans' feelings.

On top of that, even if we could do that, we can't maximize for utility in such a way to maximize all individual happiness and collective happiness simultaneously.

Utilitarianism isn't just impossible, it's impossible every step of the way.

To be clear, these are not technological problems that a future totalitarian government might be able to 'solve.' There really is no coherent sense in which we can put a number to a certain feeling of happiness and subtract from that another person's feeling of unhappiness. Qualia are qualia. It's like subtracting the sound of an airplane from the color blue.

What Utilitarianism really is

Anyway, the tradition of Utilitarianism was always a failure, but it's an interesting sign of the times. The Enlightenment was a time of some (less than usually thought) scientific advancement and the idea was that as we began to understand the nature of the body and the stars and everything else, we could fully understand too human society.

Eventually we could engineer and control them all. But as fast as we learn things about the world, even faster do complications arise and we end up '[restoring nature's] ultimate secrets to that obscurity, in which they ever did and ever will remain' in Hume's words.

The only really unfortunate thing is that the ruling class of the West either doesn't know or does care. There's a cynical sense in which they are attempting to re-engineer or 'Build Back Better' the world on Utilitarian principles where every decision is determined to be acceptable by some centralized utilitarian calculus.

Title: Monero and Other Privacy Coins

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Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/monero-and-other-privacy-coins/

Content

As I said in other writings and videos, no serious cryptocurrency can function in real life which is not also a truly private cryptocurrency.

By far, the most popular of all these is Monero, which has already become the de facto currency of the dark web, but also of all cryptocurrency users who actually use cryptocurrency for purposes other than a mere investment.

Monero, however, is not actually the only private or pseudo-private cryptocurrency, and while I talked about its competitors in a recent stream, I think it's worth putting in words for a reference.

Monero's Competitors

Zcash is Trash

Optional privacy is no privacy at all.

Zcash (ZEC) is often shilled as a Monero replacement. On the surface it actually sounds great and unambiguously better: it has a clever a zero-knowledge proof technology called zk-SNARKs which can store and prove transactions in the blockchain in a private way. zk-SNARKs are generally superior to Monero's somewhat ragtag triad of ring signatures + stealth addresses + ring CT to anonymize transactions and they are more scalable.

zk-SNARK is short for 'Zero Knowledge Succinct Non-interactive ARgument of Knowledge.'

Zero Knowledge It is private.

Succinct Referring to computation time.

Non-interactive In some earlier implementations of the technology, the interacting parties must exchange information and negotiate in turns, while zk-SNARKs can occur instantaneously.

Zcash, however, has two major problems, one substantial and one accidental (in the Aristotelean sense).

The substantial problem is that zk-SNARKs are not fully trustless: they require a trusted setup where public parameters are generated and if not properly disposed of, the initial developers could use that knowledge to produce infinite money without anyone knowing. This sort of defeats the purpose of having a decentralized cryptocurrency and while the rest of the currency is decentralized, that gaping hole certainly isn't.

The accidental problem (or maybe incidental problem in modern English) is that Zcash is only optionally private. The vast majority of ZEC transactions are not 'shielded' with the zk-SNARK technology, but are as public as a Bitcoin transaction. This allows a third-party to uncover the 'private' transactions by a process of automatic process of elimination.

Zcash, while is created valuable technology, is simply not a private currency and is not a valid competitor to Monero.

Pirate Chain

Pirate Chain (ARRR) is a minor privacy coin that has mooned significantly recently popping up from 30 cents to 14 dollars or so (it's halved since I started writing this article though). Pirate Chain uses the zk-SNARK technology, but unlike Zcash, uses it mandatorily (with optional transparent transactions like Monero via the private view key).

Pirate Chain has two big issues though. The first is what I mentioned before: zk-SNARKs as they have been implemented in ZEC and ARRR are not trustless. They require a setup in which theoretically, if the public parameters of the system were known to some inside party, they could print an infinite amount of the currency with absolutely no way that any other people could know.

Even if you trust the Pirate Chain developers, Pirate has another pretty undeniable problem: 90% of ARRR has already been mined and is in circulation! Yep, you heard that right: A minor niche alt-coin which has existed for only three years was put together in such away that now as big of a proportion of it has been mined as has been mined of Bitcoin in over ten years!

That means that that 90% is highly aggregated in the wallets of the two and a half people who knew of ARRR in this period, and anyone adding to the market cap is mostly just contributing to these people's bags. Even if Pirate Chain had great trustless technology (which is doesn't) it has not been set up equitably, but in a way that enriches early adopters to an extreme degree. Expect to get dumped on if you buy this stuff.

Honestly, if you want a better, more honest cryptocurrency, you could just take the Pirate setup and give it a slower and more sane emission. That would be a better choice than ARRR itself.

Monero + Dogecoin + Bitcoin = Wownero

website meme site

Wownero is a joke currency. It's literally a fork of Monero with Dogecoin aesthetics and some minor additions. Like Pirate Chain, it also has surged significantly recently (from 2 or 3 cents to more than a dollarbeating out Dogecoin as a pump-and-dump for sure).

Weirdly enough, Wownero is probably the best of the alternative privacy coins that I've mentioned so far. It's trustless, unlike the zk-SNARK coins, but also has some nice features.

It was created somewhat as a satirical response for another privacy coin, MoneroV, which was just Monero with an initial coin offering and forked from the same blockchain (which ruins the privacy of users on both chains because it becomes easier to triangulate on when outputs are actually spent).

Since Wownero is a 'joke,' it actually has integrated new technology and helpful additions before Monero has, since the Wownero developers are doing it all fast and loose. Ironically, that can be good.

One principle division between Monero and Wownero is that Wownero is more like Bitcoin in that it has a totally fixed supply, while Monero has tail emission. Some people have criticized Monero for tail emission, arguing that it is unnecessary and inflationary. I am not sold on either side: the game theoretics of this has never truly played out, but Wownero might actually be something to look into if you like Monero, but think it's 'inflationary.' Regardless, Wownero's whitepaper and roadmap on their website are something that everyone should read and take seriously.

Again, the currency is sort of a meme, but it is what it is. I decided to start taking Wownero donations on my site a while ago, just for fun.

Suterusu and the Suter Token

website

Now the ideal private currency would have the simple and scalable zk-SNARK technology implemented in a fair way and hopefully started in some novel manner that is truly trustless. Suterusu is one potential candidate for this kind of system. Behind it is a novel idea of zk-conSNARKs which can be read about in their whitepaper, their yellowpaper and a document on Suterusu architecture

This technology hasn't been extensively vetted, but it has the potential to solve all the issues in privacy coins.

Suterusu isn't quite meant to be an analog of Monero. The token itself is actually just an Ethereum token. In fact, this might be the interesting part: Part of its system is that it can provide zk-conSNARK shielding to other currencies that support smart contracts. You can use Suter to transact with Ethereum privately, for example.

The Suterusu system, however is not perfect as far as I'm concerned. It isn't a self-propelling decentralized system in the way that Bitcoin or Monero is. That

makes is regulatable and subject to human whim in a way a cryptocurrency should not be. It is a designed system with dev taxes and even regulatory compliance that includes blacklisting.

zk-SNARKs vs. zk-STARKs

In addition to the zk-SNARK system used in Zcash and Pirate, there also exists zk-STARKs, which like zk-conSNARKs allow for a trustless setup. Whitepaper.

To repeat, zk-SNARK stands for 'Zero Knowledge Succinct Non-interactive ARguments of Knowledge.' zk-STARK stands for 'Zero Knowledge Scalable Transparent ARguments of Knowledge.' Scalable because it scales better than zk-SNARKs and transparent because it has a trustless setup.

I do not know of a currency project that uses this technology now. Like zk-conSNARKs, it's only a couple years old.

The ideal privacy coin

Would be one that:

Is actually private.

Is trustless.

Is highly scalable.

Is truly decentralized and unmanaged by a singular entity.

Has reasonably fair emission/mining schedule.

Monero gets only half credit on 3, but full points on the rest. Wownero is the same, although perhaps it should be taken less seriously as a Doge-tier joke. Zcash fails on 1 and 2. Pirate Chain fails on 2 and 5. Suterusu has great tech, but flounders on 4.

So the recipe for an ideal currency is here. It is one that implements the zk-conSNARK technology of Suterusu or zk-STARKs (provided that such technology is appropriately vetted), but does so in a way without centralization, dev taxes and other self-refuting silliness.

This ideal currency might just be Monero itself, to my understanding Monero has contemplated integrating zk-STARKs as they become more well-travelled. Such an addition, if it works, would drastically improve the scalability of Monero even if it might require somewhat of an overhaul.

Title: Monero Maximalism: Or, How Bitcoin Is a coin

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Content

The Biggest Problem with Cryptocurrency

Most normal people hear the word 'cryptocurrency' and assume that means that they are 'cryptic' or 'private,' but that's actually a huge, perhaps the hugest misunderstanding of our time and it has some big consequences. The 'crypto' in cryptocurrency merely comes from its cryptographic nature.

When it comes to actual privacy, cryptocurrencies are an unmitigated disaster: All transactions and wallet balances are easily viewable on the necessarily public blockchain.

This might not seem like a problem to some, and there are also some who will retort with 'Well, I'm not doing anything illegal so it doesn't matter to me.'

But here's the thing: Every currency in human history has been totally private, so we have no other similar disaster scenario to even compare this to.

American dollars are centrally financially controled, but we can transact without that being public information. Even when using a Visa or Mastercard with your bank, Visa or your bank might know of the transaction, but it isn't broadcast publicly to the entire world like Bitcoin or other cryptocurrencies.

Bitcoin is therefore a unique privacy disaster that we can't even anticipate. No cryptocurrency is widely used enough as an actual currency for people to really feel the burn of this, but this opens up huge liabilities for every human on the planet. You might think the American dollar is a NWO/Satanic/Mark-of-the-Beast currency that will take away your freedoms, but let me tell you that Bitcoin as it is is far worse!

The Disaster of the Bitcoin Future

Here's some of the things we can expect in a world running on Bitcoin:

Your personal budget, income and bank account is necessarily public information.

Every business's expenditures and payroll are now necessarily public information. Everyone in the world knows how much everyone makes and know what suppliers each business transacts with. Trade secrets are a thing of the past. Employee privacy is a thing of the past.

Consumer privacy is a thing of the past. Everyone knows how much money everyone spends everywhere else.

Even giving money to friends for favors or help is visible to the IRS. This makes easy micromanagement and taxation of even minor things that might not be plausibly taxable now.

Nearly every privacy law is rendered unenforceable and useless by Bitcoin.

No sane person would volunteer to reveal all their bank accounts, transaction histories, spending habits and thereby physical movements for no reason to every

government and business in the world. But if you use most cryptocurrencies, that is exactly what you're doing.

It will be even worse.

Losing personal privacy is one thing. Maybe you don't even mind a world where eveyone is continuously 'doxxed' and bombared with perfectly targetted ads a l Minority Report.

More important than that is systemic privacy. In a system with glass walls like Bitcoin, criminals, governments, corporations and regulatory agencies realize that it is very easy for them to abuse and exploit people. Expect the maximum amount of extortion, the maximum amount of taxes on increasingly mundane things and the maximum amount micromanagement.

While you might not be able to imagine in your mind's eye all the terrible things that might happen with a fully monitorable currency, needless to say, it will contain what are, in effect, indescribable Lovecraftian monsters from the blackest Stygian depths. Bitcoin is the opposite of freedom. It is giving a carte blanche to all the world's worst people to prey on innocents.

The Solution: Monero

Monero (also known by its ticker 'XMR') is an exception to this.

Monero is a digital currency that has the blockchain technology of Bitcoin, but has in its core very smartly designed tech to keep the transactions on this public blockchain totally opaque. It takes what we've learned from Bitcoin and makes a complete project that can function, in fact is functioning in real life.

Firstly, the technologies which make the Monero blockchain private:

Ring signatures to protect sender privacy. All transactions are jointly signed by not just the actual sender, but ten other addresses. Security by obscurity and plausible deniability.

Stealth addresses to protect receiver privacy. Instead of one address on the blockchain, you technically have a different address for every single transaction and only by your private view key can you see that they are yours.

Ring confidential transactions to obscure the amount sent.

None of this means any complication for the user. Monero works just like any other cryptocurrency and if you use the default graphical Monero wallet, it's just as easy to use Electrum or something else for Bitcoin.

Monero is for normal people

Monero is often portrayed as being subversive because it is coming to totally replace Bitcoin on the dark net for illegal transactions. It often has a reputation associated with those potentially criminal purposes it could be used for (same thing with Bitcoin before blockchain monitoring became a science). Monero is

not doing anything illegal that cash couldn't do beforehand, but there's a more important point:

Much more evil can be done with public transactions than private transactions: they can cause blackmail, rumors, gossip-mongering, witchhunts, stalking and targeted robberies and attacks. Seasoned criminals know how to juggle Bitcoin and other non-cryptic cryptocurrencies to avoid compromising privacy; normal people do not and can fall prey to some of the worst things just by using Bitcoin for normal things in normal ways.

At the end of the day, it's not Monero that's weird or subversive or niche, it's Bitcoin and all other cryptocurrencies. Privacy is a bare minimum for any functioning currency. Currency users deserve that and no currency could function without it. The dollar, the euro, the renminbi and every other currency by definition has the same privacy features as Monero. Bitcoin just doesn't have that.

Monero solves all of Bitcoin's other problems.

Bitcoin also has other drawbacks:

Bitcoin block size is limited to such a small size that spenders have to compete with massive fees to get their transactions processed. It often takes $10 of Bitcoin to send $5 of Bitcoin.

It is unclear if the Bitcoin have incentives to continue once all Bitcoins are mined.

Bitcoin mining is increasingly centralized and requires extreme specialty ASIC hardware to compete.

All of these pale in comparison to the privacy issue, and a lot of smoke is generated by random coins trying to solve these issues, but Monero has a solution for them all.

1. Monero has low transaction fees.
   Monero has variable block size that avoids this issue as well, as long with a disincentive for large blocksizes to prevent spurious transactions (that could otherwise be theoretically used in an attack to compromise network privacy).
   2. Monero will be mined forever.
      The second issue is the big question mark behind the whole Bitcoin system. Once all Bitcoins are mined, will miners continue to process transactions if they are paid by fees only?
      This isn't an issue for Monero because there is never a point where the block reward for mining is zero. It will eventually stagnate at 0.6 XMR for eternity, which is a supply inflation which approaches zero over time and avoids the issue of no block rewards. This is called tail emission.
      Note also that any solution to Bitcoin's first problem above, will necessarily exacerbate the second problem. If you solve the fee prob-

lem, you make the mining incentive problem worse. If there is the Lightning Network or something else that reduces Bitcoin's fees dramatically, the chance of those lower fees maintaining miners will decrease dramatically.

I will say, if you think that the capped supply of Bitcoin will work out fine and might be better, you can still have the benefits of Monero with Wownero, which is a Monero fork with a capped supply and doge-tier memes (it also has a higher ring signature size of 22 which might theoretically be better for privacy (or overkill)). (See on Coinmarketcap) They also have a meme site.

3. Monero stays decentralized by avoiding mass-mining.

    Monero is specifically designed to avoid allowing specialty hardware (ASICs) participate in mining. This makes individual mining on consumer computers more possible for longer and makes it hard to farm Monero. They use a technology called RandomX to do this.

    Other Monero Perks

    In short, Monero is cryptocurrency done right. Bitcoin was a great proof of concept, but Monero fixes all the issues that the Bitcoin project brought to attention.

    There are yet more good features of Monero that are worth mentioning:

    Optional Transparency with Private View Keys

    In some cases, you might not want privacy, but transparency with Monero. Suppose you're running a kind of non-profit that want's to proudly show all their financials to potential donnors. Monero allows this too with Private View Keys. You can publish your private view keys on your website for your transactions to visible to whoever has them.

    Monero is actively developed and improved.

    Monero users and developers are constantly trying to improve, break and stress-test the technology. A lot of the features I've mentioned here have been added to Monero since its founding. If you want to have an in depth look at the history of Monero's development and technology, you can see this video series 'Breaking Monero' where some guys overview how Monero has overcome previous issues to become the prime privacy coin of today.

    Using and Holding Monero

    If you're reading this, I'll assume you're at least superficially familiar with cryptocurrencies and probably have some Bitcoin. Even if that's not so, just follow the links and you're smart enough to get started.

    Wallets

    Get a Monero wallet here from their main site. Write down and store your wallet seed where you will never lose it.

    Getting Monero

The first thing I recommend everyone should do is put your public address on your website for donations and produce high-quality writing and other website content. Monero users will usually be more likely to send small Monero donations since transaction fees are low. This also increases the profile of Monero in the eyes of anyone who sees it, which is a good costless investment for you now. Cryptocurrencies are driven by networking effects. Note that you can make a QR code with qrencode or an online generator if you're a true-blue normie.

The unofficial site Monero.how lists many exchanges where you can exchange Bitcoin or Ethereum for Monero and store it on your private wallet, including many that don't require KYC (sending in an ID).

The site Local Monero is even an anonymous service where you can mail in cash to exchange with a trusted Monero vendor or vice versa.

I also recommend using Bisq for the highest level of privacy. It is a peer-to-peer and totally anonymous exchange which even creates its own Tor service automatically. You can exchange XMR for BTC there too.

There are also Bitcoin/Monero atomic swaps in the works. This is something very new, but when it happens and goes fully public, you might expect a lot of value in Bitcoin moving over into Monero.

Use now or to HODL?

They also keep a small list of the growing number of services that accept Monero. Everything from online services, to houses, to computer parts and more. I also keep a Monero donation address public and recommend others to do so as well. Since Monero transaction fees are so low, microtransactions and small donations are easy.

Although if you're persuaded by my case here, you might just want to HODL Monero for the most part and expect that it will rise. As I'm writing this (April 21, 2021) Monero has increased a lot recently in the ongoing bullrun, but it is still proportionately far lower than it was in comparison with Bitcoin in the 2017 run. I have no clue whether it will moon or crash hard at the end of the bullrun or anything, all I can say is that I think the technological fundamentals are far better than Bitcoin and all other currencies and its only getting scarcer.

What separates Monero from everything else is that it is a gimmickless currency that has all the bare minimums of privacy. It is Bitcoin perfected. It's what Bitcoin should've been. That's it.

Title: We Want Our 4 Causes Back!

Content

Aristotle, in his Physics argued that there are four causes behind everything that exists. These causes answer the question of 'How' or 'Why' something is the way it is.

The Material Cause

The material from which something is made. E.g. the stone of a statue.

The Efficient Cause

The external force that causes something to be made. E.g. the artisan and his tools who make a statue.

The Formal Cause

The form or plan of the thing made that define it. E.g. the artisan's written or thought blueprints or sketch of plans for how to make the statue.

The Final Cause

The goal and reason of the thing. E.g. the purpose for which the artisan is making the statue.

If the statue lacks any one of the four causes, it will not be made.

The Demise of the Formal and Final Causes

If you want to point your finger at a single philosophical change that defines the shift from the Aristotelean worldview of antiquity and the Middle Ages to the materialism of modernity, it is the rejection of the Formal and Final Causes in the early Enlightenment.

Just ask your modern brain: 'Does everything really have a purpose?' You will probably reflexively think back 'No,' therefore, you do not believe in a Final Cause to everything. The same is true of the Formal Cause, both of them seeming to assume that there is a kind of conscious agency behind the action. That isn't strictly speaking how Aristotle intended them, but that's how they are interpreted through modern goggles.

You can see their rejection as early as the 1600's: Francis Bacon in Novum Organum pushed aside the Final Cause as only being only suitable for inter-human behavior. The Formal Cause, he dismissed merely as desperata 'hopeless.' He actually dismissed the vocabulary of the other two causes as being superficial and an irrelevant distinction too, but philosophically, they are still retained in his philosophy by other terms.

In any case, modern people do not believe in Final and Formal Causes, or if they do, not for everything in the cosmos. For Aquinas and others in the

Aristotelean world, the question of whether the universe has a purpose or a formal plan is a kind of tautology. Of course it does! Everything non-random does in Aristotelianism.

The Final Cause in Nature?

Now our post-materialist view of the Final Cause is sort of different from Aristotle's original view. We have to remember that Aristotle viewed grammar and cognition as something that in some way was directly reflective of reality itself. Compare this view shared with the so-called 'Speculative Grammarians' of the Middle Ages, 'speculative' coming from the Latin word speculum 'mirror', since grammar reflects reality. This common strand stretches from Aristotle to those influenced by his work like Priscian and Bacon (Roger (who was based), not Francis (who was p. cringe)).

Nowadays we atomize questions like 'Why' to the point that even causality itself doesn't mean anything and is a mere human cognitive convention, but for Aristotle, the linguistic existence of 'Why' questions means that there is a legitimate logical equivalent to 'Why' in reality.

Aristotle originally had argued that it is appropriate to refer to the Final Cause of something whenever it is not due to randomness or spontaneity. The example he uses is the growth of human teeth: there is no variance in where the molar and incisors grow within the human mouth. Everything appears where it's 'supposed to' and we can assume that there is some kind of Final Cause behind this.

If different shapes and sizes teeth grew in different locations of the mouth, then it would be appropriate to talk of them as lacking a Final Cause. Things that appear randomly and inconsistently do not necessarily have Final Causes, but if something happens invariably, we can trust that it has a Final Cause.

Darwin 'Got It Wrong' too?

So how far are moderns willing to take the rejection of the Formal and Final Causes?

One of my old Ph.D. advisors, Massimo Piatelli-Palmarini wrote a book with Jerry Fodor called What Darwin Got Wrong. You can withhold your kneejerk reactions; it's not a creationist book or anything, but it almost ended up being as controversial—it's a critique of Darwinian natural selection on 'philosophic' grounds.

I will stultify one of the main arguments for brevity's sake: 'How can we reasonably talk about evolution as a goal oriented process when we have admitted already that speaking of Final Causes is illegitimate?' Massimo and Fodor do not use the Aristotelian terms, (instead they talk of Gould's spandrels) but that's what they mean.

Evolution would only have been 'scientific' in Medieval Europe.

Darwinian natural selection is actually a kind of cheat idea for materialism. In

order to understand how humans have arisen from common descent with other animals, we want to have a narrative of why we speak, why we are bipedal, why our bodies are mostly hairless, etc. etc. Natural selection offers an answer without reference to a conscious incremental designer (God), but it smuggles back in the Final Cause: 'This evolved to do that.'

But if we actually limit ourselves from talking in purpose-driven/Final-Cause statements, the most communicative 'scientific' thing we can say is 'Humans share a common ancestor with other animals, but we became different.' The issue of 'Why' is dreaded 'metaphysics.' In truth, we actually need a Final Cause to understand anything. The Final Cause, as Aristotle notes, is really the most important cause, because understanding it is key to understanding something in its greater context. Understanding something intuitively largely amounts to knowing its Final Cause. Darwinism came to be accepted as a theory because it cleverly smuggled in illegal metaphysics that we were having withdrawal symptoms for. When you really think about it, this totally withdraws Darwinian selection from the ledger of supposedly scientific topics if you took such standards seriously (I don't).

The funny thing is that people can easily be made to become hyper-material anti-metaphysicians or lax on everything depending on circumstances. Fodor and Massimo partially wrote their book as a critic of 'adaptationism' and evolutionary psychology, which were and still are bugaboos to the political left because they seek to explain minutiae of human social life, including hot-button issues like gender differences and race, in the light of Darwinian natural selection. Leftists like Gould and Lewontin would dismiss such explanations as 'just-so stories,' as would science-popularizers and the press, but Fodor and Massimo argue that this is an argument you cannot avoid generalizing once you make it. It applies to all of evolution: if it is philosophically illegitimate to talk about human sexual dimorphism because that reads a Final Causes into evolution, then it is equally illegitimate to talk about any other kind of change as being purpose driven by 'selection.'

This book was received with mostly hostile confusion by the mainstream press and I suspect most biologists which mostly missed the argument and were languishing in the culture wars of the Bush Years. Mind you, I don't agree with the book, but it's mostly because I don't care to endorse this kind of materialism, but most people do indeed at least claim to abide by it, so these arguments would be important to address for them.

Just a 'linguistic' argument?

At the end of it, any evolutionary biologist will be tempted to throw up their hands and say 'So what' to that philosophical objection. After all, it sure feels like some kind of technicality or argument from the way we linguistically talk about evolution. And they're right! In truth, Darwinian evolution is a useful theory specifically because it is a method of giving us a Final Cause for gradual evolutionary changes. That's the whole point afterall. If it didn't give us a

Final Cause, it wouldn't be an explanation. Striking the Formal Cause from scientific vocabulary is only a recipe for the typical postivistic science status quo of denying any 'metaphysics' to your science while just tacitly assuming it all.

Return of the Formal Cause?

What about the Formal Cause? That is, what about the idea that everything must have a form/plan behind its creation? If we are willing to concede that a Final Cause can arise from natural selection, what about a Formal Cause?

While I'm on Fodor and Massimo's book (who again, are not talking in Aristotelian terms themselves), they actually do end up resuscitating the Formal Cause as well, albeit in a more purposeful way. While the book beats around the bush, I can say that in my conversations with Massimo at Arizona, he really does think of evolution as not being an issue of natural selection. Instead he (and Noam Chomsky as well) has the view that complex features in biology evolve from in-built genetic parameters whose complex interactions can also produce fully-formed design. This is the kernel of Minimalism in linguistics.

Now in presentations, Massimo always loves to talk about those species of jellyfish which with a single simple genetic change, develop highly complicated proto-eyes even without a direct need. One minor genetic development can produce structure as complicated as a primitive eye. This is not uncommon in biology because many complex structures are simple derivatives of simple principles. The general name for this is emergent properties and are said to be based on so-called Laws of Form.

Laws of Form are actually a big topic of conversation in linguistics nowadays, Chomsky's idea approaching the idea that one single and very simple cognitive change could be enough to produce the human language faculty. (This is totally contrary to the pop-idea of language abilities slowly arising from behavioristic cave-man grunting complexifying over centuries).

It should be obvious that Laws of Form, Fibonacci spirals, golden ratios, apparent ordering and other emergent properties arise naturally from the universe without the obvious need of conscious planning. This is not a rejection of the Formal Cause, but states the truth that it is universal. 'Form' needn't just be a conscious plan like the sculptor's plan for a hunk of marble, but a form that emerges from natural principles.

Even a Materialistic Universe Generates Formal and Final Causes

In trying to escape the Formal and Final Causes, modern science has really made them more irreplaceable. Laws of Form emerge from very simple computational operations and define the formal structure of things that arise in nature. At the same time, any kind of selective pressure or survival mechanism like Darwinian selection will naturally produce structure arranged to a goal. Understanding anything is quite impossible without referring to its Formal and Final Causes.

For the Aristotelian up until Newton (the last of the magicians in J.M. Keynes'

terms), this is us uncovering the Mind of God. While words like 'God' make moderns queasy, it's legitimate to ask why the Formal and Final Causes as concepts should. Final Causes are by definition universal where unchecked spontaneity occurs. A conscious human mind is not a prerequisite for them, neither for Formal Causes.

You actually can keep even a very clumsy materialism while accepting these traditional notions. Indeed, to understand something's Final and Formal Causes is to truly understand it such that the Material and Efficient Causes seem like mere details.

Title: Wanna Learn LaTeX?

PubDate: Fri, 12 Feb 2021 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/wanna-learn-latex/

Content

Table of Contents

What is LaTeX?

Installing LaTeX

LaTeX Video Tutorials

I have a full video tutorial series on learning LaTeX, broken into small sensible parts, here.

What is LaTeX?

Basically, it's how big boys write and format documents. Every public brief, scientific article, book, cryptocurrency whitepaper or even outline written by people who know what they're doing is written in LaTeX.

If you want to see examples of documents made with LaTeX, you can see my Master's thesis here or another paper here that shows some diagrams and other features you can have in LaTeX. Of course, LaTeX documents can be infinitely customized.

'Is it hard?'

No. It's sort of like learning vim. People complain about how hard it is until they take the bare minimum of time to learn it and realize how much more effective they are with it. The return on investment is massive. I wrote the thesis above in LaTeX in around a week of learning from the bare minimum.

'How is LaTeX different?'

LaTeX is a markup language, meaning that you write documents in whatever text editor of your choosing and instead of manually moving margins and placing

things yourself, everything is optimally placed when you compile the document into a .pdf.

Markup languages are great because they separate the task of writing from the task of formatting. It's somewhat similar to the difference between HTML (a markup language) and CSS (which does styling) and Javascript (which does scripting). LaTeX does the equivalent of all three, but it allows you to do them all separately so you can easily extend documents.

'Why is LaTeX better than Microsoft Word and friends?'

Bibliographies are done totally automatically. For all the research papers I've written in the past 5 years, I have never written a bibliography page. You just tell LaTeX, 'Oh, APA style, please' and it's done.

Section/page numbering and cross referencing is done automatically. That means if you refer people to a chart on page 52 multiple times or figure 5 or chapter 4, then you move pages or figures or chapters around, the references continues to refer to the page, figure or chapter you originally meant. That also means you can literally copy and paste text out of your document into a larger document and LaTeX will automatically reconfigure all cross-referenced numbers to be correctly referring to what you actually want them pointing to.

Text can easily be copied to a new format. I've written many term papers that latter became monographs or books and with LaTeX, you can just copy the raw text and it takes on the formatting of the document it is inside of.

It is scriptable. You can use coreutilities and other programs to search, modify and move text. This seems useless if you've never done it, but it makes a world of difference when you realize you can. You could use this, for example, to automatically take customer information on your computer and automatically-generate professional itemized invoices in LaTeX or the like. Also, being able to use sed -i and grep with .tex files is fantastic.

For more advanced users, LaTeX is more than a markup language too: and also has basic logic and tests (if statements and the like) that allow you to react dynamically to unknown content.

You can write LaTeX in literally anything. I write it in vim for its extensibility, but you can easily design your own workflow, instead of having to rely on the ever-changing idiosyncracies of Microsoft Word.

'But Word has some of those things!'

Niche features that basically no Word-user uses. Also they change with every new update. This is the primary operating structure of LaTeX.

Installing LaTeX

The core LaTeX package (texlive) is fairly small, but I highly recommend you download all the LaTeX packages out there at the beginning (a big download). This is nice because as you learn more things, you won't have to manually

download new packages. You'll be able to experiment with new LaTeX abilities through new packages seamlessly. Here's how you get them:

GNU/Linux

Arch-based (Artix, Manjaro, Parabola): pacman -S texlive-most texlive-lang

Debian-based (Ubuntu/Linux Mint): apt-get install texlive-full

Some distros (like Void) use tlmgr to install TeX packages instead of the main package manager.

Windows: Here. (Choose the net install to be able to install all packages.)

MacOS: Here.

Once you've downloaded and installed that, you have a fully-featured LaTeX engine on your machine! You can make lots of amazing things that you don't even fully realize yet.

LaTeX Video Tutorials

Basics

First thing to learn is how to compile documents with pdflatex and the basic principles of the TeX lanugage. In this first video, I talk about how basic text, paragraphs, titles, headings and more work. This in itself is enough to make a professional write-up.

Click to reveal video.

Numbering and cross-referencing

As you make more complex documents, you'll want to automatically number and interrelate section, figure and other numbers together. LaTeX makes this super simple, and make it even easier to copy your file into a new file where it will automatically update all cross-referenced numbers.

Click to reveal video.

Bibliographies with Biber and BibLaTeX

Bibliography management is a huge plus in LaTeX through biber. I haven't written a bibliography in more than half a decade due to the fact that LaTeX only needs a bibliography file of metadata and autogenerates citations for any needed source.

Click to reveal video.

Images and Figures

TeX isn't all text either. You can insert and nicely format images in a way that they are optimally placed without too much human interference.

Click to reveal video.

Macros to make things easy

As you do more specific things, you might want to make your own macros and functions. This really makes things easier, and you can do very complex things very elegantly.

Click to reveal video.

Slide Presentations with Beamer

LaTeX isn't just for printable documents either. You can change your document into a Beamer presentation, allowing you to present it as a slide show similar to Microsoft PowerPoint's.

Click to reveal video.

Making a Professional Rsum

Here, I also give some extra pointers while I make a rsum.

Part 1

Click to reveal video.

Part 2

Click to reveal video.

Title: Veganism Is the Pinnacle of Bugmanism

PubDate: Thu, 11 Feb 2021 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/veganism-is-the-pinnacle-of-bugmanism/

Content

People have quoted me as saying that. I forget where it comes from, probably a livestream, but I definitely stand by it. Since a lot of people labor under the assumption that my channel is about 'Linux,' I've accumulated a lot of subscribers that are variously nerds, furries, degenerates, coomers, libertarians, communists, trannies and among them are vegans. Some of them (I assume) are good people.

There's a stereotype about vegans that they are annoying and can't talk about anything but Veganism. This hurtful stereotype comes from the fact that it's true.

Bugmanism

Firstly, what is Bugmanism? How do Vegans fit the bill?

Long story short, a bugman is someone who rejects the purpose and role of humans in their natural environment. They reject tradition, religion, their family, gender roles, the expectation that a person should contribute to their community,

etc. They might do this for their personal convenience (usually they just wanna coom outside of marriage) or for apparently rational reasons, but the effect is the same.

If you want to sum up the esoterically evil goals of 'modernism' or whatever you want to call it, it is destroying the countervailing power of tradition and in its place, new social engineers attempt to dictate human values top down. If you separate people from their families, their races, their traditions and who they actually are, you can engineer TV shows, sports teams, activist movements and a million other things for them to identify with and worship. Modernism pretends to liberate people from arbitrary traditions and authorities, when in reality is substitutes natural, emergent morals with controlled authorities.

Veganism has always been one of the most radical examples of this logic. Esoterically, Veganism forces one to abandon not just their own traditions, but every human dietary tradition and leaves them at the whims of processed grains and pharmaceutical supplements for a meager survival.

That is, Veganism is highly disruptive: You can't have a normal life. You can't have a normal meal. You can't wine and dine with people and must make it an affair. You can't use traditional hand-made leather products. You can't hunt or trap for food or raise animals, even for eggs.

You become a nag at war with your family, the world around you. You are trapped within urbanite bugman society: you can't even eat in most non-urban places or foreign countries because the insane concept of not cooking with animal fats and eating and using animal products just doesn't exist. You have to survive holding your breath from one hipster downtown area to the next.

On every point, you become more reliant on macro-society. Vegans try very hard to give off 'organic' vibes, but it's just a lie. Even people on the internet who 'advertise' their Vegan lifestyle spend hours processing a basic meal and of course predigesting indigestible plant matter with a blender. Try and find a non-urbanite Vegan in real life. They exist, but they are an aberration.

The LARP of 'Vegan for Health'

Vegans sometimes pretend to advertise Veganism because it's allegedly healthy. This is just public relations; any true Vegan, when you really pin them down thinks that Veganism at its core is a moralistic belief. Vegans are Vegans because they believe that not being Vegan is morally deficient: killing/eating animals and using their bodies is bad. That's it.

So you have your moral principle and run with it. What magical force then is making that moral principle necessarily good for your health? If Veganism were actually a good diet for humans, that would actually be a massive coincidence. 'Vegans for health' have to grapple with the bizarre claim that meat, exactly the food that has been viewed in all human cultures as superior and more desirable is somehow nutritionally deficient.

The Standard American Diet (SAD) is Plant-based.

The weirdest thing is when Veganism is held in opposition to the Standard American Diet, as if the American diet somehow represents traditional or non-Vegan diets. The SAD is just Vegan-lite. SAD is a post-Vegan invention of the diet industry take over the past decades has been leading people into the most harmful parts of vegan diets: unstable plant-oils, processed grains as meat substitutes, etc.

The pop-cultural idea of 'health' is simply 'being skinny.' Veganism is great at making people skinny because it is slow moving starvation (I have met some carbo-loading exceptions who fatten up).

Veganism is just to starvation what waterboarding is to drowning. If you stick with it, you will eventually die, but it's so painful in the meantime, you'll probably give up.

Veganism is rational.

Vegans are exceptionally 'rational' in that they adopt the moral framework of modern society and follow it to its logical conclusion.

When you're given for your acceptance some inane religious platitudes like 'equality' and 'rights' along with vaguely Marxist notions of 'exploitation' and 'slavery' and 'oppressed classes,' it seems perfectly reasonable to expand that language to the relationship between predators (humans) and their prey (many animals) (or maybe pets too).

If you're raised in a time of extreme moral nihilism except for not liking the several historical events you're told that matter (usually slavery and the Holocaust), obviously you're going to glom on to what looks most like them: chickens in chains and sheep being led to slaughter like sheep to slaughter.

Honestly, Veganism by their own logic might not be far enough. There is some circumstantial research to the effect that plants have nervous systems that might feel pain as well: you could go one step further and simply eat nothing living. The Ctistae of ancient Thrace refused to eat anything alive, eating only by-products/foodstuffs like milk and honey. The Ctistae also refused to have sex, which might be something to consider since Vegans eventually lose sexual function anyway.

Veganism is rebellious.

Veganism has the same kind of 'rebellion' that all other forms of leftism share. It 'rebels' against the system by perfectly internalizing the system's values, extrapolating them to their logical conclusions and thus fighting the system when it fails to meet those obviously unworkable conclusions.

Corporations started shilling vegetable oils (which originally were and frankly still are just industrial by-products) as workable replacements for butter and lard. Seventh-Day Adventists lobbied for them because of their own religion

beliefs. Jews lobbied for them because they hate unkosher lard. Years later, now we know that vegetable oils are highly unstable and have contributed to the massive rise in heart disease.

Veganism is a leftist phenomenon. The psychological type of a leftist is such that they will always subordinate their direct experience to ideology. It doesn't matter if not eating meat or wearing leather or using animal products sounds hard, their suffering is more proof of a greater moral superiority.

Non-leftists can simply not become Vegans for longer than extremely brief periods. Even if a Vegan wins an argument with them, a normal person is just going to say, 'I'm sorry, I like animals and all, but I can't not eat them, that's just crazy.'

Veganism only makes sense in a bugman environment.

Ask a vegan why he doesn't eat eggs. He will probably tell you a spooky story about how terrible it must be for a chicken to live in a coop laying eggs all day. That might even bring a tear to a sentimental person's eye.

Out where I live, people have their chickens wandering in their yards and garden pecking scraps. They return to their coops at night to be safe from coyotes. Is there really something 'unethical' in the mind of a Vegan about picking up an unfertilized egg lain by one of these chickens and eating it?

A lot of the moral logic behind Veganism falls flat outside of bugman capitalism. Fundamentally, it's another manifestation of general angst from lack of connection to the real natural world.

I say this because most Vegans are Vegans because they are softies who have literally no connection to animals whatsoever until as a teenager they watched a PETA documentary with chickens getting their heads buzzed off or pigs walking around in their own poop.

Literally think about the animals. When wild animals die in nature, they don't slowly slip away in the night surrounded by their family. They die of starvation, or by being ripped apart alive by packs of coyotes. Would you rather die by getting your brains blown out instantaneously or die a 'natural' death like this?

But to the original question, it really makes no sense even for a Vegan to not eat or distribute the eggs a chicken lays... You're going to have to get deep into Marxist analysis to think that's somehow unethical. And once a chicken has living a long life of egg laying, why not quickly and painlessly dislocate its neck and eat it for dinner? If you don't, your cat will eventually gore it and it'll be a mess.

Animals live to be eaten.

This isn't even a metaphysical claim. Domesticated cows and pigs and chickens do not and cannot live as they exist in the wild. They have evolved symbiotically

with us as sources of food. They can go feral and breed with wild boar and the like, but their composition is based on their domesticated state.

Wild game like deer have lived alongside human hunters for centuries. Their breeding habits and evolutionary development is based in the fact that a sizeable portion of their population will be hunted by humans every season.

If you actually care about 'the environment' (1) you would care for humans, whose natural diet is meat and (2) you would be terribly worried about the unintended consequences of severing one of the most important links in the food chain.

Dumb Vegan sayings

'You wouldn't kill it yourself!'

They say this whenever someone turns their eyes away from an animal being killed in one of their Vegan propaganda videos.

Guess what, I also might turn away if I see a video of a sanitation worker wading through human feces it in a sewer. That doesn't mean that I'm a hypocrite for taking dumps in a toilet connected to city sewage.

I turn away when I see depictions of amputations of gangrenous limbs in movies too. That doesn't mean I don't think it's not medically necessary.

Killing animals is actually a bad example of this because while all cultures are disgusted by feces and amputations, in most times and places (including this country before Bambi), killing animals was nothing any self-respecting grown man would react to. It goes without saying that there are many countries where people recreationally torture dogs and cats.

I don't say that to say that I'd be okay with killing dogs and cats, merely that the trained moral responses we have for them are very localized and subjective in our own modernist viewpoint. But Millenials have now been raised in a Disney fantasy-land where animals think and talk like us and therefore must share the same feelings. Vegans absurdly 'imagine what it'd be like' to live in industrial farming as if a chicken's birdbrain is having an existential crisis while living in a cage.

'Veganism is minimal or more self-sufficient.'

Vegans have been fruitlessly trying to meme this one on me for forever. Starvation and death is minimal, I suppose, so it is at least true in that sense. Veganism is ultimately the diet of only eating inedible garnish that looks 'good' on Instagram.

Raising most animals is easier and more efficient than raising vegetables. If it's too hot, potatoes don't naturally know to go move to the shade. Yams don't eat your overgrown grass. Onions don't poop out fertilizer. Tomatoes can't pull a simple tractor. You can't skin dead okra and make leather out of it. You can't grind up old mustard to make bonemeal (that's not just something in Minecraft, by the way).

73

Animals are an absolutely necessary portion of any homestead in life and death. Listen, I like growing stuff. I like growing vegetables. But vegetables are just not real food. . . They are garnish. They are sides. They are only enjoyable insofar as they elevate your enjoyment of real food: meat.

'Veganism is more efficient or environmental.'

People say that eating plants is more 'efficient' because they saw an energy pyramid diagram as a kid, which shows how many prey animals are needed to maintain carnivorous animals. If we actually lived in a place where there was a calorie shortage, like a desert planet where greens couldn't grow, that might be an issue. It frankly just isn't here. We're not exactly running out of grass to feed cows. Most people are mowing their grass and throwing it away.

There are people who make really absurd environmentalist arguments against meat as well, for example, methane from cows warms the globe. Okay. Fine. So what does Veganism do about that? Are Vegans going to kill the cows for us? Should we just let them starve in the woods since we can't harvest them for meat or even milk? What about all the game we won't be hunting? Those 50% of deer annually that we won't be killingwon't they me causing pollution with the huge amount of calories they need to frolic in the woods all days? Same will all other game. Most of those arguments are cute just-so stories and they fall apart after examination. Anyone can play that game.

Let's just laugh at this for a minute. . .

Alright class, look at this commonly posted vegan meme and tell me why it's retarded:

'Per 100 calories' shows a deception so insane you should laugh. Whoever made this image wants you to believe that the piece of steak on the fork is equivalent to the tiny broccoli head on the right.

You can compare the nutrition of both broccoli and beef at those links yourself.

In order to get the protein in a single large bite of steak, you'll have to eat more than half a pound of broccoli. Good luck. Now you know why those poor impressionable girls who go vegan bloat up. And that's only 100 calories. 2000 calorie diet? Have fun. If you're famished, it's pretty easy to eat a big steak with 2000 calories (around a pound and a half of matter) and it will fill you up without any bloating or stomach pains. You'd have to eat twelve pounds more or less of broccoli or equivalent greens for that. And with all that fiber, you're going to just be pooping it all out.

Honestly, the human disgust response will stop you way before that. It's easy to eat a juicy steak without or without sauce, salt and pepper, but you'd nearly have to put a gun to someone's head to make them eat their daily 13 pounds of indigestible garnish.

Noootruits don't actually matter anyway

'Plants don't have over fifteen micro-nooootrients. . . ' sv3rige, at the end of every video

A lot of Vegan autism gets focused on replicating the consumption of known nutrients and minerals using only plants. The image above, in addition to being deceptive is based on a flawed idea that human nutruition is about consuming particular amounts of particular substances as if we are a perfectly predictable machine or a videogame. This isn't just a Vegan problem, basically everyone implicitly has this idea.

The reality is that those nutrients on the Nutrition Facts are a narrow realm of what might actually be relevant for the complex organ of our bodies. Additionally, there are many types of proteins and vitamins and minerals that the back-of-the-box doesn't account for. The Vegan game of saying, 'we can get that too' is utterly pointless when you realize we have nowhere close to a full idea of how the human body works, only some plausible theories about the relationships between certain nutrients and what they seem to do. As in the case of some nutrients, like the falsely-maligned cholesterol is a good example of something two generations of people were told to fear and reduce only for us to later realize that our ideas about how it interacted in the body were arguably literally backwards.

Title: Why It's Bad to Have High GDP

PubDate: Fri, 22 Jan 2021 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/why-its-bad-to-have-high-gdp/

Content

To put it in other words. . .

The common way of looking at Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is that it's a metric of economic success: more GDP is more wealth. Wealth is good. 'Poverty' (meaning low per capita GDP) is bad. Nowadays, pretty much everyone talks about 'economics' like this as if this truism was scribbled on the back walls of the cosmos.

This is just looking at one side of the ledger in a kind of global double-entry accounting book. A logically equivalent way of looking at it is that GDP is a metric of economic exchange required for survival in society as it exists. You can say that some area 'produced' $1 billion of output (sounds good), but you can just as easily say that $1 billion was required for that area to sustain itself (sounds bad). These two are simply logically equivalent.

Living on $1 a day

Antediluvian Hyperborea. GDP: $0 per year.

Let's dive into the Gestalt: when you hear that a family of eight lives on less than a dollar per day (PPP adjusted), you might wonder how they manage! To

actually do such a thing would require buying large bags of rice for the whole family, eat only that and live in free cardboard boxes.

The reality is that that often uttered phrase means that they use less than $1 a day in the general economy, while the rest of their livelihood is 'off-the-grid' or self-sufficient. They may grow food in a family farm, hunt for food, and most of their daily needs from cooking oils, to plates, to pottery, to soap are often made at home as well.

There is still 'an economy' but often one that is barter based or socialist in the real pre-socialist sense of the word: mediated by direct face-to-face social tit-for-tat between neighbors and friends, none of this mediated by currency being exchanged, thus it is not part of the GDP.

If you read about some Bangladeshi village where the only product is 'textiles', that doesn't mean that everyone there makes textiles all day and, without a textile company, everyone would've starved to death. It means that the only on-paper, measurable global industry practiced there is textile manufacturing. Other villagers might farm, hunt, even do some kind of gathering in some places. They will produce the arts and crafts and live the way people live when you leave them alone. If your view of the world is mediated by GDP, you're only seeing the extremely small sliver that pops into existence when people exchange something involving legal tender.

This is extremely difficult for us modern bugpeople to understand because to be a bugman in a large city is to produce absolutely nothing on one's own and buy literally everything you need from the store. To us non-productive people, GDP means income which means survival. But the further out of Bugmanville you go, the clearer the vacuousness of GDP becomes. When you realize that most of human wealth is unmeasured by GDP, you realize that Whig History and Steven Pinkerism is based on shaky foundations.

Example

A minor example. We had a large Thanksgiving feast near my uncle's house in very rural Florida. As it got cold in the night, we had a fire in a repurposed old sugar cane cooking vat artfully standing on used symmetrical cinderblock pieces. A bugman hipster might pay two hundred dollars or more for a similar looking 'authentic' piece of equipment. Those $200 would be counted in the GDP. A bugman hipster might have also bought or rented chairs for the event, 'contributing' more to the GDP, but my uncle, as part of the local wholesome church community, simply borrowed some from the church. Thus our event produced basically no GDP output in goods or services, despite being functionally equivalent to some similar but expensive and ergo 'productive' 'Friendsgiving' practiced by urbanites. In reality we are richer than the bugmen hipsters who blew hundreds of dollars on a faux-folksy party. In this case, we owned the firepit and had easy access and permission to the chairs, thus we are more economically flexible than they are. That GDP that they produced/expended is evidence of deeper reliance on the economic system. That GDP output is a marker of

fragility, reliance on the conditions of the outside economy in the same way that a village of Bangladeshis who abandon their traditional way of lives to work on textiles are more fragile, despite being able to save up for iPhones.

What GDP really measures

Most of the increase in GDP across the world is simply the movement from local partially-social partially-under-the-table economies to economies mediated by taxable currency. An economically self-sufficient village with close social relationships and a barter economy has 0 GDP. A township of entrepreneurs and artisans you partially barter and partially use currency which they don't report has 0 GDP. All of these people are 'in poverty' and 'earn less than a dollar a day'. And if you want to be truly self-sufficient, that means having a personal GDP of zero.

More than that, pretty much everywhere, GDP is a strong indicator of social upheaval. If you think that GDP is some eternal goodness, remember that everything 'good' about industrialization shows up in the GDP, while at the same time, everything bad about it will not show up. Or, sometimes bad things are registered as positive economic growth: urbanization has caused mass-disease, and if that means a market for new medical services and pharmaceuticals, great! The GDP just went up! The Ganges is polluted due to the textile plant? That just means more opportunities for local entrepreneurs to sell bottled water! The GDP just went up! Are people being pushed out of fishing or other subsistence occupations because of it? Even better! Now they have no choice but to contribute to the GDP! With every passing year, in fact, more and more of the GDP is produced by dealing with the problems that our higher level of GDP have caused.

At the end of the day, GDP is only a measurement of how reliant a place or country is on the global economy. Self-sufficiency has a GDP of 0. Wasteful consooomerism has an extremely large GDP.

Planned obsolescence

I have one of my great grandfather's early electric circular saws. It has a bunch of gunk in it, but it still works (although I recently took it apart to replace some old screws and springs and other little parts to be careful). They literally do not make circular saws like it; it's all metal, while even the fancy modern stuff is mostly plastic.

The 'unfortunate' thing about it and other durable tools is that it's 'bad for the economy,' especially the GDP. Since that thing has been around since maybe the 50's or 60's, that's as long as 70 years the economy has gone without the 'stimulation' of us having to buy another saw.

Viewers of my technology videos: Which would be better for the world, if everyone used the material equivalent of a classic American-made IBM ThinkPad, or some Apple Laptops that are unfixable computers made of mostly batteries designed

to conk out right before the new version comes out? Regardless, the Apple Macs that cost thousands a piece are much better for the 'economy.'

That's what I mean. If you have quality tools and do not need to constantly throw money at the system to buy things, fix things and otherwise waste money, you are going to be having a lower GDP. That's just how it is.

The propagandistic role of GDP

When you don't think things through like this, GDP is supposed to appear as an objective measure of economic goodness. You're supposed to be looking at those GDP charts and saying, 'Wow, my life might be terrible, I am not free, I am subject to forces out of my control, and I am told I have to participate in mass-consumerism to survive, but these charts are the facts[!], and the facts say that things are better now, so I believe them!'

It's legitimately surprising to me how big of a boon the idea of increasing GDP is for Whig history and NPCs of many different ideologies. People of the Left and Right will matter-of-factly tell me that a plastic based economy taking over the world is still good because the line is going up. I've heard it as a justification for everything:

Don't like globalization?

You're wrong, the GDP is going up.

Don't trust state-funded institutionalized science?

You're wrong, the GDP is going up.

Don't want child drag queens?

You're wrong, the GDP is going up.

Don't want everything to be made of plastics and other petrochemicals?

You're wrong, the GDP is going up.

Don't want mass pornography?

You're wrong, the GDP is going up.

Don't want free sugary drinks since infancy?

You're wrong, the GDP is going up.

When you abandon the illusion of GDP, you are suddenly able to ask whether massive technological 'progress' has actually been good for real human life and human pychology.

Title: Academic

PubDate: Mon, 11 Jan 2021 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/academic/

Content

Table of Contents

Papers and Memories. . .

Here are some old academic papers that I mostly wrote as term papers and such in graduate school. People occasionally ask out of interest.

By the time I got a year or so into my Ph.D. at Arizona, I had pretty much not intention on continuing in the charade of academia, therefore, they are usually out of the mold of normalcy for the field since most of these papers I had no intention of ever 'publishing' in 'academic journals.'

Master's Thesis on External Possession (April 2015)

Not actually that interesting, at least I don't think.

Syntax doesn't exist (May 2016)

I wrote this back for that old throwaway seminar class that Tom, Massimo and Chomsky put on (this was actually before Chomsky officially relocated to Arizona). Most of the students in the class were just undergraduate communists who didn't know anything about linguistics and just wanted to be around Chomsky and therfore had to survive abject confusion and suffering. The class was really fun and I just talked to cute girls or us graduate students just goofed off. This was actually when I decided to get my first ThinkPad.

. . . Oh yeah the paper. It actually was the first inklings of 'my idea' written in this highly disorganized paper in less than a day. The idea is that alternations in languages that seem strange all occur because they are attempts to try to optimize between phonological and semantic constraints. Syntax is not an autonomous engine with idiosyncratic constraints, but just a shorthand we use to talk about these strange things that happen to make phonological structure acceptable to semantic structure or vice versa. I argue that extraposition, the EPP and some other things all are phonological repairs and we don't have to posit some extra constraints in the language faculty to model them ad hoc.

Scope marking. . . yep, it's prosodic too. (May 2017)

A very short paper I wrote for one of Mike Hammond's classes. Not even sure it gets the point across, but I really like this idea. Languages like German can have

residual wh- words in places through which they have been raised: scope markers. I noticed a formal similarity with noun phase stressing in a cited Kimper article. I argue that German scope marking is actually the same pheonomenon, based on that interesting idea that Richards had about phonology driving wh- movement.

Prosodically-driven word order (September 2017)

I argue that syntactic word order is just an epiphenomenon of prosodic, rather than 'syntactic' parameters. Ultimately, all languages simply place subjects, objects and verbs where they will recieve the appropriate stress level, and where this is ties in with independent prosodic rules of each language. I use Optimality Theory to model this as some cruel joke and because this was a qualifying paper and I had to do something conventional. I don't really take it seriously as a scientific tool.

Indo-European Particles and Word Order (November 2017)

The most boring class I ever, ever took in my 20 years of schooling from kindergarten to Ph.D. was Heidi Harley's head-movement seminar. Just thinking about that room lowers my testosterone. Actually, I need to go lift right now. . .

Thankfully, the only thing we had to do for that seminar was write a paper. (We may've had to present articles a couple days, but I must have suppressed that level of boredom.) Obviously I was not going to write something about head-movement (which is some silly theory-internal idea of Generative Grammar), so I wrote the paper on Indo-European particles and how they affected a change in word order over time from SOV to SVO. This was obviously not the kind of paper expected and I wrote it dismissively, but the argument of it is solid and interesting.

A Critique of 'Reason' (December 2017)

Finally, not a stupid linguistics paper. On my issues with the Kahneman and Tversy's 'heuristics and biases' program, with various support from Gigerenzer and Taleb. I wrote this for a class of Massimo Piatelli-Palmarini's I took which if I remember right was technically an economics/neuroscience class. Massimo is a big fan of Kahneman and Tversky, but I've always found their work basic and predicated on clumsy hyper-rationalism which ends up not being rational at all. I explain in the paper: Actually read it.

Game Theory determines quanitifer scope interpretation (April 2018)

I argue that Chomskyan syntax is not equipped to properly deal with quantifier scope interpretations. I present a framework that assumes that speakers use and assume their languages' constructions to communicate scope given certain universal constraints assuming the priority of surface scope and economy principles. Nearly all normal and abnormal scope judgments fall out for free from this method, which is analyzed with Game Theory. At the end: flexible syntax (across either a whole language or a specific construction) ends up entailing

universal surface scope, while syntactic rigidity causes scope ambiguity. BTW, look at those cute little LaTeX charts. . .

The Shivasutras and Neural Nets (April 2018)

This is actually probably a ditsy paper, but it was my last paper I wrote in graduate school and for a class I never actually went to. I don't really remember what it was even a class on. I think Mike Hammond was the professor? Maybe Robert Henderson? That's how much I paid attention my last semester, and I wrote this paper as a larp.

I had been reading classical Indian/Vedic grammars and the Paninian stuff. We had been talking about the 'interpretability' (or lack-thereof) of Neural Nets so I wrote a little piece on the Shivasutras, which order the phonemes of Sanskrit in a unique order to be able to refer to them in Paninian grammars with the greatest economy. I make the statement that these classes of phonemes are analogous to the intermediate nodes of a neural net, which often appear to have no real-life relevance, but one often appears at an extra level of abstraction. For example, it becomes very easy to model the Indo-European ablaut system via the Shivasutras since different lines show the different grades. Sanskrit grammarians of course had no direct knowledge of Proto-Indo-European but in the interest of formal economy, end up discovering aspects of its grammar.

The Indo-European Tapes

Since I had a background in classical languages and Indo-European studies, a couple of my friends wanted to put together a little reading group to learn about Indo-European stuff. We covered all the basics of Indo-European grammar and reconstruction and basic lore, although we fizzled out after only a couple weeks.

For my personal records, I actually recorded these meetings on my phone (it was actually mostly me lecturing and all of us making jokes). The audio recordings are extremely messy, with every bump on the table audible, but they are listenable if you care about the topic.

I also made some handouts which have also survived. I'm uploading these in ogg because it's a superior format. If you're an Apple/Mac user, suck it up and get a real audio player.

Week 1 Audio: Basics and Phonology (handout)

Week 2 Audio: Ablaut, Morphology and Indo-Hittite (handout)

Week 3 Audio: Divergence and Syntax (handout, examples)

Week 4 Audio: Paleohistory and Migration (handout)

Week 5 Audio: Greek, individual languages (handout on Greek)

We got lazy after this and the group ended! Good while it lasted. I had prepared this handout for the sixth week which never happened.

If someone is good at cleaning up audio, I would be very grateful if you could do a number on these; email me and I can provide the lossless originals for that.

(Note also that these tapes were recorded back when I cursed, so you can get a snippet of me still saying naughty words.)

Video Talks

The embedded videos here are from PeerTube. These are all on YouTube if you prefer (to see all the extra comments or whatever).

Biolinguistic Clarity in Generative Syntax (2015)

Click to reveal video.

Shortly after I finished by M.A. at the University of Georgia, I ended up returning to help with a conference they had started recently. Some guy canceled at the last minute the day before, so I volunteered to invent a talk in 24 hours. It was more of a comedy routine, but here it is. I consider the actual ideas behind this talk underdeveloped and totally superseded by the ideas I illustrate above in those paper on syntax and phonology, but this is a good idea of the kinds of things I was thinking around 2015.

Language as Synesthesia (2017)

Click to reveal video.

slides

Tom Bever had a cognitive science seminar for graduate students and this was my presentation for it. Most of the other grad students were in cogsci or philosophy, nonetheless, I did a pretty linguistics-heavy talk.

'Linguistics Isn't 60 Years Old!' (2018)

Click to reveal video.

slides

My last semester at Arizona, Simin invited me to present a day in one of her grad classes on the history of linguistic thought (she actually invited me to present a lot because she knew I liked teaching or just talking about these issues, while she is totally burned out on it (I actually was her assigned assistant for an undergraduate syntax class, and I ended up teaching about a third of the days just because I wanted to and she liked taking vacation)). Anyway, as we all know, I mostly like old books and old stuff that no one seems to know anymore, so I talk about Paninian/Sanskrit grammar in Classical India.

As we talk about at the end, originally we planned to make this a series (I even thought of making it a goodbye tour), but that never happened. No one will ever know my hot takes on medieval European grammar.

Audio Talks

'Chomsky Joins Us in Hell' (YouTube video) Me and my roomate talk about when Chomsky relocated to our department from MIT. This was originally going to be a series until Heidi Harley bullicided Ryan from talking more lol.

Quantifier Scope is Just All Fun and Games I gave a teaser presentation for prospective students on my quantifier scope project mentioned above. It's also on PeerTube and YouTube, but no video.

Neuroscience and decision-making graduate seminar presentation Begins around 1:20. Sort of bad quality audio at the beginning.

Other presentations

I have some slides and stuff from other presentations, and I might upload them here when I get the chance.

UGA colloquium a very old talk from my Master's program. Was more of a comedy routine, but you can look at it and only guess what my hilarious jokes were.

For the Quantifier Scope with Game Theory project I have a couple presentation slides: Synsalon presentation and another one.

The Greek Alphabet presentation I did in my friend Shannon's class once.

Handouts I made the syntax class I did with Simin Karimi: Head Movement (sort of modeled off a lecture Andrew Carnie would give) and on page A Guide to Generative Syntax.

Also a presentation on constituency I did in that class.

Don't go to college!

Just in case anyone sees this page and thinks, 'Oh wow, look at all the cool things Luke was doing in graduate school! I should go too!' Do not do that. I want to make it clear that if any genuinely intelligent and curious person whose goal is inquiry without reservation, you will find nothing but frustration and suffering in contemporary academia. Particularly Arizona was very cultlike, stifling and uncomfortable. I stayed alive by being blas and jocular about things, as you may be able to tell in some of those recordings, but I want to make it clear that I regret going into a Ph.D. program and I consider it the third biggest mistake of my life. I will never get those years back, and I sorrowfully regret it.

Title: Advice on Some Other Languages

PubDate: Fri, 11 Dec 2020 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/other-langs/

Content

This page is just for minor pointers on lesser studied languages that I don't have enough to have on their own pages.

Gothic

Gothic is a dead language and the only thing existing in it is a partially translated New Testament by Wulfila. It still is a very important language for the study of Germanic and Indo-Europeanism because it is the only language of 'Eastern Germanic' so well attested. Eastern Germanic languages are distinct from other Germanic languages in their lack of umlaut and some other characteristically Germanic features, while Gothic still retains some earlier Indo-European inflectional categories.

I mention Gothic only because one of the best ever language learning books I've ever seen is written for it, and that is Thomas Lambdin's Introduction to the Gothic Language. I actually took a Gothic class flippantly in graduate school, but the book stuck out to me as being perfectly designed for the typical target audience of Gothic in historical linguistics.

The book has very well designed lessons and activities, but I think greatest is that in the back of the book, for each chapter there is a corresponding lesson on the historical grammar of the content learned. It goes through what conjugates of each word exist in English, Latin, Greek or Sanskrit or other Indo-European languages and provided comparative paradigms of noun and verb inflections. No word or concept is left without a real mneumonic device, not a fake one fake from some joke about the word, but one tied into the actual historical facts of the word.

I've said before that one of the reasons I never use things like Anki and 'spaced repetition software' is that the real way to retain information is to understand how it fits within a wider web of information. In historical linguistics, you have an ideal of this because the more you learn, the easier it is to 'remember:' remembering that the Gothic word for 'field' is akrs is incredibly simple when you realize it's the same as Latin ager, Greek agrs, Sanskrit jra and English acre.

Sanskrit

Sanskrit is the crown jewel of Indo-European languages and there are very few resources for it. Luckily, there is Devavanipravesika by Goldman and Sutherland, which again is a star in terms of language books.

I do recommend you have some of these abilities before attempting Sanskrit:

Some grammatical knowledge of a classical inflected Indo-European language like Latin or Greek.

Knowledge of the Devanagari script which is used for Sanskrit nowadays (also the script of Hindi and many other modern Indian languages).

Sandhi

In English, if you say the sentence 'What are you up to?' it usually comes out closer to 'Whatchu up to?' This kind of phonological compression is a natural and systematic process in all languages. What is interesting is that when written language was younger, it was very common to express these phonological changes in the writing system itself. It looks slangish in modern English to write 'whatchu,' but it is more accurate after all.

Sanskrit overtly writes every alternation like this, including when words seem to combine together into a single prosodic word. The term for this is Sandhi.

The tricky thing that newbies to Sanskrit must understand is that knowing the principles of Sandhi are the first priority in knowing Sanskrit because it's impossible to even parse a basic sentence before you understand it. Phonemically, many Sanskrit words end in an -s, but one of the first rules of Sandhi is that words are not allowed to end in -s in most cases. So -s might show up as -h or -o or something else depending on the phonetic context.

I say this because before you get excited about diving into Sanskrit, you have to make sure you know the basics of Sandhi or it will all be a mess.

Classical/Koin Greek

Greek, much like Spanish, I never really sat down to learn. Greek is close enough in form to Latin that I learned it from reading a biglottic Bible in both languages. Its grammar presents very few concepts alien to Latin, the only big hurdles probably being the novel uses of the article and if you want to learn classical Greek like a pro, the pitch accent system.

What I mean is that I only read very little of Greek grammar before I could pick up my Latin-Greek Bible and start reading the Greek with the aid of the parallel Latin. This was also a nice experience because you can see the similaries between the two languages, but also how the expressiveness of Greek is sometimes lost in translation.

Greek, for example, has such a complete and elegant paradigm of participles that many of them are unstranlatable in Latin. Latin has only passive perfect participles and active present participles, while Greek has participles for the whole spectrum of voice, tense and aspect. What that means is that Latin has to talk around some common Greek expressions, often utilizing Latin deponents (which can have perfect active participle) to get the meaning across.

Title: Command Line Bibles

PubDate: Fri, 11 Dec 2020 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/command-line-bibles/

Content

I've made a couple very useful command-line accessible Bibles for a quick and scriptable lookup of Bible verses and passages. They exist not only in English, but for Latin and Greek as well.

English King James Version (including Apocrypha) Github, Gitlab

Latin Vulgate Github, Gitlab

Greek Septuagint amp; New Testament Github, Gitlab

Installation

Or just replace kjv with vul for the Latin version or grb for the Greek.

Usage

Single run

Run the program name followed by a passage. The text will appear to you in your pager. Arrows or vim-keys to scroll, q to quit.

Note that you may also give whole books or chapters. kjv genesis will give you all of Genesis. kjv mat 1:1-10 will show only Matthew 1:1-10. Note also that you can usually abbreviate books.

Searching

/ searches for patterns. For example, kjv /offering will search the whole Bible for the word 'offering.' You may specify a book/location before it to search only that book.

Interactive mode

Just type kjv (or vul or grb) alone to enter interactive mode. You can then just type verses/books without prefixing them with the command name each time if you prefer.

Origin

I forked the original software from this repository which is an incomplete English King James Version (without the Apocrypha). With the use of coreutils and vim, I found online texts of the Apochrypha, Vulgate, Septuagint and the SBL New Testament and formatting them to function with this program.

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Title: Hating Brave is Cool!

PubDate: Fri, 11 Dec 2020 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/hating-brave-is-cool/

Content

I like and use the Brave Browser. It's a free and open source browser with features like:

Ad-blocking by default.

Tracker-blocking by default.

Anti-fingerprinting mechanisms to prevent you from being monitored.

Built-in Tor windows.

Run by a based Christian and not furry leftists.

As far as I'm concerned, Brave is indisputably the best out-of-the-box general-purpose browser out there. There are other okay browsers, and I'll mention things about Brave I don't like, but Brave is especially good because it comes with all of these sensible features out of the box (you don't have to go install an ad-blocker), so this makes it very good for installing it on your grandma's computer. The anti-fingerprinting abilities are even unique among power-user browsers.

Despite that, there is a loud clique of anti-Brave agitators and Brave skeptics. Whenever I do a video on Brave, I can expect at least 20% dislikes and a torrent of comments from people with anime avatars calling me a 'shill' for recommending this browser.

This, I suspect, is because Brave has an optional extra feature: Brave Rewards, which is 'too good to be true.'

Brave Rewards

By default, Brave blocks all ads, but users can turn on 'Brave Rewards' to voluntarily view occasional ads and will receive a small amount of Basic Attention Token (BAT), Brave's cryptocurrency. The ads computer's notification system.

Brave's entire motivation is to replace traditional ads that fill up webpages with these kind of ads that share revenue directly with the web page owners and the people browsing the sites themselves. Ad companies disappear, the internet debloats and users and actual sites get a direct cut.

This ad feature is not just optional, but is disabled by default.

The Archetypical Brainlet Brave Skeptic

The fact that brave has exploded on the scene so quickly make me suspicious. There's money involved somewhere. Comment on a YouTube video of mine

Yes. Because Brave users literally get money to browse with it. Duh.

So there is no conspiracy theory about this. Brave just does everything right as a browser and they give you free money. In the Basic Attention Token system, companies buy ads and the revenue is shared directly by the owners of sites and the people who view the ads. This cuts out the middleman ad-companies from the internet. It removes effective and bloatfree way to monetize the internet than old-school ads. Or, you can just keep the default functionality where there are no ads.

I literally have people post on my videos constantly about how Brave is a big scheme and 'you'll never see a cent of that money.' Meanwhile, literally every Brave user, including me, gets a monthly payout. You can even receive your payout directly in US dollars if you want! Even if the Basic Attention Token framework totally flops, it's not like you're putting any money into it. The worst that can happen is you saying, 'Oh no, all I have left is the browser with the best out-of-the-box functionality!'

It reminds me of the joke of two economists walking down the street. One says, 'Hey look, there's a $100 bill on the sidewalk!' The other one replies, 'That's not possible, if there were, someone would've picked it up already.'

The anti-Brave crowd's argument is always some form of 'it's too good to be true.' In reality, you don't realize how inefficient and wasteful the previous way of internet ads was. Why pay an ad agency with employees to pay website developers to put ads into the actual code of websites, contorting it all into a mess? The BAT system and Brave just be shown when wanted in the user's already existing notification system. The goal of the BAT project is to universalize Brave and perhaps similar browsers which block ads and trackers by default, thus cutting off the very lifeblood of that inefficient and anti-social system.

If you still don't trust the BAT project or think it's gimmicky, great. By default, the 'Brave Rewards' system is off. Complaining about Brave because it has an optional feature to make money is like complaining about another browser because it has an add-on you don't plan on using.

Tactical Ignorance

I use to love brave. NOT anymore.. I'm sure that they are fingerprinting and using my browsing habits and even search queries and shows relevant ads. It is not like they are showing some random pop up for ads. I get ads for NordVPN if I search for best vpn 2020. I instantly get pop up for lenovo laptops as soon as I search for laptop. Obviously, with all the utm source and other tracking stuff. I am making around 15 BAT/month. I don't need those pennies. Back to Firefox with Ublock Origin and Privacy Badger. Comment on a YouTube video of mine

This guy is literally talking as if how Brave works is some kind of mystery, as if its entire code base isn't openly auditable. No, Brave doesn't take or 'fingerprint' your browsing habits, instead, if you are enrolled in Brave Rewards, you browser pulls the entire list of adds from the system, then locally decides on your own computer what ads to serve.

On Brave's FAQ:

Only the browser, after HTTPS terminates and secure pages are decrypted, has all of your private data needed to analyze user intent. Our auditable open source browser code protects this intent data on the client device. Our server side has no access to this data in the clear, nor does it have decryption keys. We do not run a MitM proxy or VPN service. We provide signals to the browser to help it make good decisions about what preferences and intent signals to expose to

maximize user, publisher and advertiser value. Each ad request is anonymous, and exposes only a small subset of the users preferences and intent signals to prevent fingerprinting the user by a possibly unique set of tags.

Is Brave bad for privacy?

A popularly linked Neocities site Spyware Watchdog ranks Brave as having a rank of 'High' spyware. The information on the site is generally good, but a little context-less: if you compare their Brave article to their articles on other browsers, this bad ranking for Brave is utterly out of place.

Many people who read things and lack basic critical thinking skills wanted me to either admit or refute this page. Again, the website's information is good, but there is that same implicitly more skeptical standard held to Brave than other browsers.

As a point of comparison, take the browser Pale Moon. On their site, the Spyware Watchdog classifies Pale Moon as being 'Top Tier' in privacy, while Brave is 'Low Tier.' But if you look at their own analysis, on nearly every point, Brave is superior to Pale Moon.

Issue

Braves Flaws

Pale Moons Flaws

Trackers

Brave blocks ads and trackers, but whitelists Facebook and Twitter to not break cross-site logins for normies. Users can still choose to block these sites in the settings menu.

Pale Moon does not block any ads or trackers at all, so tough luck. Go find an extension that works well with it.

Forced incompatibility

None.

Pale Moon ships with a blocklist of add-ons that the developers don't want you installing. This includes NoScript and Ad Nauseam.

Auto-updates

Brave checks for updates on startup. (I'm not sure if this is the case on Linux too). There is no menu option to disable this but you can block connections to the update site in your hosts file.

Pale Moon automatically checks for updates, add-on updates and changes to the add-on blocklist on start-up. In the about:config some of these can be disabled.

Analytics on the Start Page

Brave connects to a free/open source Piwik service to get the number of ads/trackers blocked for the startpage. This can be disabled on the start page.

Pale Moon connects to Google analytics on the start page. This can be disabled by changing the start page.

Other bad connections

If ads are enabled, Brave makes connection to a site to get ads. It also checks a HTTPS ruleset on an Amazon server.

Pale Moon makes a OCSP request for every website you connect to to verify their SSL with a third party. This can be turned off in the options.

On pretty much all of these points, when Brave is lacking, Pale Moon is much worse (that isn't to say that Pale Moon is a bad browser either). So it doesn't really make sense to me why Brave, which also comes with additional privacy features like fingerprint-blocking, should be classified as lower than Pale Meme. That site also claims that Brave uses the Google search engine as default. If that was ever true, it isn't now, or at least not on any version of Brave I've used. Brave asks the user on the first start up which search engine he would like to use as default. Google is among the choices though.

Note that in their articles they admit that Pale Moon has 'auto-updates,' but complain that Brave has 'shitty auto-updates.' Okay. I wonder what the difference is aside from personal emotion. In the last paragraph or so, they do mention, if not skirt around all the actual features of Brave:

and the fingerprinting protection I don't think is found in any other browser (but I didn't confirm if it actually works).

It does (of course it's an arms-race). But this is an acknowledgment that Brave is fighting on a level that no other browser is. While other honorable browsers like Ice Cat are committed to free software, Brave is also committed to an internet free from ads enmeshed in web pages and the people who simp for them.

Brave for normies

Aside from nit-picking different browsers, if you want to install a browser on a computer for a normie relative or friend, there is no debate that Brave is the best. Again, Brave is built with ad and tracker blocking. Browsers like Pale Moon or Firefox are bad browsers that can become okay browsers after you manually disable their junk features and download a bunch of add-ons, but Brave comes as it should be. Even Brave's token feature of viewing ads to get paid is not on by default. As it ships, Brave is just a good browser.

This is why I have Brave ship with LARBS: it's a pain to hosts a repository and edit browser settings via dotfiles, while I can just have Brave installed and that gives a passable, ad-free experience for users.

So if you want to make a normie's life easier, install Brave. They will be able to do everything they could do on Chrome, but now they have decreased their Google liability and no longer have to put up with ads.

Grasping at Straws. . .

Chromium based

When you corner an anti-Brave aggitant, they usually mumble something about how Brave is bad because it's 'Chromium-based.' I've never seen people use this argument about, say, qutebrowser or other minor Chromium-based browsers, but I think it's just become 'that reason' for Brave. I honestly, really can't get worked up against a free and open source software project just because it's been spearheaded by Google. The ability to fork it always remains if the code goes south or if it does degenerate stuff.

I think it's especially absurd to place your trust in Mozilla FurryFox and their team of stereotypical SJWs and soydevs as a functioning alternative. Remember Mozilla spends its money developing fun add-ons like this to 'protect' people emotionally from scary 'conspiracy theories' and 'alt-right content' on YouTube. I consider Google just as insane and dangerous, but not necessarily so much more insane so that I for some reason trust the judgment of Mozilla developers over Google ones.

EDIT: Here's another one from Mozilla FurryFox: 'We need more than deplatforming' Moreso than Google, Mozilla's openly stated goal is an internet totally controlled by stereotypical dyed-hair SJWs with bad physiognomy.

What I mean by this is, sure, I'd like some browser with an independent engine. Pale Moon does sort of has that. That's cool. But that is not enough to make a difference for actual usage. Again, look at the list of benefits of Brave at the top of this article, all of those are hard to replicate or find in other browsers. I could go into it elsewhere, but there are a million little reasons why I don't use Pale Moon (but you might like it).

Affiliate links

Twitter users/Redditors went apoplectic several months ago when they realized Brave had included affiliate links to some sites whose names are filled in in the url bar. I have already written on this. It's literally nothing. As I say there, this is what affiliate links are for. I've never heard the same crowd through a fit that DuckDuckGo does exactly the same thing. You could even actually see the Brave affiliate links fill in, which is not the case when clicking on a DuckDuckGo affiliate site link. Still took these guys months to even notice. . . This is only something 'controversial' to people who are trying their damnedest to find something to not like about Brave.

Actual good complaints about Brave and BAT

Since most visceral anti-Brave agitators just have a kind of general ax to grind, I want to take this time to voice my actually annoyances with Brave and the BAT

project. I consider all of these ultimata: I only use Brave with the expectation that these issues will be fixed in the future.

Get rid of Uphold!

Actually, let me say that in

. . .

Get rid of Uphold!

So you can get BAT from viewing ads, and people with websites and YouTube channels can receive donations, great. The annoying thing however is that you can't just get payouts to a random Ethereum wallet, instead, you have to use the company Uphold. This is probably because of legal issues and because I'm sure they have some financial arrangement, but the BAT project cannot be considered to be a universal and private solution if users are funneled into some site that requires a real-world identity.

Legally or technologically difficult to do otherwise? Maybe. But that is one of the goals of cryptocurrencies anyway and it should be met. Build the technology so that it's impossible to legally constrain. Most blockchain technology is already like that.

Users should just be able to give a public Ethereum/Token address and receive BAT there. That should be it. If you want to offer a normie-friendly partner service like Uphold, fine, but that should not be either the default or required. Uphold, I should say, is definitely not normie-friendly anyway. Since they did a redesign late September/early Ocotober, I admit I literally cannot figure the site out and how to transfer my BAT out efficiently.

I should say, in development Brave has had some suboptimal or non-private features in the past before better solutions were devised. I mentioned the fact that Brave pulls a non-personalized ad list, but that wasn't always the case to my understanding: when Brave was starting out, the browser did request specific ads, giving the central service some information about user browsing habits. So that at least indicates that Brave is open to reevaluating methods that are exploitable.

BAT as a coin

Let me state it again though, if the BAT system requires Uphold for basic functionality, it is not a serious long-term service. That's it. I only use and recommend the BAT system under the expectation that this is a temporary situation that they are actively seeking to remedy. If anti-Brave shills want to shill about something that actually matters, this should be it!

Like most coins, BAT is not decentralized in any meaningful sense. Its KYCed into oblivion and relies on a significant number of platforms in bottleneck positions, including in particular the BAT Project itself. I wouldnt say I even

support the BAT Project itself for this reason, I just dont mind using Brave since you can dip your fingers into it without getting KYCed.

Auto-updates and integrations

I agree strongly with the argument from the Spyware Watchdog site above that Brave should not make any unsolicited requests to sites, especially auto-updates, and if it has a reason to, it should have some menu option to disable it. Any connections a browser makes in the background for these purposes or for analytics should be disabled by default too.

The Browser should be neutral and decentralized.

Somewhat related to the above, if Brave is actually serious about becoming the commonly used system not just for browsing, but for internet monetization, it has to be as neutral and decentralized as possible. Brave has added a lot of optional features for different services and other little annoyances. Obviously, you can immediately disable them, but if you want to have a personalizable and universal browsing experience, Brave should be absolutely blank when you pull it up on a fresh install.

General little features

The ability to not keep track of history but to still keep cookies. All Chromium browsers lack this menu feature which exists in Firefox. I'm not sure why this isn't an option because it has always seemed to me the most sensible way to browse. I don't want sites I've already seen filling in my url bar!

Title: Learn Chinese

PubDate: Fri, 11 Dec 2020 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/learn-chinese/

Content

Chinese is the hardest language to learn according to normies who have never tried to learn it.

In reality, Chinese is really easy. It has literally no complex morphology: no tense, plurals, gender. It doesn't have irregular verbs or nouns because it has no verb and noun endings whatsoever. It's almost difficult to explain how easy Chinese is.

The only different thing is the writing system which is I hesitate to say anachronistic. The Chinese character system is more structurally similar to Sumerian cuneiform than to English morphophonemic writing. That presents a unique hurdle, but one if properly tackled is not too difficult and also edifying. It's important to realize in any case that learning a language and learning its writing system are two separate things.

Knowing this is important for mastering or even beginning Chinese.

These are the best Chinese Books

The Yale series by John DeFrancis is not just the absolute best for learning Chinese, but they are an eternal exemplar of basically the best you can do for any language. The books all have generic names and they're linked below with audio. The books are massive. Even if you just get 'Beginning Chinese' and 'Beginning Chinese Reader, Part 1,' you'll know around 4 semesters worth of Chinese compared to your average university course. They have free audio too. Remember that if you get nervous about their price tags, which might be as high as $50. These books are severely worth it though.

There are actually two parallel book series in the DeFrancis/Yale series: the green books, which cover the spoken language (in Romanization) and the red books (the readers) that cover characters. It might sound strange to cover the language itself and the characters separately, but it is massively superior.

The Green Books (for the language)

The great thing about the main series is that they come with many, many exercises and drills which are actually good for individual use. Books that expect you to read something once and internalize it are irreparable.

Links are to the official Yale site. Probably better to buy on eBay or something though. Worth the money even when they are expensive.

Beginning Chinese (audio)

Intermediate Chinese (audio)

Advanced Chinese (audio)

You can get .pdfs of all these books on Library Genesis. I have physical copies, except some an ex-girlfriend borrowed and never gave back. If you read this, you better send them back!

Note that I've also linked audio that was recorded for these books, which is great. They used to cost a lot too, but now they're free!

The Red Books (for characters)

The reason the language in transliteration and the characters are in two books is because learning them is really two different processes. The green books are more typical language learning books. The red books/readers are different.

Every chapter, they teach you 10 characters, but with those 10 characters, you might learn to combine them into 50 new words based on them. The pacing here is for only learning the essential and most used characters as simply as possible as you advance. The readers do not explain grammar and expect you to be advancing in the green books to understand grammatical things.

Beginning Chinese Reader, Part 1 (audio for parts 1 and 2)

Beginning Chinese Reader, Part 2

Intermediate Chinese Reader, Part 1 (audio for parts 1 and 2)

Intermediate Chinese Reader, Part 2

Advanced Chinese Reader (audio)

The Blue Books?

I won't link them because they sort of the defeat the point, and I don't have them, but there is also a blue series which is just the green series but with the language in characters. I think it's intended more for classes that can't do the DeFrancis method due to bureaucratic constraints. If it has the exercises of the green books, that's good and all, but really the value of the system is the fact that when you do the spoken language in the green books, you don't have to worry about unknown characters and when you do the characters in the red book, that's all you need to pay attention to.

I'm not dismissing the blue books, because the quality of the Yale/DeFrancis series is still light-years ahead of all other series, but I'd stick with the classics here.

Notes about Chinese

The tone cope

I remember having normalfriends in my Chinese class (which was a waste of time, just get the DeFrancis books) who would say that Chinese wasn't too hard 'except for the tones.' Mandarin Chinese has four tones that distinguish words. If you've sat through your first day in Chinese class or even seen a YouTube video on Chinese, you know this.

Normies see this alien concept of having tones and they turn their brains off. There were kids in my class who said they'd 'just not learn' the tones. Which is sort of like saying you're going to learn English, but not the vowels 'because they're too hard.'

Actually around half of the world's languages have tones. They are not bizarre or highly 'marked' in an objective sense. They are much more common that the 'th' sound in English. You can bear it.

Title: Learn Latin

PubDate: Fri, 11 Dec 2020 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/learn-latin/

Content

Latin was the first language I learned and has probably been the most useful. Here I'll talk about some of the things it's gotten me and some recommendations for how to learn it well.

What I've gotten out of learning Latin

You get multiple languages for one.

Latin, as you probably know is the ancestor of Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Romanian, etc. Once you know Latin, it is quite literally downhill learning any of these. In college, I decided to take Spanish for a degree specialization (I was doing an international business thing and required a foreign language). Merely based on my knowledge of Latin, I just tested into fifth-level Spanish and figured it out from there. I don't even remember learning Spanish, but I can speak it and still do every once in a while.

In grad school I took classes taught in Spanish and French. I can basically read all Romance languages. I even read Rhaeto-Romance poetry for fun (the languages of Switzerland). All of this is nearly free stuff when you learn Latin.

Latin will unironically red-pill you on many subjects.

Looking to other cultures in the world might change your view of things in some superficial way, but looking into the past will revolutionize how you see it. A recurring point I make in many contexts is that the past is literally an alien civilization. Most of what people pretend they know about it is repeatedly cited modern rumors about it. Seeing it in its own words is very different.

It's insane the amount of writing done in Latin in the medieval period and antiquity, so much of which isn't even on the mind of translators. A lot of historians just cite modern historians. Theologians cite modern theologians. Scientists cite modern scientists. Once you crack open a traditional book on any of these subjects you realize the provinciality and oblviousness of modern 'frameworks.'

In generative linguistics, people who have never read anything written before 1950 pat themselves on the back for all the 'problems' they've solved not knowing they are only retreading paths long established by Stoics, Modistae and early Indo-Europeanists. There are a lot of theologians and philosophers who are trapped in modern citation circles because they don't have the power of Latin that can bring them in touch directly with Aquinas or Augustine or other philosophers of the early periods.

Knowing Latin is like an academic superpower and supposed intellectuals will fear you. Latin used to be the bare minimum of a respectable intellectual... actually... you know what, it still is. Now is your chance to have an actual one up over more pompous people whose only function is writing lit reviews with a disability to read original sources. Being privy to an original and long-neglected source will be a continuous content mill which will unironically be the envy of others in academia.

Knowing Latin is better academically than an undergraduate degree in linguistics.

The process of learning Latin and the lore around you will equip you with all the terminology and principles to make you superior to someone who just studies 'linguistics' without any actual application. I really mean this. When I was a grad student in linguistics, all the brightest undergrads had one thing in common: Latin. I actually came to judge people based on how they first got interested in linguistics. The smartest ones always started with Latin, the biggest plebs always started because they liked some Steven Pinker book (sorry Pinkucks! Those are the honest facts!)

How to Learn Latin

What I used

When I learned Latin, all I had was a copy of this book: Collar amp; Daniell's Beginner's Latin Book. The truth is that most old Latin books are good (old being at least 70 to 100 years old). After language learning became commercialized, it all became dismissable. You can see a list of downloadable Latin textbooks and other materials here here.

The only other source I used in the past to learn and read Latin in a biglottic Latin/Greek New Testament (i.e. Greek on the left and Latin on the right). This is probably actually the single most significant book I own, now that I think about it. I learned Greek from it too and I've had it for around 15 years now.

Lingua Latina per se Illustrata

Although I didn't know about until later, there is another very unique and excellently made Latin series called Lingua Latina per se Illustrata 'The Latin Language Illustrated by Itself' by Hans Orberg. You can see an English publisher here, but you can also find them on eBay or pdfs on Library Genesis or Pirate Bay (along with audio for the books).

LLPSI is unique and really stands out. The entire book, including explanations is in Latin. Latin words and grammatical concepts are explained by illustration and example. This sounds absurd frankly: how are you supposed to learn a language from a book written in that language? But the design is so perfect that it works.

I recommend to get LLPSI and some classical grammar primer like Collar amp; Daniell's because I think especially for newbs, it might be necessary to have explicit instruction about grammar points in English.

Read this

Read this article: 'Latin by the Dowling Method.' It's back from the early internet and its recommendations have stood the test of time and I agree with them.

Latin links

You may've known about these already, but they're worth noting.

The Latin Library Massive collection of classical and medieval Latin works

Textkit Greek and Latin resources and forum

Title: Learning European Languages (Michel Thomas)

PubDate: Fri, 11 Dec 2020 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/learning-european-languages-michel-thomas/

Content

I've said on a couple livestreams that the ideal way for an English speaker to begin learning or excel in learning other major European languages (Spanish, French, Italian and German) is to use Michel Thomas's audiotapes. They can be found for free on Pirate Bay and other sites, but you can also buy them on his official site.

This style of audiotapes is so far above any other, it's hard to even put it in words. They make really exceptional promises: 'learn a language in 8 hours' and in some sense I'm inclined to agree.

They certainly give a reflexive foundation that makes learning anything else about a language very easy. There are multiple courses and they're worth listening to multiple times until it's a totally internalized.

Explanation of the Method

The tapes all have Thomas locked in a room with two people who don't know the language, one male, one female. Thomas simply teaches and illicit basic responses from the two students, teaching them as they go. As the listener, your part is to say the proper responses to yourself before the example students. At all points in time, the students are creating novel sentences, combining basic concepts.

Lack of vocabulary

Probably the most important part of the tapes is the lack of vocabulary taught. You don't get 20 irrelevant nouns with each lesson to memorize that you don't even now how to use. What new words you 'learn' are mostly shared in common with English. The goal is to make you fluent before you have to memorize words.

Thomas, instead, actually teaches the language and how to be constructive in it: the verbs, the verb inflections, how to combine them, basic pronouns and the like. Only once the students understand them does he move on to the words for real-world objects. Thomas will sometimes explain why he does this in the course, but it amounts to what I've said in other places: you can guess or figure out nouns or talk around them, but if you don't know how to put verbs together,

you just don't know the language and you can't even fake it. It is much easier to learn nouns after you actually learn the structure of the language and can actually use them.

Lack of 'comprehension'

You're never told to 'listen to this passage and think about what it means' in the Thomas method. The Thomas method is entirely productive: you make the sentences and you have to put yourself in the mindset of how the language works.

A lot of other audiotapes, say Pimsleur, have you sit and listen to text and implicitly ask you to 'translate' it. This in essense, keeps you thinking in English, or thinking in translating mode. The also keep you chained to canned responses in a single dialog. When people do this, they ignore the actual structure/grammar of the language, listen for big noticable nouns, and then piece together what the sentence means. This is always a bad idea.

Michel Thomas actually just knows what he's doing.

It's honestly rare that you even ever see a 'good teacher.' By that I mean someone who can easily keep track of what his students know and can devise questions perfect to pry their knowledge. Thomas is just honestly good at this and it goes a long way. In the tapes, if he notices that a student repeatedly messing something up, he knows how to elicit better responses and remind them of what they need. This is 99% of teaching, despite the fact that it's a really rare skill.

Don't bother getting the tapes without Michel Thomas

After Michel Thomas's death (or perhaps a little before) the company running his website above put out tapes for many other languages: Chinese, Arabic, Hindi, Japanese, etc. under his name. They are done 'in his method' theoretically, but they are no good. They do weird things like have two different teachers: one who instructs the students and one who is a native speaker of the language to say the sentences in it. I think the idea behind it was to make sure you hear a 'perfect' accent, but it's a total waste and the sponteneity required for actual teaching is lost because you have these two different people trying organize among themselves. I think the teachers lack the introspective skill to keep tabs on the students' learning that I mentioned above, so all-in-all, I think they're awkward and fake.

Donovan Nagel (you may know him from his YouTube channel on BSD) gave Michel Thomas a negative review after using the 'Michel Thomas' Arabic tapes. I listened to part of the Chinese tapes and they were not worth it (if you want to learn Chinese I've written about what I recommend).

But the real Michel Thomas tapes: Spanish, French, Italian, German, done by the man himself, are the best for all their respective languages.

Title: Making Free Money off Credit Cards

PubDate: Fri, 11 Dec 2020 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/making-free-money-off-credit-cards/

Content

While I've done a video on this topic before (PeerTube, YouTube), some people asked me for more information, so here it is.

Aren't you glad to be an AMERICAN?

In America, people are so notoriously dumb with credit and money that credit card companies can literally give out free money by the hundreds to attract new customers. For brainlets who don't bother to understand the basics of credit and debt and the fact that you apparently have to pay back the money you spend, this is like a fly trap. For non-retarded people it is what it is: free money.

Exploiting introductory offers: 'Churning'

Many credit cards have introductory offers like this: 'If you spend $500 on this card in the first 3 months, you'll get a free credit of $200.' That would be a cool offer in the first place, but since there are so many cards that have offers like this, a pattern emerges:

Open a card with an introductory offer, for example: 'Get a $200 credit when you spend $500 in 3 months.'

Use it for your normal daily life until you spend that $500 which you would be spending anyway.

Get/redeem/spend the credit/cashback/points on that card. Literally free money.

Lock away the card and don't use it anymore unless it has some other extremely good offer or cashback perk.1

Rinse and repeat, this time with a new card and new offer.

This cycle is often called 'credit card churning' and some people like me don't mind living off of it.

Every year I go through a couple cards like this, making a couple hundred or a thousand dollars back. If you do the math, it can be like living with a permanent 20-25% off coupon that you use on literally everything. Individual cards will have even more perks to pump-and-dump for extra cash back.

I recommend especially young guys to try this out: it's a way of saving money, while improving your credit by paying off many lines of credit, and once you're done churning, you have a wide selection of credit cards to use for their various normal features.

Cards to churn

Here's a brief list of some cards whose introductory offers I've taken advantage of. This is just an example list, there are many more.

Chase Freedom

Discover It

American Express Cash Magnet

American Express Blue Business

Links to more cards per company:

Bank of America

Wells Fargo

Citi Bank

That's it! That's all you need to know, to take advantage of this, but the rest of this page is just details that people ask about. Read on for more!

How credit card companies try to mitigate this

As I said, introductory offers exist primarily to get dim-witted people who don't know how credit works into using cards unwisely or at least normal people into switching to a different company. They know that high-agency people can exploit this system, so there are some rules they put in place to mitigate the extent to witch you can take advantage of their offers.

Chase, for example, will not approve anyone for a credit card who has gotten five other cards in the past two years. Wells Fargo will not allow you too open cards with introductory offers without a 18 month gap in between. Those are the main ones; other banks like Bank of America don't bother preventing it at all, but it's possible that they will start something like this soon.

Cautionary note for credit brainlets

I suppose it goes without saying that credit cards are not magical money devices and everyone who has a credit card should only spend what they have the account that autopays their card or even better, do what I do and never let my head hit the pillow before paying off all debts. This might sound like a condescending thing to say, but obviously some people out there don't understand how credit cards work and are going into debt for no good reason. I know everyone who follows me is smart of course, but I say this rhetorically.

When I did a video on this I was surprised to learn that there are also people that resist and detest credit cards but still don't understand them. Some people have this strange idea that merely possessing a credit cards causes debt to occur in some cultic fashion outside of your control. And for people who can't know better, maybe it's better for them to think of credit cards as essentially magical objects if it means they aren't misusing them. For everyone else, credit cards are easy to use and exploit and benefit from.

Other advantages of having multiple cards

It's actually nice to have a number of rewards cards from different companies. I will occasionally check the bank or card's web interface and there will often be additional perks especially for points-based cards. It can often mean 10% in addition to everything else from buying from a hardware store or grocery store. There are many niche businesses and I don't recommend into getting roped into buying something you wouldn't be buying anyway, but I keep tabs on if there is anything familiar.

Similarly, it's nice to have 'rotating category' cards that offer say, 5% on a certain type of buy for a period of several months. The Chase card I mentioned above, for example is giving 5% cash back on every purchase made on PayPal as I write this in Q4 of 2020 (it looks like they do PayPal every year or so). I've actually been deliberately making all purchases I would be making anyway over PayPal, just so I can maximize earnings. I'm even going to be paying bills in advance with PayPal so when they are actually due next year, they'll be paid, and I'll have the extra cash back.

Common questions about exploiting introductory offers

A lot of people hear this and think, 'sounds too good to be true.' Makes sense, but we live in a complex world which again is primarily targeted to the unwise. I've been doing this for years and have made back a lot of lot of money and even increased by credit score.

Let's talk about some of the concerns people new to credit card churning might have:

'But what about muh credit score?'

I'm not entirely sure why people think this, but there's this idea that somehow you're scamming or defrauding credit card companies by doing this. You aren't. You're just obeying their terms of service. You're certainly not neglecting payment or proving yourself a bad investment for a loan, which is what a credit score is actually about.

Opening new credit, including credit cards, will mean an inquiry on your account and for a time being, you'll be marked as 'looking for credit.' This will decrease your credit score by a small amount; it's normal. But over time, having lots of credit which you have paid off is good for your credit score. That's, like, what a credit score is. Having more credit cards and properly paid off is a great plus on your account.

'B. . . but that's unethical!'

You gotta be an extreme simp to see these companies massively ripping off retards and nickel-and-diming people and say something stupid like, 'I mean is this really ethical?' You're an idiot. You don't deserve free money. Why use your principles to defend people who obviously don't share them?

A lot of these companies even charge people to have checking accounts. Just in case you don't know how banks work, they make money loaning out their reserves. They are already making money off of every account. Charging you extra so they can make money off you is just more icing on the cake for them. There are many banks who are less shills who simply don't do this because it's totally unnecessary.

People who think this, do you go to the grocery store and chide people who get free samples as unethical? It quite literally is the same thing except for the store never makes money off people who just take samples. A bank whose offer you exploit still might make a lot of money loaning out money you put in a checking account there or even on the credit card transaction fees they charge merchants. And if they didn't, who cares?

'Do I need a checking account?'

If you get a bonus from, let's say, a Chase credit card, do you need a Chase checking account to redeem your bonus or points? Usually not.

Every credit card company I've used allows you to set up automatic payments from another bank. So you shouldn't have to worry about remembering to paying your bills, although I usually pay everything manually anyway just to be careful.

If you get an account credit, that will appear as a negative number on your card and you will be able to spend it without paying it off. If you get points, it might be that you need a checking account to redeem it as cash, but you can also usually redeem previous purchases or sometimes receive your bonus in the form of a bunch of gift cards.

This is an important question because some companies like Chase or Bank of America will charge you several dollars a month to have a checking account open, which I find utterly ridiculous. In both cases, you can waive the fee if you have either direct deposit into the account or if you just have a certain amount of money in the account (I think it's $1,500 in the case of Chase). Either way, you can avoid this problem as having a checking account is not usually necessary.

Three important notes on Credit Cards

The psychology of spending

One aspect of human psychology is that people are more likely to be okay with spending or wasting money if they're using credit or debit cards rather than paper money. It makes sense. If you have to part with a physical object to spend something, it can hurt. It doesn't hurt as much to use a card.

I find that the antidote to this is actually in introductory offers. If I get a card that gives me a bonus for spending $500 in 3 months, I treat that $500 as my absolute budget no matter what. Bills included if possible.

Additionally, I started pasting sticky slips on the back of my cards where I keep

track of the exact amount of money I use on each card so I know when I hit the required amount for the bonus. Each time I spend, I deduct that amount from the original number. This actually serves the double purpose of making the money-spending more real to me. I'm not just swiping my card, but subtracting the amount and can feel what I'm spending.

Don't use cards with annual fees.

Or at least if you do, be smart about it.

None of the cards I recommended above have any annual fees. So you can get them and not worry about canceling them. You can logically exploit the offers of cards with annual fees and cancel them afterwards to avoid paying the fee, but I don't do this myself.

Firstly, annual-fee cards are usually targeted to big spenders: their offers will be something more like 'spend $4000 in the first 3 months and get $750.' If you're making a big purchase, that might be worth it, but I personally am the kind of guy who feels guilty for spending too close to $300 a month. I would definitely contemplate one of these if you know you're going to spend some massive amount of money though. Don't forget to cancel it later!

The bigger issue with annual-fee cards because they are used primarily for social engineering and corporate sponsorships. That might sound strange, for example, but some cards which cost several hundred dollars a year might give you a big free annual credit on their favorite airlines or on Uber or Lyft or Amazon or some other godless corporation. That makes them work for people who are loyal consooomers of their chosen affiliates, but for most people, getting the benefits of those cards requires you to use the products they want.

I've seen some cards that give you bonuses for using them 30 times a month or something else. Sure you can juke the system, but I feel like the incentives they put forth are too strong and will probably manipulate you into spending more than you usually do. The reason I recommend the other cards I do is because you can easily spend that much if you're an independent person without feeling like you have to spend more.

Minimizing Privacy Exposure

Now if you're someone principally concerned with privacy, there are ways for you to take advantage of these kinds of offers without exposing your daily purchases. Obviously opening a credit card does require some basic information, like who you are and where you live (other things your bank already knows). But you can minimize your exposure by using the money on the card for a single recurring payment credit.

For example, let's say you pay an electric bill every month. Many power companies/co-ops allow you to prepay or accumulate a credit, so if you open a spend-$1,000-get-$250 card, you can immediately prepay $1,000, wait for your free $250, then prepay that amount as well.

In that, you've got your free $250 (and you can forget about paying bills for a year or so) and the only new thing the credit card company knows is your power supplier (which they could probably guess anyway from where you live). You could do the same with other recurring payments.

A lot of people I've talked to plan on using these offers to by over-the-table cryptocurrencies. That works too.

Additionally if you make a large purchase like a car that is going to have to be registered with 'the system' anyway, it might be a good time to get one (or maybe more) of these cards.

The most important thing, however, is that you are the one ripping them off and never the reverse. Do not spend more or waste more because you feel richer because you have something that feels like a free money card.

'Daily drivers'

When not pumping-and-dumping a credit card for an introductory offer, there are also generally good cards that you can keep to maximize idle cash back. Obviously the true red-pill is using cash, but if you'd rather get bonuses from cards, here are some options I use with links:

5% on gas and purchases on military bases (unfortunately USAA is very exclusive (you must have family in the military), but great for members)

5% on groceries (only for first year, but there are multiple cards that do this can can be cycled (or get your wife to get it next year))

5% on bills, specifically, you get 5% on rotating categories and home utilities is one of them.

3% at restaurants and on travel expenses

2% on everything else

It should also go without saying that you should have fixed costs/bills set to charge credit cards just for the free cash back. I mean if you have $250 dollars in bills a month and hook them up to a 2% cashback card, that's $60 back a year. It adds up over the years.

Again:

'The NEET will work harder than the wagie to stay out of a job.' Nullennial (YouTube comment)

'I'm Jewish and I find this video Jewisher' shiran (response to my original video on this)

Note: Never close a credit card. It looks bad on your record, while having many credit cards over a period of time which you pay off looks good. Just store your old cards away and you can often disable them on their websites.*#160;#x21a9;#xfe0e;

105

Title: Notes on Learning Languages

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Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/notes-on-learning-languages/

Content

I get asked a lot about learning languages, so I have a few comments about it here. Hopefully I can awaken you from some dogmatic slumbers about language.

Vocabulary is the least important part of learning a language.

This is hard for people to understand because I think most monolingual people think that languages are just different word lists that people use. As a result, 101 students will manually look up every word in the dictionary to translate. This actually increases the mental load of learning a language because people have the idea that to speak it, they have to think of something in English, then translate the sentence word by word, then say that. What a pain.

So what is a language if not words? It really is a set of constraints as to how words can go together: what order they go in when modifying each other, but also languages are morphology. Verb endings and tenses and such are literally the most important part of a sentence. If you don't have a productive and reflexive use of verbs, you are literally just going to be reciting nouns you know like a monkey.

This is actually why I recommend people learning Romance languages or German to use Michel Thomas's audio. Thomas doesn't lecture at all about what he's doing, but he focused only on using verbs and building up basic expressions from the bottom up until it's understood reflexively by students. To actually learn any language, this is more or less what you are going to have to mentally do anyway in the process.

I would say it's actually possible to fluently speak a language knowing only about 50 words. If you understand the 'grammar' of a language, you can basically get by anywhere anytime with a couple dozen words only. What words you don't know can easily be figured out, but you can't wing it with grammar and you can't wing it with morphology.

Computer metaphor

Granted, the same is true of programming 'languages' as well, weirdly enough. No one would think 'knowing a [computing] language' means just knowing all the function and variable names. The important thing is knowing the syntax of how you put functions (loosely verbs) and variables (loosely nouns) together. After all, variable names are always different and functions can be easily invented too or called from some obscure library. Someone who knows a language is someone who can use its syntax to produce novel expressions. If you take a Python script, replace its functions with C functions, it's still Python, just calling a bunch of

undefined functions. People can only get away with even sort of believing this in the domain of human languages if you just don't know enough and end up assuming that all languages just work the same.

Then what is a language?

So really when you learn a language, you can't look at it as new words, but new patterns of speech that interconnect in a logical way.

Speaking fluently in that language means being able to use and combine its basic constructions into complex thoughts put in words. This is why I'm really against 'translating in your head.' If you're doing that, you're not actually using the language. You're teaching yourself a silly English-word-replacement game. I know it's very hard for word-thinkers not to think in words, but if you can't stop doing that for a second, you're not going to be able to learn a new language.

You will not learn a language by consoooming media.

There's this lazy idea that somehow if you passively sit around and watch people using a language this will somehow endow you with the ability to flexibly produce a language in the same way you see others using it. People want to believe it because they want to be able to watch TV or play a cell phone game like Duolinguo or valueless Rosetta Stone-like software and somehow gain competence in a language.

It's not going to happen ever. Learning to play a boring computer game using words from a different languages is not the same as learning to speak the language.

You might say of 'just listening to speech' that 'that's what children do,' but that's not true at all. Children try pretty hard to participate and understand conversation. They sometimes have a desperate personal need to understand each passing sentence and hear the language they are trying to learn for hours a day for years. You watching some forgettable movie in the background as you play with your phone don't.

Are you actually thinking?

If you want to know if you are actually learning a language, ask yourself that. People are weirdly afraid against actually thinking through things and making new expressions in other languages when that's exactly how you learn them.

A lot of language nerds love to email me about their Anki cards or their harebrained schemes for mass-memorizing words as if they're an Asian studying for a chemistry test. Given what I've said about 'learning words,' you can guess my opinion on that. Once people abandon the lazy route, sometimes they take up the via dolorosa: the route of suffering and assume that training themselves like a Pavlovian dog will help them become fluent in a language.

In reality, the only question that matter is: 'Are you actually thinking?' Are you actually going through the mental process of creating new sentences in a new language?

107

When I was learning Latin obviously I had no Latin-speaking friends and could barely get my hands on anything Latin-related. But after I learned the basics of the language I started thinking in it constantly. First that starts in my always implicitly translating English song lyrics or ads in my head into Latin. That's actually difficult if you're dealing with something modern and idiomatic. Not as bad with church songs. As time goes on, I would overtly remember things in Latin sentences instead of English. If I mumbled something under my breath I would make sure it was Latin. At all points in time, I was thinking about how the language was structured and what it meant to produce sentences in it.

The sad fact is that most people who 'learn' languages in school treat them as advanced cross-word puzzle like games where they don't actually think in the language, but have hilarious mnemonic devices in their head for relating what they want to say in English with something in the language they're learning.

Translating is a bad habit.

If anything, you should become worse at translating the further you go on and the more independently you can stand on your own in another language.

Latin is a good example. I can read and comprehend Latin very well, but if asked to translate what I'm reading, I find that more and more difficult the better I read Latin. Now it's easy for me to report the meaning of a passage, but phrase-by-phrase translation is something you have to think through because Latin and English are structurally very different. This isn't just word order, but even how a Latin speaker approaches expressions and the kinds of phrases they use can translate only very delicately into English.

The problem nearly doesn't exist between English and Spanish, which are basically the same language. I'm sure someone who only knows Spanish will feel like English and Spanish have many differences, but in the context of other languages, like Latin or Chinese or Japanese, it's hard not to view English and Spanish as having basically the same kind of syntax 95% of the time. That actually goes for most modern European languages.

You sound stupid if you don't sound stupid.

Every language has its own set of phonological rules that determine what particular sounds are said how and where. Phonological rules give us 'our accents.' When someone speaks English in an accent, they are really just speaking English using the phonological constraints of whatever language they're more familiar with. If they speak English competently, there's at least some extent to which they are abandoning their native phonological rules.

When you first start learning a language, you might read something aloud and say 'I sound stupid.' This is because your natural way of speaking is obviously to say everything with an accent consistent with English. You can probably remember the apathetic jock in Spanish class or whatever who religiously pronounced every Spanish word he mindlessly read with an almost intentionally non-Spanish accent.

To actually speak another language is to adopt the phonological tendencies and even the prosodic and tonal traits of that language. When you initially do that, you will probably sound very stupid to yourself since violating phonological rules you're familiar with always sounds wrong. If you do overcome that illusion of felt stupidity, you won't sound stupid when it counts. If you refuse to improve your accent immediately and from the beginning you will sound like an utter moron forever.

There's actually a trick too: when you imitate a foreign accent, you are actually implicitly adopting the phonological rules of their language that you have noticed in real life. My suggestion is when you are starting out, read the other language in what you'd guess would be a stereotypical accent of the person speaking the language. If your imitation is good, you're speaking their language without an accent.

'The Critical Period' is fake.

That reminds me.

There's an idea in academic and clinical linguistics as well as popular culture that children have a magical plasticy of the brain that makes them uniquely good at learning languages. This is supposed to be the reason why children learn languages 'fast' and adults don't. I think this is a myth. You don't have to send me all the 'proof' about this (don't worry, the Universities of Georgia and Arizona would've failed me totally if I hadn't seen it for my linguistics degrees there). I sort of assumed that this was true for years, but on further thought, I think it's just a conspiracy of irrelevant data and copes. . . or at least, it's not nearly as true as people pretend it is: adults are just about as capable of learning languages in most senses.

After all, think about it, children actually take several years to function in a language, which is often much longer than an adult that knows what he's doing. The Michel Thomas style tapes which I alluded to above are good at giving an adult a passable diving-board for a language in about 8 hours. It can be done. You can also give an adult a crash-course in phonology and articulatory phonetics that will make it easy to understand and with practice produce the sounds children take years to master.

The motivation of a child and adult are utterly different. A language-less child has lots of reasons to invest most of his mental life in attention to language. Apathetic adults don't.

What I really get sick of is doomer adults who cope with their laziness by talking about how hard it is to learn a language as an adult. Many adults still learn languages all the time. There is some circumstantial evidence that infants cue into some acoustic cues and other things quicker than adults, but I think in most cases we're just looking at infants semi-consciously honing in on what details they've acknowledged to be linguistically relevant. In reality, developed humans have huge institutional and intellectual advantages to learn.

Title: Only Use Old Computers!

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Content

The ideal ThiccPad

If there is a single point of advice I can offer novice computer users, it is stop using modern computers.

If you look at 'technology YouTube,' by which I mean the massive multi-million subscriber channels, nearly all of it is devoted to constantly reviewing and comparing every new computer, processor, graphics card and product. There's big money in it because obviously all of these companies put money in it, but also if you're a normal person, you automatically assume you need the 'best' technology.

Do you need a modern computer?

Absolutely not. More than 95% of people could be using a computer from 2008 or before without any problems. Needing a recent machine is limited to people who:

Do extreme, professional, processor-intensive video-rendering.

Compile massive programs and operating systems with severe time constraints.

Play recent triple AAA video-games on high settings.

Use many massive Electron apps and other inexcusably bad software written by soydevs and other people who shouldn't be writing software.

The last two reasons aren't really real reasons at all because they are totally unnecessary and avoidable things.

But to the point, watching YouTube videos and using a word processor does not require last month's new release.

Every video I upload, I transcode for settings optimal for YouTube, meaning I render each video I record. On my computer from a decade ago, that still takes only a couple minutes. A fancy $5000 computer might be able to do it in less than one, but it is honestly not worth the pain associated with modern computers.

How much should a computer cost a normal person?

Either nothing or just around $200, I say. I use a ThinkPad X220 I got for $90 on eBay. Before that, I used another ThinkPad X220 I also got for $90. Like anything else, if you are buying things on Amazon, you're doing it wrong.

The Pain of Modern Computers

Modern computers are more breakable

As computing has become more and more popular, companies have started to realize that a consumer's first reaction on having their $5 wifi card die is immediately buy a whole new computer. This means two things: (1) they don't bother to make computers easy to repair, in fact, they make it more difficult and (2) there is absolutely no need to make computers durable at all. In fact, it's probably better to let computers break so you'll get yet another sale.

Apple is by far the most anti-social computing company because of this. I'll let the larger tech channels show you the specifics, but every Apple product is brilliantly designed to make it difficult to fix very basic and otherwise fixable problems. They have quite a racket licensing out the ability and tools to companies that want to fix their terrible hardware. Apple even used pentalobe screws just so normal people couldn't open their computers up with a typical screwdriver. Of course nowadays every other computer manufacturer imitates the Apple style where apparent 'sleekness' is supposed to be a signal of high quality.

Modern computers are increasingly monitoring devices and come with proprietary junk.

The Management Engine

You might've heard that all Intel i3/i5/i7 processors (that is, after the Intel Core 2 Duo) have an onboard alternate processor that is meant to function as spyware. This is called the Intel Management Engine. It can view your memory and connect to the internet: basically all modern computers have this permanent back door. In older computers, say the ThinkPad X200, you can, with a little hardware action, remove the other processor and replace the proprietary BIOS with Libreboot or Coreboot, but that is not possible on more modern computers (you can install Coreboot on a more modern machine, but not all of the components of the Management Engine are removed).

More recent computers, however are non-removable spyware by design and, yes, the NSA can monitor any machine with a Management Engine. There are actually even rumors that one of the taps that the FBI under the Obama administration put on Trump during his campaign was a Management Engine bug.

Note that AMD (Ryzen) processors have what they call a 'Platform Security Processor' that is equivalent to the Intel Management Engine, so you're not escaping the issue by using one of them.

NVIDIA

Again, unless you play modern videos alone all day, you literally have no reason to have a modern computer, especially one with an expensive graphics card. NVIDIA is a great example because they make graphics cards and develop proprietary drivers for them to make it harder and harder to use them on

machines that aren't running whatever the most recent spyware variant of Windows 10 is. Linux works perfectly on all computers ancient and modern, but if you plug some NVIDIA thing up to it, you might lose your screen or not be able to boot. A lot of gaymers whine about their NVIDIA products 'not working' on Linux without realizing that is by design. NVIDIA and other companies and all CPU designers go out of their way to keep their source code and standards private which makes their products tangibly worse because it is harder for other parties to write drivers for them. Why? Because most of them have partnerships with Microsoft.

The Problem of Windows

How many times have you heard a normie explain to you that their computer is slow because it's 'really old' and they bought it 'way back in 2015?' It's an absurd statement of course. Computers don't just get magically slow... ... unless they've been running Windows.

In the future, once even Microsoft has switched over to a purely Unix-based backend for their operating system, we're all going to have a good laugh about how Microsoft Windows, literally the worst and least functioning operating system ever devised, was the largest consumer market share for decades.

I might go into how Windows is poorly designed in another page or video, but I want to be clear that there is no such loss of speed on any Linux distribution, which is what you should be using. I am one of the first to complain about the feature bloat of the Linux kernel and Linux software, but compared to Windows, it's no contest: Linux runs fast on old hardware. You'll know from some of my videos, however, that I'm not big into 'Linux Evangelism,' mostly because it's sort of strident and doesn't really work with a high success rate. Using Linux is just something that normies have been immunized against (mostly because 'It's what smart people do'), but I always find myself in a position where someone's Window installation has permanently crashed and they're at the awkward decision of having to buy a license to reinstall the dysfunctional and slow operating system they've grown to hate.

There is quite literally no problem that normal people have with computers that is not immediately alleviated by installing Linux.

Why do people use ThinkPads?

As I said above, I use a X220 ThinkPad. Older ThinkPads are fairly popular among people who think and care about doing things effectively and economically on a computer. Why is this?

ThinkPads were always designed for enterprise environments, meaning the financial incentives for the manufacturer are not always planned obsolesce, but a long-standing reputation among large companies of having durable, fixable and expandable machines.

To replace a hard drive on the X200 requires unscrewing just a single screw.

Same to replace the memory. To replace a spoiled keyboard is no more than three screws. Modern laptops, including the degraded modern ThinkPad have abandoned this simplicity and opt for the Apple-Mac/cell phone design technique of making batteries, memory and the rest functionally soldered and irremovable.

How far can $500 go?

Over the years, Ive had many things break on my laptops, but since Ive been using ThinkPads, it is incredibly easy to keep a working computer even after rough use. I estimate that I have never spent more than a combined total of $500 on computers, which is usually a bare minimum for what someone can buy a modern laptop for nowadays.

When the keyboard on my ThinkPad breaks, I can just buy a replacement keyboard for $30 or $40 and replace the old one much easier than any other model. Thats the modularity of these computers.

Even in the worst case scenario when something on the motherboard makes the computer unbootable, I still get to keep my broken ThinkPad and repurpose the memory, wifi card, keyboard and everything else. I still have some parts of every laptop Ive had just because they do come in a lot of use. The other month, a friends wifi on his desktop went out and I could replace it with one of my old ThinkPad modules.

This is the kind of thing you lose with modern computers. This is purposeful on the part of manufacturers, and its important not to pay them huge amounts of money to incentivize this behavior. Its very easy to live off of 10 year old computers nowadays. The eBay-and-etc resale market is massive even thought many of us have gotten wise to the value of these old computers.

Title: Reviews of All Linux Distros (That Matter)

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Content

Firstly, once you reach basic competency in Linux, different distributions don't matter. A lot of newbies analyze distros based on what they look like when you install them, often not realizing that it's a pretty simple affair not just to change superficial things like your theme and setup, but entire desktop environments. Basically all distro reviews online are wastes of time for people who know what they're doing. When I came to YouTube, all Linux YouTube was was people constantly installing distro after distro in a virtual machine and critiquing minutiae. It was a bleak and boring world. One of my first and greatest achievements on YouTube was making this video: How to choose a Linux distro: Stop Thinking!, which went semi-viral and sort of put a damper on

distro reviews. Either way, I'll say what I think about different distro minutiae here.

Things that matter

Free software. If you are switching to Linux, there is no point of you just using junk proprietary spyware 'apps' that you used on Windows. Any distribution that advertises proprietary software as a feature should be viewed as suspect. You can always install proprietary software if there is some particular need (usually the only 'need' is a lack of knowledge of free software that is more extensible and performs the same tasks and more).

Up-to-date software. This matters because if you want to install a program, you're often going to need recent libraries/depencencies. This is especially important if you want to use software in active development: say software for video-game compatibility on Linux.

No gimmicky additions. Probably the worst thing you can do is install a distribution that puts a giant wall between you and the system itself. One of the biggest advantages of using Linux is the ability to understand what's going on on your computer and optimize it. If you use a distribution that hand-holds basic things, it might seem convenient at first, but as time goes on, you won't have a clue when that fragile system fails.

Consistent and reliable maintainence. Lastly, you'll want to make sure that your distribution has humans on the development side that are at least fixing basic problems. As programs change and are updated, it often requires some changes in your distro's repositories and more. Unmaintained distributions are usable, but it becomes annoying to deal with as time goes on if you want to install software with the distribution's package manager.

Ubuntu

Ubuntu is a common distribution because it is the distribution shilled by the company Canonical. Canonical has probably had a positive effect on making GNU/Linux more widely used and accessible, but Ubuntu has a lot of long-term headaches that will plague users.

That said, Ubuntu is nearly the worst distribution for new users. It is maintatined at least, but fails on all the metrics above:

It advertises proprietary software in its software center and encourages users to use programs because they are 'familiar' from Windows.

It releases slowly and you'll run into problems if you try to install something out of the box.

It is full of gimicks, the elephant in the room being the Snap system, but Canonical has thrown in a lot of junk features in the past and a lot can break.

Debian

Debian is just a more reasonable version of Ubuntu: it separates free and non-free software clearlyit has a optional version that allows unstable and testing packages for some recent software and it has so few gimmicks it's probably the most boring distro!

I haven't used Debian much as a desktop system (I do use it on my servers), but the package manager and even the release speed of the testing versions isn't quite fast enough for me personally.

Artix and Arch

Artix is the distribution that I use and have been using for a while. It is really the same thing as Arch, except for Artix allows the usage of different init systems (I use runit).

Arch and Arch-based distributions are 'bleeding-edge' in their release time and have access to the Arch User Repository (AUR) allowing the single widest software library of all major Linux distributions.

Artix offers many installable desktop-environment ISOs for newbie users, but thankfully they don't over-bloat them with gimmicky features. Arch itself only has an official minimal installation, and that's kind of its thing.

If I had to choose, Artix is the distribution that I recommend for both novice and most veteran users.

Manjaro

Manjaro is another Arch-based distro. I've even recommened it before for new users in the past and installed it on many people's computers in real life, but I will admit that my view on it is souring. They have definitely started to go the way of Ubuntu by adding lots of extra features, directly people to rely more on flatpak and 'harmful' systems and generally adding more layers of abstraction between the user and the system.

All the good things that can be said about Manjaro can also be said of Artix, which also has easy to install ISOs, so I consider Artix the superior system.

Parabola

Parabola is the FSF-approved, all-free software version of Arch Linux (it also has an OpenRC version for soysystemd-haters). In the abstract, Parabola is my optimal distribution, but I don't actually use it anymore for two reasons:

It uses the Linux-libre kernel, which is all free software, but networking will not function with laptops with proprietary wifi cards.

It is not quite as well maintained as Arch and Artix, and you'll be a little more likely to run into package breakage.

The second problem isn't the end of the world, but it can be annoying.

Gentoo

Gentoo is one of the best distributions and excels in all of the 4 requirements I give. Not only is non-free software obviously separated, but it isn't too difficult to have your Gentoo install with a Linux-libre kernel if you want.

Gentoo is also unique because it is a source-based distribution: you can set basic compilation settings for your programs and have a lot of control over them. While Gentoo is very well maintained, you actually end up with a good bit more control over your system. That is a responsibility that has some prerequisite knowledge of course, so Gentoo has a reputation of being difficult to install.

If you want to look into Gentoo, you should first be familiar with Linux and what specific kind of system you want. When you first install Gentoo, because you can customize it so specifically, it obviously helps to know what exact network backend you're comfortable with, whether you want to use GTK or QT, or many other little things that a Linux noob might not know too much about.

Void

Void is another great distribution. It's notable also for using runit instead of soystemd, having a musl version, and having a package system reminiscent of Arch, but in many ways more minimalist and extensible. It again separates free and non-free packages, and has a wide repository of them, included even more installable via the xbps-src system which is somewhat analogous to the AUR, although unlike the AUR, I don't believe it's quite as easy to update packages.

Void has had a somewhat tumultuous development culture. It was originally the brainchild of one man, one man who went missing for a year... After he returned, drama eventually caused other member of the team to encourage his retirement. Either way, while I used the distro for a while and was one of the first people advertising it online, I never remember this translating into any downstream problems on my computer.

Distro not here?

This is only a list of distributions that I've used for a bit. I don't do 'distro reviews' or just install random distributions just to test them, so if it isn't here, I'm not going to have an experience-based opinion.

Title: Science vs. Soyence

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Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/science-vs-soyence/

Content

There's nothing necessarily wrong with science, reason, knowledge etc. To some degree, they're fundamental for survival in this world in one way or another. But one of the more worrisome problems which have arisen since the Enlightenment, and especially in the past several years, is the fact that whenever scientific

knowledge has increased, human arrogance has accelerated even faster. This isn't a metaphysical, moral arrogance; it's one that is more and more jeopardizing the human cosmos.

We live in a pop-scientific and pop-technological world. Because common people are constantly weighing themselves down with new gadgets and state-of-the-art genetically engineered food, there's a tendency to want to pay homage to the amorphous blob of 'knowledge.' Of course, much like the Greek Gods, we cannot seem to speak to 'knowledge' directly, or to mentally murky academics, but only to official mediators: journalists and 'science communicators' and the like.

The religious metaphor is intentional. Of course the actual view of Popperian science is that scientific 'advancement' is less of an increase in knowledge than a decrease in falsity. We can never be sure of what is true, but we can gradually establish what is false and contradictory; science does exclusively the latter. Real scientific work refutes and calls into question established fact and is in a constant self-regeneration. Facts mean nothing in themselves.

And scientific models, from our models of the atom, to models of the Earth's weather and climate, to models of our body are highly circumstantial, and as a rule, will nearly all inevitably be proven false. Theories are the narratives we cast over facts which have not yet been ruled false. We know nearly nothing of how the brain works. Sure, we know there are synapses, and we know what brains end up doing in some circumstances, but we haven't begun to scratch the surface of how a brain is actually engineered (computational models be damned). The same is true of the human body and is especially true of human society.

Now Neil deGrasse Tyson has the annoying mantra that he repeats at every possible opportunity, which goes something like: 'the good thing about science is that it's true whether or not you believe in it.' First off, I don't know what's good about that; it'd be pretty damn convenient to live in a world where we could imagine away gravity or CO2 or cancer, but aside from this, science, actual science as a critical methodology is manifestly not true and is not the truth. Science is a way of marginally approaching truth by discovering falsity, and in most endeavors, this approachment is so marginal as to be inert in all our daily lives. There is nothing to 'believe in' in science anyway, because it's an exposer of non-truth.

But in pop-science, Science is 'knowledge' and deviation from the scientific catechism is 'irrational.' It's not just irrational to dispute consensus, but irrational to fail to implement it in your personal life.

In Practice

The greatest danger of pop-science is the unquestioned assumption that life should be led 'scientifically.' That we should 'look for evidence,' 'question everything,' and universally 'challenge authority' (unless that authority is a professor). The problem should be blatantly obvious in hindsight.

An obvious example: in the 20th century, Western societies had to deal with the

very real problem of a bizarre increase in lung cancer rates. We 'know' now that smoking tobacco and other substances apparently cause drastically higher lung cancer rates, but this was lost on the people at the time.

The relationship between smoking and cancer was highly circumstantial; there were some statistical correlations established, but as any pop-science guru will tell us 'correlation is not causation!' For decades, scientifically minded people looked for evidence while millions more died. Smoking companies took refuge in the fact that there was no mechanism understood behind how smoking could cause lung cancer. With all scientific rigor, they insisted for decades that the increase in lung cancer was due to something else, or merely an increase in diagnosis capacity. And they were on the side of scientific skepticism!

Only now that there is some understanding of how carcinogens in smoke can damage the lungs can we say that the 'scientific consensus' is that smoking causes lung cancer. Cute, but if people had been 'irrationally' cautious, the human tragedy would've been substantially mitigated.

The problem is that 'looking for evidence' before acting or non-acting is personally and socially dangerous. In nearly all circumstances, our intuition (crafted by millions of years of evolution) or social norms (which keep us to established safe routes) are much better guides to life than the scientific consensus, despite them being 'irrational' (and sorry, religion is part of this too). When someone guzzles down some newly fabricated energy drink or gallons of soda, they're nearly certainly damaging their bodies in ways science does not yet understand. Don't wait 40 years for some longitudinal peer-reviewed study to prove that eating plastic is bad for you. Trust your instincts before you give credence to some YouTuber who says inane things like 'There's no evidence that. . . '

My favorite little 'irrationality' that we all commit is of course, sleep. After millennia of trying to understand it, there is no established scientific reason or justification for why humans 'need' sleep. Sure there are hypotheses (memory processing, repair, maybe even something Freudian), but none close to common currency. In the words of one of the world's most prominent sleep researchers, William Denent, 'As far as I know, the only reason we need to sleep that is really, really solid is because we get sleepy.' Of course the absence of logical evidence to the necessity of sleep keeps no NdGT fan from wasting their time on the 'Bronze-Age Myth' of the importance of sleep.

(Not) (Mis-)Understanding Complex Systems

The human body is a complex system in which every 'system' is overlapping, somewhat redundant, all-affecting and fundamentally beyond linear analysis. Our scientific studies can find binary variables that correlate with a low p value, but that tells us nothings about what's actually going on and nothing about the underlying mechanisms. Again, the same is true of the human brain and the same is true of human society. Nothing is a simple input-output system.

What this means is that basically nothing from the world of pop-science can ever

affect the basics of our lives because the interaction of our component parts are just non-amenable to any kind of generalizations that make intuitive sense to us. Everything we do affects our bodies in ways we can't predict so the proper strategy is always an 'irrational' precaution and avoidance of novelty.

Things, of course, get especially touchy when talking about the 'rational' management of society. Every good denizen of the post-Enlightenment world, even most of those on the 'Right' have the idea that the economy and social relationships are simple one-to-one hydraulic systems that can be managed like a little steam engine. Now we've been rationally managed to hell and not back (and the solution is always more rational management).

The terrible truth is that traditional social norms are irrational and still do exist for a reason in the perennial gale of social evolution. Social change and social progress (note the lack of scare quotes) have always been happening, but only now do we have the naive idea that the units of society (people) have the competence to design and contribute to an otherwise unconscious evolution of social memes.

Anyway, I'll give the last word on this issue to Noam Chomsky, who somehow manages to say something clear and admirable on the subject:

Science is a very strange activity. It only works for simple problems. Even in the hard sciences, when you move beyond the simplest structures, it becomes very descriptive. By the time you get to big molecules, for example, you are mostly describing things. The idea that deep scientific analysis tells you something about problems of human beings and our lives and our inter-relations with one another and so on is mostly pretense in my opinionself-serving pretense which is itself a technique of domination and exploitation and should be avoided. Professionals certainly have the responsibility of not making people believe that they have some special knowledge that others can't attain without special means or special college education or whatever. If things are simple, they should be said simply; if there is something serious to say that is not simple, then, fine, that's good and interesting. We can perhaps find deep answers to certain questions that do bear directly on issues of human interest and concern, but that is rarely true.

''Science' 'Communicators"

One of the worst aspects of all of this is that this understanding of pop-science encourages people to distrust what they know or can judge of the world in favor of the caricature of the consensus of institutionalized academics. People have this idea that there are these intellectual, peer-reviewed demigods in universities who discover the secrets to the universe and communicate them through their messengers stationed at BuzzFeed and the Huffington Post. Betraying their infinite wisdom would make you 'irrational' or a 'fundie.' The reality is that these demigods really just went to graduate school because they were lazy and initiativeless, and even in the abstract, most of their real work has nothing to do with your life whatsoever. It's only the messengers that convince you of that because it stimulates their power trip.

Science journalists, much like journalists generally, are people too incompetent and emotional to work in the private sector, too dumb to be academics (and the standards are abysmally low these days), too full of themselves to work in charity and too bumbling, weak and arrogant to work in a blue collar or manual occupation. Journalism is an attractive career to many because it demands the least rigor and honor and promises the greatest power and influence.

Their self-ordained duty is to overwhelm the public with a confusion of 'studies' that increasingly seem to micromanage a neurotic person's life. 'Studies show that' classical music may help infant brain growth, or that gluten ravages the intestines, or that simply owning more books causes higher scholastic achievement, or that Vitamin C or antioxidants or kale or whatever health-food de jour solve all the world's problems.

At the end of the day, the worst part is that we talk about 'science' as if it's some kind of anthropomophic creature with desires and feelings and a plan for us all. It's a uniquely modern flaw to say things like, 'Science tells us that. . . ' 'Science is about..' 'Science is against. . . ' Does this not strike anyone else as creepy? The interpretation of science forced on the public is a scriptural one, where law to live life by are codified in 'peer-reviewed' journals and communicated by intermediaries. 'Science's' purview is infinite and any failure to conform is some congenital failure or reason.

Title: The Fragility of Physics

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Content

Physics has a reputation of being a uniquely 'scientific' field. In other fields, you might hear of the concept of 'Physics Envy' which is supposed to be a deep-seated desire of academics of other disciplines for the rigorousness and elegance of physics. Only physics, so the popular understanding goes, is truly able to abstract away from the messiness of detail and create truly beautiful and solvent models of their subject matters. Physics is thus the queen of the 'hard sciences.'

I object to the very idea of 'hard vs. soft sciences' for reasons that will soon be clear, but I think it is most important to remember that for all its pretensions, physics is the most fragile science. That isn't necessarily bad, but it's true.

Why 'fragile?'

Put simply, physics, partially due to its somewhat abstract nature, is exactly that domain where our interpretation of the universe is most likely to change radically in the event of any kind of theoretical sea change. That is, while in other more terrestrial sciences, the data is well-known and the theory is in debate,

in physics, the opposite is arguably true. In astrophysics, quantum mechanics, the study of gravity or relativity, this should all be obvious.

Even without departing the cuddling embrace of mainstream physics, we can actually see this clearly. What is the ultimate fate of the universe to be? A continuous expansion of the universe until heat death? Perhaps gravity or some other force will pull everything back in a Big Crunch? The correct alternative is a statement of very specific and tendentious data which changes quite a great deal with any kind of new interpretations of what we see.

It's worth it to remember that for most of man's history, including the initial development of what we nowadays call physics, the 'normal state' of the universe was assumed to be the state of affairs we're familiar with on the surface of the Earth: everything falls down to the ground and things propelled in space will slow down until they stop.

But modern physics now looks at the nature of our life on Earth as an exception to the general rule of frictionless and continuous movement in the vacuum of space. A valid question to ask is how much more that we take to be normal is a special case of reality? As we encounter more and more abberrant data, such as quantum mechanics, we might soon find ourself unifying seemingly disparate forces in the same was that Newton in a novel and seemingly absurd way the fact that objects fall to the ground with the apparent fact that the Earth orbits the Sun into one new concept: Gravity. Such a unification religates all our universals to a special case.

Does light really go the speed of light?

Physics is fragile because it is like a game of Jenga. Pull out or change one piece and the whole thing is either reordered or simply collapses.

As an example, say that within several years, we realize that the speed of light, for some known or unknown reason, doesn't function with the universality we assumed. Suppose that there is some kind of interaction of light and gravity such that light is faster in some parts of the universe. The reason isn't important. Or suppose we merely find out that in the past, there has been a systematic principle (similar to the Heisenberg Principle) that has miscalibrated all of our measurements of light.

Even if we have minutely mismeasured, the Jenga piece of light will radically alter everthing: our ideas of how old the universe is, our relationships with other planets, the solvency of general relativity, etc. You might say that there is a 'concordance of evidence' that attests to our single known speed of light, but another way of putting that is that we have many other things tied into our interpretation of light that will have to change if we realize our models of it are flawed.

Poverty of data

Especially in the astronomical domain, it's worth remembering exactly how

circumstantial our ideas of space are. We sometime speak of the traits of other solar systems' planets as if we've been there. But in reality, astrophysicists guess the chemical compositions of foreign planets based on their light frequencies and other fragile data. Any systematic error in observation over those thousands or millions of lightyears and we have been counting angels on pinheads the whole time.

People have the idea that because astrophysicists make extraordinary claims about planets, galaxies and time periods far beyond our mortal ken that they must have extraordinary evidence for them. That is frankly not the case. We have a piece-meal and jury-rigged set of circumstantial reasoning leading us to these claims. Seeing them computerized in full color in a science documentary doesn't make them more real. It just makes them look more official.

Physics vs. 'soft sciences'

I remember talking to someone over the internet who accused me of having a low view of institutionalized science and being a dreaded epistemological anarchist because one of my degrees is in the 'soft science' of linguistics. While I have a lot of bad things to say about the current state of linguistics, as a field, it is substantially more advanced and its findings are substantially more solid than physics. At that, formalizing ideas in math doesn't just make something a better or a more rigorous science anyway, which is the assumption of many people have.

While linguistics undergoes theoretical changes every several generations, the data, or really more importantly the phenomenology of linguistics is as secure as ever across all theoretical frameworks. That is, we know how language works. We can see abstract relationships between morphemes and syntactic structure. Even if we totally rewrite our narratives and theories about linguistic basics, there is no debate about the structure of language and how basic data relates to other data. This is absolutely the opposite of physics.

Physics is pretty solid on earth, and solid when you are running objects at each other in a vacuum, but once we broach the territory of astrophysics, relativity, gravity and more or less anything else that we as humans lack direct intuition of most of the 'facts' of physics are theory-internal facts, and will fade away or be rendered obsolete when the next theoretical fad comes around.

My standard for theoretical frameworks

I think any serious scholar needs the ability to operate cognitively with multiple different theoretical frameworks in mind.

For example, (on linguistics) I don't really take Generative Grammar very seriously, in fact, despite it being on of the most well-funded dialects of linguistics nowadays, it's pretty inert. Despite that, I view it as very important for me to be able to process linguistic problems within Generative Grammar and word explanations within its ideas. It's nice to be able to say to someone 'this alternation is accounted for if this DP occupies the spec of CP.' I don't believe in

CPs or specifiers as being psychologically real, but I can recognize the language as communicative.

A good theoretical framework is one that can produce facts and observations that can be recognized and explained outside of its framework as well.

That is, a framework should cue us in to finding utterly novel observations and thus a new phenomenology. This goes against the egocentric motivations of a lot of scientific frameworks whose practitioners are trying to edge out 'the competition.' Fields that spend most of their time trying to formalize previous observations within their own theoretical language are mostly a waste of time (this is Generative Grammar, frankly, although due to historical ignorance, many people in GG do not know they are re-treading steps).

One of the biggest issues of modern post-war institutionalized science is that the funding and peer-review mechanism is self-reinforcing: all fields converge to be 'unipolar': only one methodology or framework is deemed 'scientific.' This creates a community of 'scientists' who are more an more incestuous and generally oblivious not just to other possibilities of inquiry, but don't even have to be aware of their own priors or assumptions.

The blinders of positivism

As I've interacted with physicists more, I'm often surprised by how irrelevant they think even the most basic theoretical awareness is. That's 'philosophy' for them. It's not uncommon to hear zingers like these:

'Science isn't about truth, it's about creating models.'

'Physics is about fitting equations.'

'We don't do philosophy.'

Things like these are said as if they are some kind of statement of universal and well-consented-to truth, when in reality they are absurd Zen koans of the positivist religion. This was a loony opinion a hundred years ago and people saying these things now know that they are ludicrous. They have just become identifying marks of the social club.

Yep, science is about creating models. . . models that replicate reality, i.e. Truth.

A scientists who doesn't do philosophy isn't a scientist: he's a meter-reader. A philosopher who doesn't do science isn't a philosopher: he's just a stoner. The attempt to sever these two words from each other is part of the problem.

Physicists seem to be particularly touchy on this point. On one hand, they insist that philosophy is 'not their thing' and 'not related.' On the other hand, they get incredibly angry when anyone else dares to either put the methodology of modern physics to any kind of philosophical tests or even to look into philosophical ramifications of their work.

In reality, modern scientists and positivists have their own metaphysics, it is just an implicit one that they advertently or inadvertently sneak into their theories. They can only do it because its clumsy sterile 'materialism' is the background-radiation of the modern world.

Title: The Parable of Alien Chess

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Content

A parable on the Logical Postivist 'interpretation' of scientific models.

The Parable

Suppose an alien race comes to Earth and wants to observe our games. They are very interested in chess, despite the fact that they have eyes with properties that make it impossible to make out what actually happens on a chess board. (The whites and blacks and squares all blur together.)

They can still learn about chess experimentally, they know they can sit two players (a so-called 'white' and 'black' player) down to play it, and they can tell behaviorally who at the end wins.

After extensive experimentation, they realize this: 50% of the time, the white player wins and 50% of the time, the black player wins (we'll ignore draws and any first-move advantage for the example).

The 'best' model

A logical positivist alien thus creates the ultimate, long-term model of chess as an iterated game: Chess amounts to just a drawn-out coin flip. Half of the time white wins, half of the time black wins, just as if they were tossing a quarter.

The aliens then decide to model chess as a coin flip, as a 50-50 game with no underlying principles. While this statistical technique might not be useful for predicting a single game, over the long run and over iterated games, it is the most efficient and parsimonious possible model.

'Inferior' models

Suppose, however that a 'crank' scientist of the alien race posits that 'God doesn't play dice' and that chess is a more complicated game, despite the fact that the aliens cannot observe it. Suppose even he asks around and determines from humans that there are actually pieces on the board with functions, and he even devises a machine that allows his alien eyes to see the first move of the game of chess.

Seeing this move allows him to create a new theory and model of the game, one that takes into account the first move made and he tries to generate a new set

of probabilities of victory based on that move. The model he makes, is of course highly arbitrary, stipulated and ad hoc. In fact, this model is inferior on many inevitable accounts. For example:

It is less predictive over iterated games than the coin flip model.

It is not as parsimonious/minimal as the coin flip model.

It adds new variables to the theory (pieces) that are suspect.

Which model is 'right?'

Which model is closer to truth?

Since we, unlike the aliens, are not prevented by defect from observing chess, we know that the second, 'inferior' theory of chess is truer. Its theoretical categories, if apparently arbitrary in the eyes of the aliens, are getting at the actual underlying mechanics of chess. Even if the model is less effective, it is certainly righter.

Which will cause fruitful scientific inquiry?

The coin flip model is a scientific dead-end. Firstly, the coin flip model is constructed statistically, which presents the underlying mechanism to be randomness, and thus unworth of inquiry. This isn't statistics hoisted above random variation we know to exist, instead, it's utterly blind statistics that covers over whatever principles underlie it.

Secondly and more importantly, in order to actually improve that model, it has to lose empirical solvency: embracing the abstractions of pieces means introducing mess and deviating in some way from the empircal generalization that half of all chess games are won by white and half by black.

This is not an abnormal circumstance.

The parable here, really an example is not abnormal. In most affairs in science, whether that be physics or neuroscience or economics or chemistry, we are exactly like the partially-blind aliens.

'But science isn't about truth!'

Yeah, it is dude.

Even if you are pretending that science is about 'models' or fitting equations and the like, again, the well-fit model is impossible to perfect, while the flawed, yet more true to reality model does have a potential over the long-term to be a superior one. After exhaustive inquiry, an alien race might not only discover the pieces and the full set of rules behind chess, they might be able to predict what moves are good or bad and predict individual chess games. Even on the standards of mere instrumentalism, the mindless positivistic theory is still actually inferior.

Local maxima

The plot

One of the ways I visualize science and models is that each model is really like an n-dimensional optimization plot. 'Truth,' or if you deny truth as metaphysics, 'accuracy in data' or 'well-fit equations' are upwards and the goal of science is to get further that way.

At the point you're at, you can tell which direction you can go to move upward, or, which little changes you can make to improve your model. That is what incremental science is, after all: don't change assumptions and just fine-tune your equations. The endless fine-tuning is sometimes thought of as 'progress.' Of course I don't think that this is bad, but it is a very minor and scientifically less important part of science as a whole.

The reality of incremental science is that once you're at a local maximum, once you've fine-tuned your equations about as perfectly as possible, it's over. Everything next to you looks like a disimprovement. It looks just like those inferior theories of alien chess that posit the existence of pieces. From that, you might erroneously conclude that you have found the global maximum, which due to the nature of the complexity of the universe and the multiplicity of possible answers and theories, you flatly haven't.

Logical positivism is kind of theoretical lobotomy that implicitly tells scientists that they should never, ever, ever change foundational assumptions: tweaking equations like an oblivious autist is Science and everything else is 'philosophy' or 'metaphysics' or 'pseudoscience.' This amounts to keeping each scientific field on whatever local maximum is closest, utterly unable to extricate themselves from it even when they see on the horizon abberant data. If you want to understand the stagnation of science or any other specific field, this is where it comes from.

Purposefully 'bad' science

In Against Method, Paul Feyerabend, in what an unreflective mind might misinterpret as a 'troll,' says that it is important for science that people have biases, financial interests, interfering religious and political doctrines and the like in science. Looking at the plot, you might now see why. When we are stuck on a local maximum, every new data keeps our already-optimized model where it is no matter how low that maximum actually is. What you need to shake it up is an external shock that totally moves our theoretical position somewhere new on the plot where we can try to optimize at another point, and then compare.

Basic assumptions

A prudent person should be able to question, 'Am I even on the right track or am I playing with some model that has a fundamental flaw?' I can guarantee you, optimizing for data and fitting math and equations is easy. All theoretical programs are wrong because they make incorrect core assumptions. This is very hard for the ego of scientists because it means:

Possibly illiterate dilettantes on the internet might see and bring to attention legitimate theoretical flaws.

All the years you spend in graduate school counting angels on pinheads in your respective theoretical framework is mostly a waste of time.

The borders of science are borders more of a sociological club than being the border of raw rigor.

Most of the scientific work is not meaningful outside of the theoretical framework that gave rise to it.

Title: Why I Use the GPL and Not Cuck Licenses

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Content

Every piece of software I write I license under the GNU Public License Version 3 (GPLv3) unless I have forked it from something else.

The GPLv3 is the premiere copyleft license, meaning that it not only allows users to run, modify and distribute their own versions of what I write, but it also requires that no one in that chain of development restrict and close-source that software: it and software deriving from it must forever remain open, usable and sharable. Richard Stallman, one of the minds behind the GPL has described it as a 'hack' of the copyright system because it uses the legal infrastructure of copyright to ensure software is free rather than restricted.

But occasionally I get asked why I don't use so-called permissive licenses like BSD or MIT. These are free software licenses, but they do not require that forked versions of the code be free and open source software. In other words, you can take something written with a BSD or MIT license, put it in the next version of Windows and no one will ever know. If you did that with GPL code, you'd be in for big legal trouble if found out.

I and others have recently taken to calling these permissive licenses Cuck Licenses.

Why 'Cuck Licenses?'

Why be mean and bully BSD and MIT licenses calling them 'Cuck Licenses?'

Quite simply, using them is precisely analogous to being cuckolded. When you really look at it, the similarity is uncanny.

I understand GPL free software and its ethical vision for software. I also understand that desire for people and businesses to not release their source code for commercial and monetary benefits. What I don't understand is simultaneously releasing free code with no requirement that it remain free. It can now be used against you and othersif you had moral qualms about that, you could've at least made money off of it yourself.

127

Using a Cuck License especially for 'ethical reasons' or 'because I like open source software' is beyond absurd. You're simply writing code and effectively abandoning the privileges of intellectual property while allowing any large corporation to come and close-source and monetize your software and sell it back to you without any other obligations. You have also abandoned your ability to ever complain about IBM, Microsoft, Apple or any other tech giant because you are literally writing their proprietary software. These companies even sometimes take very simple code from minor projects and use it to save a buck and a little effort.

When you license with a permissive license, you don#39;t have a say anymore.

At the end of the day, using a Cuck License is little different from either releasing software in the public domain or just not licensing it (in some jurisdictions, at least). It has the pretense of a license, but for no real function. I suppose depending on which you use, you at least get your name on the license, but I hardly think that that's how internet fame and glory is actually distributed anyway. As far as I'm concerned using a Cuck License is worse for user freedom than just releasing it in the public domain. This is because at least public domain software can be taken and later additions can be protected by the GPL. The legal case for doing that with a Cuck License is not so clear.

No whiners!

The funniest thing is when Cuck Licensers complain that people are abiding by their licenses. They will complain that people took their code and made money off of it. They will complain when they don't get some social credit they feel like they deserve when their code is used in a project. They will complain if people fork their project and it becomes more popular than the original. They will complain when some tech giant takes their code and makes spyware out of it.

If they were serious about stopping any of this, they easily could've by licensing their project as anything other than a code giveaway. If you want praise for some contribution, put it in the license. If you don't want your software used for proprietary software, use the GPLv3.

A Cuck Licenser gets what he deserves (and we all pay the price).

One of the funniest and saddest horror stories of Cuck Licenses I can think of is Andrew Tanenbaum, who released MINIX, an operating system, under a BSD license. Intel silently took this software (thanks to its license) and unbeknownst to him, used it for their Intel Management Engine, making it the OS of the spyware microprocessor/backdoor now running in all Intel CPUs. We all have a permanent NSA backdoor because of the Intel Management Engineall made possibly by Cuck License cuckery.

Only many, many years later was this even revealed to Tanenbaum. Read that blog post of his as he slowly externalizes his mixed feelings, tinged with guilt. After all, on the 'bright' side, he says:

'I guess that makes MINIX the most widely used computer operating system in

the world, even more than Windows, Linux, or MacOS.'

Wow, what a proud achievement. But regardless, Tanenbaum already feels some regret about the fact that his permissive license allowed Intel to withhold this:

'This was a complete surprise. I don't mind, of course, and was not expecting any kind of payment since that is not required. There isn't even any suggestion in the license that it would be appreciated.

'The only thing that would have been nice is that after the project had been finished and the chip deployed, that someone from Intel would have told me, just as a courtesy, that MINIX was now probably the most widely used operating system in the world on x86 computers. That certainly wasn't required in any way, but I think it would have been polite to give me a heads up, that's all.'

You can feel the regret. With Cuck Licenses, you get the worst of two worlds: You get no credit for your work, nor money for licensing fees like other proprietary software and your software will be used to violate your and other users' privacy when it is used in closed-source environments. Oh, no. . . copes incoming:

'Many people (including me) don't like the idea of an all-powerful management engine in there at all (since it is a possible security hole and a dangerous idea in the first place), but that is Intel's business decision and a separate issue from the code it runs. A company as big as Intel could obviously write its own OS if it had to.' emphasis added

If Tanenbaum had released MINIX under the GPL, we wouldn't be at the mercy of Intel's business decision. They would've had to release the source code for the microprocessor, keeping user privacy ensured and irradicating the permanent spyware liability all computers have nowadays.

If they wouldn't want to do that, they'd have to just write an operating system themselves. Tanenbaum is right, they obviously could've taken the time and money to write an OS themselves if they had to, but they didn't have to, because a BSD license cuck wrote it for them. Thanks a lot, sucker! Now our computers are being monitored at a lower start-up cost and we have you to thank. It would've been a lot more respectable to not use a permissive license and instead license it proprietarily if he has no moral issues with proprietary software: he could've at least gotten Intel to pay him to use his operating system. Heck, if he had used the GPL and if they took it anyway, he could become an insta-millionaire by suing them right now.

The moral of the story is perhaps lost on Tanenbaum, who finishes up his blog post with:

'If nothing else, this bit of news reaffirms my view that the Berkeley license provides the maximum amount of freedom to potential users.'

'Maximum amount of freedom to potential users' is somehow mass-surveilance of every computer user thanks to the BSD license. Thanks for your contribution to 'freedom.'

The Freedom that Cuck Licenses 'preserve'

'Freedom' is an incoherent buzzword if you don't define it. There are some people who might argue that the fact that they can't kill and steal freely is a violation of their 'freedom.' That's very true in some sense.

In the same way, the GPL (unlike Cuck Licenses) 'violates' the freedom of all people to close-source code and hide it from the public and (in effect) do annoying or privacy-violating things with it.

The goal of the Free Software Movement, defended by copyleft licenses like the GPL is for all software writers and users to live in an environment of publicly auditable, editable and exchangable code. The goals of the Open Source movement have a similar goal, albeit often guided by practical considerations.

He does it for free.

Cuck Licenses, however, undermine those goals. They will say that they maximize freedom by placing no requirement on those who distribute When you release any code under a Cuck License, you are simply writing free commercial code for corporations that will inevitably use it against you. You might as well just actually get a job with them so you can get paid for what you do instead of just getting cucked. When you release code under the GPL, you write free software that benefits other people who write free software.

The Free Software Foundation and the GPL people have correctly realized that just being 'permissive' with licenses is unworkable in the current environment. The legal infrastructure incentivizes and defends proprietary software and gives it a systematic financial advantage. The GPL is a viral antidote to that. Obviously if all software were free and no laws protected 'intellectual property' in publicly obtainable software, everything would be 'permissively licensed.' We don't live in that world. The GPL and other 'copyleft' licenses are ways of undermining and disincentivizing and making impossible the close-sourcing of software. Not using the GPL and using a cuck license is just the same as writing proprietary because you literally are because all of your software can be snatched up and proprietarily licensed.

B. . . buut the GPL isn't enforceable!

I've heard some people pass around the idea that somehow the GPL is unenforceable. After all, if you have close source software, how can anyone really tell what's going on? In some cases, that might be true if you have perfect op-sec. That wouldn't be the case for the Intel Management Engine above, and that wouldn't be the case for Windows XP, whose source code recently leaked.

I have known people in industry writing proprietary software and worrying about the GPL is real. The 'virus' of GPL taking over everything and making it free is something people have to take heed of. I'm sure there is some level of GPL-violation going on in some places at least, just because lifting simple routines or copy-and-pasting some things from GPL with significant enough

changes could go unseen even if leaked, but integrating larger GPL programs would be nearly an impossibility.

At the end of the day, though, what does it matter? What is a totally unenforced GPL? It's just a Cuck LicenseIsn't that what license cucks want? So why should they care? At their very best, BSD and MIT licenses are only what GPL might be at its very worst.

The GPL is a permanent liability for any company that crosses it. Some companies might be so bold to lift GPL code and hide it, but there is always a risk and a worry that prevents its general violation.

Addendum

Are copyleft licenses always best even for freedom?

No!

Here's a question I got about this article that I'll reproduce here because it touches on something good.

This was my response to this email explaining this finer point.

Title: Hedonism, Asceticism and the Hermetic Answer

PubDate: Thu, 03 Sep 2020 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/hedonism-asceticism-and-the-hermetic-answer/

Content

The modern world more or less gives you the philosophical choice of either Hedonism or Asceticism. You never really hear it in those terms, but that's how it is.

Hedonism living for pleasure. Your default lifestyle is eating whatever, watching Netflix and playing video games irrespective of how late it is. You watch porn, masturbate, have sex as much as you can and any consequences of any of this are just facts of life which you view as either out of your control or worth the suffering. You might not use drugs because you are worried of the hedonistic damage it can cause, but you're at least chill with people who do. At a basic level, modern society is hedonistic because it more or less openly holds as highest moral value what can stimulate people the most. You know this is the case because anyone who condemns hedonistic behavior will immediately be judged as judgemental.

Asceticism is supposed to be the smart alternative. Asceticism is rejecting pleasure, normal life and anything else enjoyable in the world as morally inferior to some higher non-physical ideal. Buddhism, which rejects the physical world, has become a popular meme philosophy in the West and is highly acetic. Vegans

131

are acetic: they abandon basic life for their own principles and intense vegans will eventually start talking about 'transcending' and 'vibrations' and non-sense. Look at the anti-global warming movements and they fall perfectly, almost neurotically into this category. Asceticism come in many forms nowadays, but it is always a reaction to the indulgences of hedonism.

The Poetic Worldview

Hermes Trismegistus, author of the Hermetic Corpus

The Poetic Worldview is the solution. Don't worry, it has nothing to do with poetry.

The Greek word that poetry/poetic comes from actually is just a generic word for make, create, produce. The word 'poetry' originally just meant something like 'creative output.'

This view is tied into early Platonism and monotheism. The physical universe is a creation or manifestation or 'the One' or 'the Source' or really God. God is the ultimate creator, and an individual is good insofar as he reflects this creative tendency of God. We see it expounded in the Hermetic Corpus:

The other name of God is Father, again because He is the that-which-maketh-all. The part of father is to make. To Asclepius (17), from the Hermetic Corpus

In the Poetic Worldview, the highest moral goal is creation. That can be:

affecting the world,

improving what is around you,

having children,

making money not to spend it on pleasures, but to make something new and great with it,

writing or making something useful or edifying for others,

clearing up misconceptions that get in other people's way in accomplishing these things.

From the Poetic worldview, hedonism is evil because it is expending otherwise creative energy into nothing of consequence. Racking up video-game achievements that no one will ever know or care of but you, watching pornography, pursuing fleeting relationships, impulsively wasting time browsing the internet and fiddling with social media.

This passive and impulsive pleasure-seeking reduces someone's ability to live as intended, instead, they are prisoners to their lusts and conveniences:

But whatsoever human souls have not the Mind as pilot, they share in the same fate as souls of lives irrational. For [Mind] becomes co-worker with them, giving full play to the desires towards which [such souls] are borne,[desires] that from the rush of lust strain after the irrational; [so that such human souls,] just like

irrational animals, cease not irrationally to rage and lust, nor ever are they satiate of ills. For passions and irrational desires are ills exceeding great; and over these God hath set up the Mind to play the part of judge and executioner. About the Common Mind (4), from the Hermetic Corpus

Hedonism is additionally harmful because it isn't even hedonistic. It's clumsy and self-destructive. Spend your life from ages 16-23 playing videogames, masturbating and smoking weed and you have destroyed your capacity to enjoy life, sex and have normal interactions with normal people. Your capacity for enjoyment ends and you fall into asceticism as a cope.

Asceticism is just as evil because it sees this issue with the hedonistic lifestyle and tosses up its hands in surrender. It internalizes the lie that wasteful and sinful living is somehow obviously funnerwhen they see they aren't actually having fun, they throw the whole world away.

Most ascetics are liars anyway. They pretend to reject pleasure and worldly things, but they often just seek it in perverted or unconventional ways. There are men who call themselves MGTOW (Men going their own way) who 'swear off' women. In reality, most of them are just desperate porn-addicted men who just can't get the girl they want.

Contrary to all of this, having a Poetic view proposes that the more moral and also most enjoyable life is one where one is constantly creating something new out of what he is given. In Hermetic thinking (and, well, Christian thinking) man must hold God as the idea to emulate. Since God's principle feat is creation from nothing, our goal is to celebrate that creation by making something new and productive from the raw materials we have.

Asceticism views the material world as a mistake or illusion which leads people to reject life itself. The Poetic view is that the physical world is a reflection of its spiritual state, and what you do in the physical world reflects your spiritual stature.

The Poetic view is somewhat similar to Nietzsche's Will to Power, which was an attempt to unite both human and material sciences under the idea that the ideal is maximizing one's output on the external world. Will to Power is a little more morally ambivalent though; it can include destruction, while Poeticism merely values creative power.

Distractions are literally evil.

This is why I highly condemn wasteful activities like videogames and pornography and social media. They are principally habits that divert your natural energies into something absolutely sterile. Many people ask me What can I do to be more productive? and I have to say that the most important thing is to remove inert distractions and habits.

Due to bureaucratic workplaces and bureaucratic education, there are many modern people who just don't know what it means to be productive. Most of

their lives might be someone trying to fill their day with busywork. Since the normal enjoyable ritual of creative output is unknown to them, this causes a kind of aimlessness and the feelings of inferiority that comes with that.

But in truth, you live at an ideal period in that you can have a highly impactful and ergo poetic effect on the world using internet technology and the higher material standard of living. The only trick is to sidestep the distractions of hedonism that turns you into a passive consumer and the apathy of asceticism.

Title: Politics matters most to slaves.

PubDate: Sat, 09 May 2020 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/politics-matters-most-to-slaves/

Content

Now onto the second point I didn't get to in my post yesterday: politics only matters so much when you're a slave. Or as I put it there, 'You will need politics less than you think.'

That is to say that if you live in a city where your every action is watched, if you use proprietary software and communicate only via social media services, if you have no marketable skills because you have some inert degree and questionably productive and definitely replaceable job and a large company, you need politics quite a great deal.

Your entire existence in the system is based on being a good boy within the established boundaries of what is deemed by the mass media to be socio-politically appropriate. Maybe you've gone into debt, but you definitely rely the whole 'system' for all the basics. If you don't think you do, just ask yourself whether your life has changed for the better after the Coronachan Panic of 2020.

What's the alternative? Well, boomer rants viewers might see some of this coming. . .

The fact of the matter is that both the daily ins-and-outs of politics and the overarching trends of politics matter very little the more independent your are of the system. Earlier, I always mumbled about how conservaboomers seemed a little too apathetic about the cultural changes being forced on them. This social engineering still is the most serious problem in all technologically-complex mass-media societies, but I must admit for people who choose personal independence and independence for their families and local communities, it is much less of a problem.

When I was plugged into the system, minorly red-pilled and generally peeved because I actually paid attention to the media as something other than to laugh at, I found the idea of Political 'Exit' pretty cucky. How much sense does it make to leave the 'political process' altogether? Sounds like giving up.

It sounds like giving up because the 'political process' is something internal to the media system at large. That's why even when the political process does something the media doesn't like (like electing the Orange Boomer, for example), its actions are immediately rendered inert by fakery.

The actual solution is creating and participating in organic society, which still very much exists outside the purview of the media and NGOs and the like. People still need plumbers. No one is going to fire a plumber because he says trannies are mentally ill men in dressesotherwise there'd be no plumbers. Or electricians, or builders or anyone who actually does anything productive. It'd just be HR, journalists and professors left... and some open source developers who write more codes of conducts than they do software. Do you think they'll be able to feed you?

Exiting the system is actually the opposite of surrender. Why would you think the solution is something like voting or even 'owning the libs' or something publicly advertised as a solution? The actual solution is building an alternative. Or maybe rebuilding the alternative.

Do you really want to make your boss rich if you think he'd turn around and betray you because of a media witchhunt? It's better for you to be doxxed and fired now rather than wait 20 years for it, getting more ensconced in the insanity. Start becoming more independent now.

A lot of people LARP about what they're going to do when they take over 'the system' by revolution. Revolution, the idea of abrupt enforced change, however, is fundamentally their idea and if you buy it, you're going to keep running your head into a wall.

Being independent, living out of the city and the Matrix, however, is simultaneously like transporting yourself back in time to when things were saner, but at the same time, transporting yourself into the future where 'the system' has already collapsed and we're already rebuilding. Be a part of it now rather than later.

Title: Why do I so rarely talk about politics on my channel?

PubDate: Sat, 09 May 2020 00:00:00 +0000

Link: https://lukesmith.xyz/articles/why-do-i-so-rarely-talk-about-politics-on-my-channel/

Content

It's not a huge secret that I'm somewhere in the high echelons of the red-pill, however you define it. I'll openly talk about pretty any topic that people organically bring up in streams, or that I'm asked about, but I've never really made any kind of political content on my channel, aside from jokes and memes. That might be surprising because especially three years ago before the mass-bans

and algoritm tampering, right wing political channels were a dime-a-dozen and an easily way to get views. There are two main reasons I never took part. Arguably 'fear of being ZUCCed from YouTube' could be a possible third, but I have a kind intransigence that makes me relish me being banned. I'm also pretty tired of YouTube, and am increasingly questioning if using it is even a reasonable compromise. . .

So why do I not do political videos? Why do I not have a set list of deep facts that will blow you away and red-pill you? The two reasons:

Reason one:

Reason two: You will need politics less than you think.

Okay, reason one there is just the first line of the Daode Jing. The Daode Jing is the basic book of Daoism (Taoism), and Dao (literally 'Way') is an amorphous concept in Chinese thought that could be crudely comparable to Western concepts of 'natural order/law' or maybe even 'spontaneous order.' 'Sounds gay,' you say. So what does this famous first line mean and how is it relevant to why I don't talk about how to get red-pilled? I would say it's hard to translate, but even saying that would sound even more pretentious as if I actually know classical Chinese as a native language, but here's a rendering.

The Dao (way) that you can follow isn't the true eternal Dao. A name that you speak, isn't its true name.

An aside, it should be a capital offense to translate classical Chinese. It is so perfect and terse and everything autisitically limited to four elegant syllables that it's just criminal to mutilate it into another language, but we'll forgive it this time.

So what do I mean by quoting this? I mean that the journey to getting red-pilled is not something that can be explained. If I could just explain it, tell it to you, it wouldn't be the true story. It is a varied, and in each case, personal journey, that one goes on.

Although you've been lied to, it's not the lies that's the problem. As an adult, you can a lot of the times tell when the media is manipulating you, especially in the last past decade it's gotten so obvious even a Boomer could see it. But what you don't see is how when you were lied to (or told selective truths) as a child, you didn't have the same BS-detector, and that allowed a lot of deep-seated impressions about the world to be formed. So a lot of people who don't believe anything the media says now (rightly) are still mind-cucked. They accept the programming and differ on the details.

I will give you this hint. Basically all of your programmed emotional responses are your enemies. There was an old Moldbug blog post where he talked about even far after 'awaking from his dogmatic slumber,' he still was surprised that if he saw a group of Nazi LARPers, he would reflexively have a pang of emotional stress, but if he saw Stalinist LARPers, he wouldn't have the same kind of emotional

reaction. I think everyone raised in the West has that same programmed reaction. You might know with your head that the communist death count is supposed to be higher and the suppression wider, but it doesn't click because you weren't made sensitive to it.

A good heuristic is whenever you see one of these emotional responses, especially an emotional response to a political term: democracy, equality, racism, feminism, literally all of them actually, your Pavlovian conditioning is telling you to avoid an intellectual area specifically because it is the ideological weak spot of the background propaganda of modernism. If it was not a weak spot, there would be no harm in you being allowed to calmly investigate it. People's thoughts are regulated in liberal democracy not by laws, but by psychological programming that goes off when someone is tempted to evaluate an idea they're not supposed to. Okay, actually I guess in Europe they're regulated by that and laws, and it's coming to America very, very soon now.

All of this is to say that breaking out of this programming is not so much of an issue of me or anyone else explaining a series of facts to you. That's what Laozi said. As cringe as it sounds, it is primarily a battle against yourself, or at least the part of yourself that has eaten up the tacit assumptions of modernism. Before you own the libs, you must own yourself. Laozi said that too.

In case quoting classical Chinese and talking in floating, general terms isn't getting across, I'll say that getting red-pilled is sort of mystical... literally. Of course, 'mystical' in the old, original Greek sense. A 'mystic' in Greek is just a synonym for an 'initiate.' Many cultic religions of two millennia ago where like modern Freemasonry: not a ideology one could just go and read about on Wikipedia, but one where people were slowly initiated in the thought and mindset of the religion over time. While people were born into Paganism, they were initiated into Gnosticism, Hermeticism or even early Christianity. The only difference is that you are being initiated out of the cultural bubble of modernism. Into what? It can vary person to person, experience to experience. You'll always be in some bubble, so don't be arrogant, but you will be out of the big bubble that's going to pop everywhere and is dominated by liberal cat-ladies, professors, sanctimonious NGO-members and journalists.

All of this is to say that it is simply impossible for me to provide you direct direction. Even direction might sound stupid before or after. Maybe I can lay out some random disorganized recommendations.

Years ago as young college student, I remember reading Steven Pinker's Blank Slate (dl) and thinking I was finally red-pilled. Now I think Steven Pinker is a moron (that book and only that book of his is good, the rest is beyond garbage). I've actually met many people for whom this book was the first step away from basic boomer-tier progressivism. I suspect that Pinker almost regrets writing this book because he's actually very basic in politics. He wrote it back before the elite recognized any threat of a resurgence of energy on the right.

I think everyone knows that Uncle Ted's manifesto is another favorite on my

channel. I never read it until long after I needed it, but since it's a meme now I should recommend it explicitly.

If you're prepped for harder stuff Radishmag has it. This one tries to evoke that programmed emotional response in a devilish way, but it might be exactly the next step with plenty of actual original sources on historical articles to follow up with.

Everything Nassim Taleb has written is good. He might be the only living author worth reading now in fact, which isn't saying that much considering our age, but Taleb is pretty based and has attracted a constellation of non-retarded people who employ the very useful concepts he's popularized: antifragile, Lindy, buttercuck... (okay maybe the last one he didn't coin himself, but I'm buttercucked and proud). Read his books before you even look up videos of him or shadow him on social media. His books are lucid, but you won't get it based on mere social media. He also has no patience for brainlets.

Also, you can be red-pilled too quickly and end up like that guy in the Matrix who looks like me and betrays his friends so he can be put back in the matrix to have nice juicy steaks again. Did he make an appearance in Runescape as well?

Anyway, I wrote more of this than I thought I was going to, and I never got to reason two! I'll write it tomorrow after church. You can read it once you get back from church providing it isn't banned where you live.

Speaking of church, for those interested in early Christian theology, or frankly Greek philosophy generally, notice how similar name/word 'mng' in the Chinese above is equivalent to logos. In fact, is even used both in the particular sense 'the name that you speak' as I render it, and in the universal abstract sense of logos. This pun, which doesn't exist in English without some explanation, does exist in both classical Chinese and Greek. More on that later.