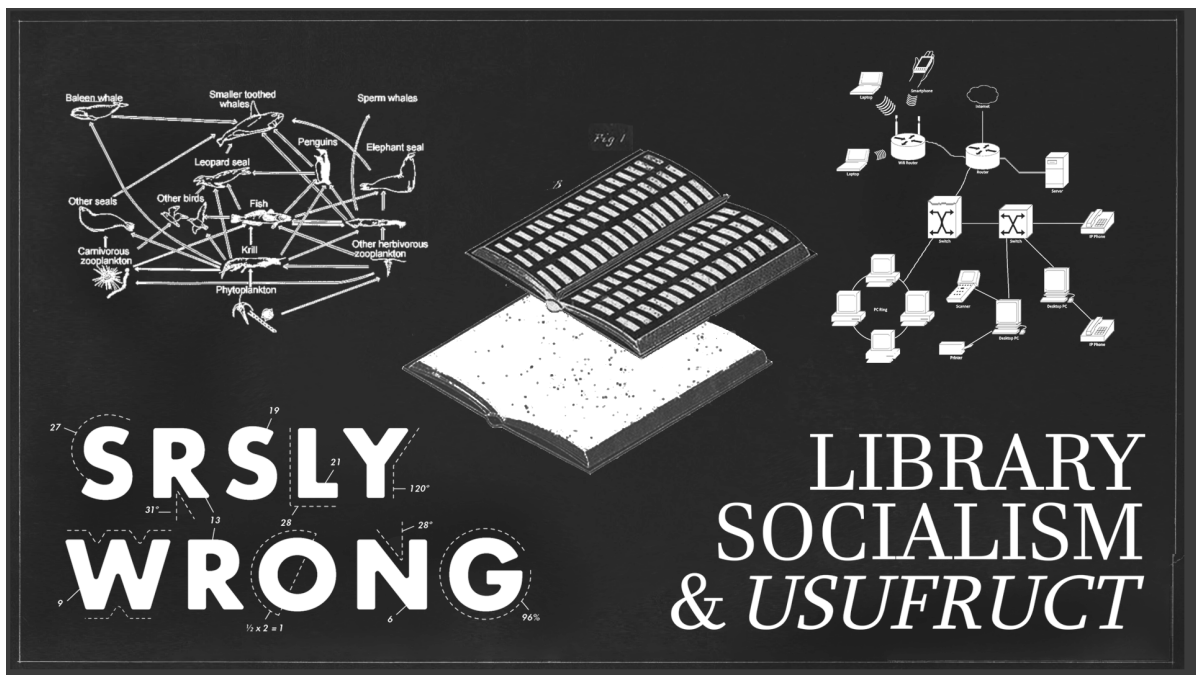


Library Socialism & Usufruct - SRSLY WRONG Episode 189



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFDCa5mq5Jo>

Narrator

Warning: The following episode of *SRSLY WRONG* takes latent potentiality and makes it explicit.
Opening Theme Song by Jodi Pongratz

☒

*I'm wrong, you're wrong, he is wrong.
She's wrong, they're wrong, we're wrong.
You're wrong, you're wrong, I am wrong.
We are wrong. Seriously, seriously, seriously wrong.*

☒

–[00:00:27]

☒ *Infomercial Music*

Narrator

Today's episode of *SRSLY WRONG* is brought to you by: All that was, all that is now, and all that ever will be.

Worker

Here at the Was-Is-and-Ever-Will-Be Transdimensional Library of Everything, we strive to ensure that everything is properly and diligently recorded, so we have a complete collection of all that was, is, and ever will be.

☒ *Music ends*

(Sounds of fire and chaos)

Worker

Mr. Was-Is-and-Ever-Will-Be, the results from the History Expedition aren't looking good. History is being generated faster than we can capture it.

Mr. What-Was-Is-and-Ever-Will-Be

You don't talk to Mr. What-Is-Was-and-Ever-Will-Be like that! Our mission is that nothing is lost, ever!

Worker

Sir, we're going to have to upgrade the servers in the What Will Be and the What Is sections imminently. They just can't— can't hold the amount of data that's coming in from the sensors, sir—

Mr. What-Was-Is-and-Ever-Will-Be

We have to collect it all!

Worker

We have a total server failure on Galaxy 32-a, Universe B, Timeline—

Mr. What-Was-Is-and-Ever-Will-Be

So fix it!

Worker

–220 – I'm trying, sir!

Mr. What-Was-Is-and-Ever-Will-Be

Look, time is not moving any slower. History keeps being created. The only universal constant is change. Nothing lasts. But we make sure that nothing is lost. Understand me?

Worker

I understand, yes. (Cries) Sorry, sir.

☒

Narrator

All that was, is, and ever will be. Proud sponsor of *SRSLY WRONG*.

☒

–[00:01:34]

Shawn

Hello, everyone, and welcome back to the *SRSLY Wrong Podcast*, we are your co-hosts, the Wrong Boys. I'm Shawn.

Aaron

I'm Aaron. So, Library Socialism.

Shawn

Yeah, Library Socialism. It's something we've been mentioning a lot on the show recently. We've been asked to clarify and elaborate what is meant by this.

Aaron

Like, libraries and socialism go together already. Libraries are a proto-socialist element of the current society. And also, it's just– I feel like it's a good way for people to get a feel for what you want the experience of socialism to be like.

Shawn

That reminds me, there's this thinking tool I think I got from Robert Anton Wilson. I don't think he made it up, but it was in one of his books, the word, "po"– P-O. It's like a thought tool. It means, "think about the relationship between these two things." To put things next to each other to invoke thought and analysis from it. So you could say, like, for example, "climate change po capitalism." That's a jumping off point to thinking about, "What's the relationship between capitalism and climate change?" and so on.

So I'd really like to encourage people: socialism po libraries. What's the relationship there? Or what are potential relationships? What are ways you can think about these things? So I thought maybe a good way to get into Library Socialism, what it means, is to start by talking a little bit about how I came to become a library socialist. Way back in the old days, 2014, 2012, 2011.

Aaron

Pre-Library Socialist Shawn, walkin' around, 2011.

Shawn

Early developing political consciousness. A lot to learn about the world. And I became really fascinated with this political project out of Sweden which I participated in for a few years, the Pirate Party. Sort of an offshoot of The Pirate Bay, basically a file-sharing advocacy political party that's primary goal was to secure Net Neutrality, secure access to the internet, tied up into the sort of techno-utopian vision of the internet as this great platform of ideas that would connect the world, help to overthrow dictators, and so on.

Aaron

Yeah.

Shawn

But at the heart of that was this idea that file sharing like Napster, The Pirate Bay, was actually a positive thing in society. That it wasn't the crime that it was made out to be governments and corporations. And that idea just, like– it so profoundly– because I was an avid file-sharer, as a young person who didn't have any money to spend to be able to access the things that I wanted to access anyways. So there was a real, like, emotional feeling behind it. Like, how awesome it is to just, like, get the music you want to listen to without having to, like, save up for it. It was a really revolutionary, awesome thing when I was, like, 14.

Aaron

Yeah. For me, the music thing was amazing. But, like, when I first learned you could download TV shows, that was so huge for me. Because, like, I think DVRs existed at the time, but the idea that I could just have the show and watch it whenever you wanted, that there was no schedule, you don't have to watch it on TV when it's on— but you could, like, buy DVDs, that was kind of coming in around the same time. But, like, I don't have to try and tape it. And, like, setting VCRs to— I just sound like old people now. (Laughs) "I used to set my VCR to tape my TV show." You had to, like, program start and stop times, and then fast-forward through the commercials. (Laughs)

Shawn

And I'm sure there's older people listening, like, "Oh, these young kids, they don't even remember—"

Aaron

Yeah. "If we missed an episode of a show, we just missed it."

Shawn

"I remember when VCRs cost \$600 and only my rich friend's family had one." And the thing I really liked about the Pirate Party was that it was radical, but it was outside the contemporary, sort of, frame. It wasn't, like, a cultural flashpoint. It wasn't strongly coded as left or right in itself. And that's reflected in the Pirate Parties around the world. Some are more centrist, some are more left-wing. And it was always sort of an alliance, to some degree, between different elements of libertarian leftists and libertarian rightists.

Aaron

Yeah, right.

Shawn

So I was involved in communications for the Pirate Party of Canada, organizing. I was elected leader twice at different times.

Aaron

Yeah. You were the leader of, like, the whole national party.

Shawn

I was the youngest political party leader in Canada at the time. It was an early political experience. And I learned a lot, but it was a real nightmare. Robert's Rules of Order is—

Aaron

Shout out Robert's Rules of Order! (Laughs)

Shawn

Shout out to Robert's Rules of Order over IRC. It's a match made in hell. The thing about Robert's Rules of Order I'll say real quick before we move on, is it's not a deliberative mechanism. It's a mechanism which is intended to be used, and only can be used, by small groups of people who gamify it, use the bureaucracy to keep dissenting voices out, and ram through their agenda. That's the function of Robert's Rules of Order. And any attempt to use Robert's Rules of Order in good faith is just gonna be a fuckin' nightmare. Robert's Rules of Order has existed for a long time and been successful because everyone secretly knows you use it that way. If I had just done that in the Pirate Party, the Pirate Party might not be de-registered in Canada now. (Laughter)

But I left the Pirate Party. But by the time I left, my favorite narrative was this idea of the internet as a library, because it, like, just clicked at some point that we had this technological potential that we were using in this stilted way, and we were actually using the law to repress our own technological potential to live in a more utopian and perfect world. That is, the utopian and perfect world where you can access any information you want— books, textbooks, music, movies, television shows. The complete cumulative expression of humanity from the beginning of time is now literally in our pockets. And the fact that it was not being tapped into intentionally— like, this is an opportunity. This is a technological opportunity for humanity to step up to another level, to become a better species, a more complete species, a more human species. And it was an opportunity that we were rejecting because of these, like, rigid government bureaucracies, the influence of corporations on government.

Aaron

And this is how, like, file-sharing became prevalent in my political development as I was going along, is it was being used as an example of the way that our technology has outpaced the usefulness of market economics. Because we've created this thing where it's actually just easier to give everything away for free, because it's so easy to replicate things and send them around to other people, that we have to create all these artificial barriers, and you have to make it illegal for people to send files to each other. You have to set up paywalls in order to stop people from getting— like, it's actually harder to put something online behind a paywall, just from a sort of, like, raw coding perspective— like, now there's websites, it's easy to do either way.

But, like, it takes a lot more work to embed a video behind a paywall that, like, checks to make sure you actually paid for it, and blah-blah-blah. So we're doing all this extra work to squeeze our current technology into the market system, when we have reproductive capacities for this particular type of commodity, I guess, to produce it at zero marginal cost, or near-zero marginal cost. So it just makes the most sense to give it away for free, to have the library of, like, human art and cultural production could exist in a comprehensive form. And that idea has always been super attractive to me. Like, just having everything together in one— like, "We have all of it, and it's here," you know? Like, this massive one library of everything humans have made.

—[00:09:03]

☒

Narrator

Today's episode of *SRSLY WRONG* is brought to you by: The Multibillion-dollar Industry of Limiting Human Potential. What do intellectual property lawyers and tech monopolies have in common? Answer: they both want to fundamentally destroy the greatest tool for distribution of human knowledge in history and limit it permanently for their own profit.

☒ *Music shifts*

Kid

Mr. Ad Man? With the spread of wireless networks and global high-speed internet and handheld devices and global connectivity, it seems like it would make sense to put the entire repository of human knowledge and culture at the fingertips of every human being alive, and use our technology to help them interface with the vast stores of information and wisdom that humanity has collected over the ages, and is our common heritage, right?

Mr. Ad Man

Sharp question. The answer is: absolutely not. There's multiple layers of tech monopoly in between the universal utopian la-dee-da access to human knowledge and therefore obviously potential. These are for-profit tech companies that are manufacturing these devices. Their incentives aren't necessarily to connect you to human knowledge. Their incentive is to keep you using these tech monopoly websites over and over and over again, even at the expense of your wellbeing—

Kid

Yeah, but—

Mr. Ad Man

—to serve ads to you. So that's— it's totally different. (Chuckles)

Kid

Yeah, but don't you think it would be a better use of human potential, instead of putting people to work limiting the access to our collective wisdom, and instead creating new ways for people to engage with this information, and making it digestible and relevant in a contemporary context and translating that vast store into an ever-churning sea of new cultural presentations and engagements, all available to everybody for free?

Mr. Ad Man

Is that within the realm of potentiality? Absolutely not, that makes no sense. Obviously we have the highest-speed internet in human history, with the highest capacity. But there's a tech monopoly or oligopoly nearby that's gonna charge you by the gigabyte for that. So not exactly free, even if you

can totally release copyright. Oh, that stuff about, "engaging," sort of weird, I'm gonna skip it. "Human potential"—has to be fundamentally limited, and this is the sort of stuff that you figure out as you get older.

It's— it's our duty on Earth to have a multibillion-dollar industry of people who are paid much better than your parents, (stifled chuckle) the people who do the intellectual property enforcement and run these tech monopolies, they've got families at home. They've got kids. You're talking about taking food out of their kids' mouths, getting them out of a job, getting 'em on the street, with a bindle. It's not gonna happen. We need to have these people bindle-less, in offices, working to suppress fundamental human potential forever.

Kid

Go fuck yourself.

Mr. Ad Man

Whoa, precocious! Okay, get outta here, kid, get outta here.

☒ *Music shifts back*

Mr. Ad Man

Well, it just brings me solace at the end of the day to know that the cost of that child getting the education that he would need to overthrow me and my twisted order is beyond his reach.

The Multibillion-dollar Industry of Limiting Human Potential. Proud sponsor of today's show.

☒

—[00:12:01]

Shawn

I just remembered. I think I know the moment where I started moving more sharply to the left. And it was around the time of Occupy. Like, I really liked Occupy, but I saw Occupy as a little bit broader than just being left-wing, in that same sort of way. Like, in retrospect, there was, like, the Ron Paul libertarians there. There was this general sort of anti-authoritarian thing that came up at the different camps. But there was this speech that Žižek gave at Occupy Wall St., he used the metaphor of red ink, talking about red ink being our capacity to criticize the world as it currently is. And he's like, "We need to create our new red inks for the modern era, when we're describing this perfect other world. Back in my day, we called that other world 'communism,' but you can call it whatever you want." And in that moment it sort of clicked for me. Like, "Oh, yeah. I am thinking about this other world other time. And back in the day they called it 'communism,' but who cares."

Aaron

Right. Right.

Shawn

Like, it was that formative sort of— because the tension with dealing with the internal politics of the Pirate Party, there was a really intense tension that came out of myself and the others that had more leftist tendencies in the Canadian Pirate Party, and those who were pointedly centrist and, like, respectability politics bureaucrats. And actually, some people that I would consider in that category, I was able to become friends with outside of the context of politics and stuff. But also the literal sort of, like, rightists, and, like, conspiracy theory right-wing people, there's a lot of tension that comes out of that. Like, someone who's interest in the Pirate Party seems to be fixated— and in retrospect, I've got a different read of this now than I did back then— but someone's primary contribution to the Pirate Party is trying to convince us to be so hardline on free speech that we make statements against persecuting Holocaust deniers. Which at the time seemed like a liberal, principled, kind of edgy—

Aaron

Did you guys put out that statement? Is that a thing that happened?

Shawn

No, no, we didn't. Yeah, but—

Aaron

But it was argued for, whatever, by someone?

Shawn

Yeah, yeah. And I think my position on it was, like, "Yeah, sure. We're in favor of free speech."

Aaron

Right.

Shawn

But now I'm like, "Wow, actually, that was probably just a Nazi." Yeah. So that internal tension within the party— they didn't like the library narrative. They preferred the more, like, rights-based narratives and stuff like that. But the library narrative really captured me. And it sort of introduced me to the idea also of "post-scarcity." The idea that we don't actually have a scarcity of, for example, music, or books. Like, we have a scarcity of physical books. But we don't have a scarcity of the information within books being replicated. You can just copy and paste.

Aaron

Yeah.

Shawn

You can send each other songs over Facebook Messenger and download the MP3s to your own computers while still keeping it. It's not a zero sum thing to replicate that information.

Aaron

You mentioned post-scarcity, and that's been, like, a central theme of my politics pretty much since I started caring about politics. Because, like, I came at this stuff from the Zeitgeist Movement, which was also similarly— had this tension of, like, conspiracy people being involved, but then also people who were just really into fully automated luxury communism, though we didn't use that name. It's funny, too, because, like, I also kind of thought that I was outside of the political binary, in a sense, because that was kind of the party line of the Zeitgeist Movement, was that it's nonpartisan. It's not left, it's not right, it's different from everything else.

And it would contrast itself from communism with just, like, quick general statements about USSR and, like, "Oh, that didn't go well." And, like, you know, there isn't a ton of analysis there. But, like, it was just— it was interesting to me that I had all these political ideas before I knew it was basically repackaged libertarian socialism, like, left anarchists. Like, I'd say 90% of what you can get out of Zeitgeist Movement materials is libertarian socialism. There's a few different, like, hardline points where there's, like, the replacing politics with science stuff— doesn't matter. It's mostly libertarian socialism, but I just didn't know it.

Shawn

Yeah. It's interesting, in - in retrospect, in those early stages, I didn't really, like, read many political books, or even, like, political opinion pieces. There wasn't, like, the socialist article network the way that there is now. There was no *Current Affairs*, *Jacobin*, and stuff. There was no *Commune Mag*. It was all people that I had met responding to news articles from CNN on their personal Facebook. Like, that was my discourse cycle.

Aaron

Right.

Shawn

And, like, the debates that we had within the Pirate Party. And, yeah, I didn't really know much about, like, libertarian socialism either, but I found just through the disagreements I was having, in retrospect, there was an unconscious sort of libertarian socialist element to it. And— and even in just the fundamental way of, "No, this, like, freedom from interference stuff sounds pretty good, but I think you've got to counterbalance it with some freedom to stuff." Not even that articulate. It's interesting the way people get into politics and how it changes over time, and what changes and what stays the same. And, like, things that are givens to you at different times and stuff like that. And if you're interested to hear ours, we have five years of podcasts. Some of it would completely make me cringe to re-listen to, but that's 'cause I was, like, younger and stuff. But, hey, six dollars a month, get to hear the development. Someone told me recently that listening to the development was why they loved the show.

Aaron

So if you don't love the show already, go back and listen to every episode. (Laughs) And then you will.

Shawn

Just, like, Stockholm Syndrome. I mean, that's— all podcasts are kind of like that, right? You're like, "I listened to five or six episodes. I have to start liking it now."

Aaron

Do you remember—

Shawn

Oh, I was gonna maybe talk about Bookchin, from "Post-Scarcity".

Aaron

So, yeah, and I got introduced to Murray Bookchin because post-scarcity was something— it was a phrase that Zeitgeist used a lot. Someone discovers, "Oh, there's this book, 'Post-Scarcity Anarchism'." Gets posted up. I read, like, a third of it and I was like, "Oh, yeah. This is just like the stuff we always talk about, except written way earlier. This is cool." And I never finished it. And then I remember mentioning Bookchin to you on the show once.

(Static sound)

Younger Aaron

Post-Scarcity Anarchism by Murray Bookchin.

Younger Shawn

Bookchin?

Younger Aaron

Murray Bookchin.

Younger Shawn

(Laughs) Does he have, like—

Younger Aaron

A book on his chin?

Younger Shawn

Yeah. Or, like, the book came out of his chin? Or his book is the shape of a chin? Or his chin is the shape of a book?

(Static sound)

Shawn

Yeah, I think that's Episode 20.

Aaron

Yeah.

Shawn

So Bookchin describes— it's not his idea, but I was introduced to it by Bookchin— the idea of "usufruct."

—[00:18:24]

(School bell rings, children playing)

Teacher

All right, class, please, return to your desks. Snack break is over. Artemis? Thank you. (Claps) All right, class. Today's word of the day— you know I'm a word geek, I love words— "usufruct." (Chalk writing on blackboard) "Usufruct." Does anyone know what "usufruct" means? Jeffrey?

Jeffrey

I don't.

Teacher

Thanks, Jeffrey. In order to explain this correctly I need to go back to the establishment of civil law. (Chalk writing) Which, obviously, was codified out of Ancient Rome, but was popularized in its modern

form in Europe. It still has a lot of influence on a lot of jurisdictions today. Under civil law, property rights were considered to have three "real" rights underneath it. That is: usus, abusus, and fructus.

Jeffrey

Is fructus like the shampoo that my mom uses?

Teacher

No. Okay, so, "fructus" is Latin for "fruit," but in this context it refers to "the fruit of something." (Chalk) So, "usus" is the right to use a thing, "fructus" is the right to take the fruits of something, that is, profit from some property without damaging the property. And "abusus" is the right to damage or destroy property. So, something that you own, you're able to— the term is "abusus." So it's like abuse. So "usufruct" is a combination between "usus" and "fructus". That is, the ability to use and profit from something, but without the right to destroy or get rid of it or sell it.

This is actually codified in many legal jurisdictions to this day, this concept of usufruct, typically in terms of the landlord giving usufruct rights to someone else, who's then able to, like, grow food on their land and stuff like that. And actually, just recently in Cuba in the 1990s during an economic crisis, the government gave Cuban citizens the right to grow food on public land, on a sort of usufructian basis.

As part of our revolutionary program— now, obviously, this is a revolutionary school, and you're all wearing your mandatory Che Guevara shirts. People say that school uniforms are bad for kids? I disagree. I think you kids look great. You're embodying the contradiction so well. So as part of our revolutionary program, we obviously call for ownership in common.

So, usufruct— use and profit— from common property. Not from a landlord, but from a shared sense of duty towards property to not degrade it in an unreasonable or damaging way, because it's all shared. It belongs to everyone. It comes from the same logic that, you know, Thomas Jefferson— famous radical liberal— he said that everything on Earth should be held in usufruct by the living, for the living. You know? Not from a landlord, but from the collective. And that sort of principle underlies our revolutionary program here.

(Chalk) In addition to that is the "irreducible minimum," the level that no one should ever fall below. And also this concept of "complementarity," that is, through having a complex social ecosystem you're able to fulfill all sorts of needed roles in relation to each other, so not everyone is a baker, and not everyone is a shoemaker, but— but together we have enough bread and shoes for everyone in a complementary web. That's our sort of revolutionary program, and that's where usufruct fits into it.

Jeffrey

It's a beautiful word, Teacher.

Teacher

Sorry, Jeffrey, can you please raise your hand before you comment in the class?

Jeffrey

(Quietly) Oh, yeah.

Teacher

Do you see, Je— I'm just gonna be honest, Jeffrey. Do you see anyone else blurting out, "That's a beautiful word," this whole presentation? Or are they being quiet and paying attention?

Jeffrey

I'm allowed to talk now? You just called me...?

Teacher

So, yeah, I'm—

Jeffrey

You called—

Teacher

—asking you a direct question, so yeah.

Jeffrey

I just thought, it's such a beautiful presentation you gave, a good concept, and... nobody complimented you on it, and I just wanted to say it was beautiful.

Teacher

Well, I appreciate that. If you raise your hand, and then you say it?

Jeffrey

Okay.

Teacher

It makes thi- okay, thanks. Okay?

Jeffrey

Yeah.

Teacher

Okay, class, so next we're just gonna take a short break. (Music fades in) I want you to all get a piece of paper and write a short story about a liberated world that follows the principles of usufruct, complementarity, and the irreducible minimum. I'm just gonna step outside for a cigarette. You know, they say under utopia cigarettes won't be bad for you, kids, but we certainly don't live in that world. Now, it doesn't need to the whole point of the story, but if you could put in an anti-smoking message, or- you can if you want to. Don't- actually, forget I said anything. I just feel guilty. I just... Trouble at home, kids. You can't even imagine, kids. Okay. Sorry. I'll be back in, like, 20 minutes or whatever. Just, like, have your stories ready.

☒ *Music fades*

-[00:22:38]

Shawn

And so the basic idea is that property is owned in common by the group, and one has domain over something while they're using it. So it's like you have temporary ownership of shared things in a context where everything is held in common. And, like, a good example of that is if you're on, say, like, a work site, and you say, "Hey, pass me that hammer." No one's ever like, "This is my hammer. You have to go buy your own hammer before you can continue contributing to this collective project."

Aaron

The idea that many things would work more like a library than a department store in the future was also something that was embedded in Zeitgeist. It was an example that we talked about a lot. And it was often framed in the idea that it makes more sense to just want to have access to something when you need it, rather than actually having to have it. Ownership, for many things, is actually more of a burden than it is something that is beneficial to people.

Like, owning a tent kinda sucks. Like, you have to find somewhere to store the tent the, like, 50 weeks of the year you're not using it. For a lot of people you don't have a lot of space for that kind of stuff. You know, there's lots of things like that, that you only need to use when you need to use it. And, like, having it yourself and maintaining it yourself is a pain in the ass. So it's actually better to have it something that you can just borrow and then other people can use and just borrow. And then when it doesn't work they get replaced.

And then the other angle that was core to Zeitgeist was sustainability. You're giving 50 people 50 shitty tents that they don't use 90% of the time, versus just making, like, three really good-ass durable tents that they can trade off and use when they need it, and then return to the place when they don't need it is, like- you just saved 47 tents' worth of material by, like, sharing it. Because things sitting around in your closet aren't useful for anything, and it's a waste of resources for them to be there.

Shawn

And you also have an incentive, as someone who wants to continue producing tents into the foreseeable future, to provide a product that is gonna have a natural breakdown and life cycle that's short enough that you can sell the same customers multiple tents over their lifetime. This is something that we talked about in the Pirate Party, also, is the manufactured obsolescence issue. And the Library Socialism concept also has this really strong economic basis. I went through a bit of a phase trying to better understand economic arguments, because people always use economics as this trump card. Like, "You don't know about economics."

Aaron

Right.

Shawn

Like, no matter what your idea is, no matter what your theory is, I studied economics, you didn't. And if you know economics, you would know that your idea for people not starving causes people to starve more.

Aaron

(Laughs) Because all economists agree with each other about everything.

Shawn

And we have conclusive evidence in something that is a science. (Laughter) And in that sort of expedition of research, the big things that I took away from it: "economy of scale" is economics. When you produce a bunch of stuff at once, the cost is cheaper. So the example I would make is, making a big pot of soup to feed 40 people only takes maybe about three times as much as time as making one bowl of soup for yourself. And if everyone does that, you've wasted a bunch of human potential, basically, by having everyone atomized, producing their own individual meals. And there's also this concept fundamental to Austrian economics, which is sort of like the primary right-wing school of economics, called "marginal utility." And the idea is that if you have a lot of something, you need it less, so its subjective value to you is less. And someone who actually needs it, the value to them is larger. And this uses an argument to say, basically, they should pay more. Or, like, they're willing to pay more, so that's what the market allows.

Aaron

Right, yeah.

Shawn

But what is fundamental to it— and this is what's true about economics— implicit in the logic is the idea that the rich don't their wealth. It has literally less value to them. If you give a hundred dollars to Bill Gates, you've literally given him almost nothing. Economics doesn't make any sense unless you hold that to be true. And then somehow they come to the conclusion at the end, through all these layers of abstractions, and all these interesting graphs— which, if you take the time to study and understand, actually often seem quite inconclusive about what they're measuring or what they're claiming.

If you take the time to interpret what they're saying it doesn't hold up. But they somehow come to the conclusion that because an individual cow is worth less to someone who has a hundred cows than to a person who has one cow— abstraction, abstraction, graph, graph, graph— some people will always starve. So I bring this up to say that there's principles underlying economics, and what is true about economics, that encourages communalist, library-based, socialist utopia.

When I read economics textbooks, I can feel the utopian socialist communalism bubble up through it. Because it costs less money to produce less things. And if people only need things for the duration of the time that they need them, then you're producing less things overall, so you're saving money. And then money obviously represents the other major crisis of our time, the ecological crisis. And part of the ecological crisis is that because of manufactured obsolescence, because of all this bullshit, we're burning through the planet at a higher rate than it can sustain. And we're eventually gonna hit peak material resources in various ways, and we're not being good economic stewards. We're not being good— we're not running our ecology like a business.

—[00:28:30]

☒

Narrator

And we now go to the Wrongtopia Ecological Restoration Initiative, which is entering its fifth year of sustained ecological downturn.

☒

(Wind across lifeless terrain sounds)

Worker 1

You ever wonder what it is we're restoring here? Doesn't seem like anything's been restored. Just gettin' worse.

Worker 2

I mean, the beetles took out the whole western region the other day.

Worker 1

Yeah. I mean, well, that invasive species came out of nowhere. That wasn't, like—

Worker 2

So then the guys at the top are like, "Oh, we're gonna call in some \$140,000 fucking consulting firm to teach 'em how to run their ecology like a business." Like—

Worker 1

Ugh.

Worker 2

—look, it's - it's hard to do this shit. Like, we're trying our best. It's, like, maybe try increasing our budget?

Worker 1

Yeah. \$140,000? They could have bought us a pizza party. Multiple pizza parties.

Worker 2

Yeah, 140— dude, I've seen that—

Worker 1

That's a lot of pizza parties, actually.

Worker 2

That's a lot of pizza parties, man. \$140,000? (Licks lips) Sorry for licking my lips so loudly—

Worker 1

Ecological restoration needs fuel. And pizza—

Worker 2

What's this stuff about—

Worker 1

—fuels me, baby.

Worker 2

—this bullshit, they're like, "Oh, no more pizza parties until the ecology's restored—"

Worker 1

It has all four food groups.

Worker 2

It's been five years since our last pizza party. And are we working any less hard? A little, yeah. Because there's no pizza going in. I have to bring my own lunch?

☒ *Cool music drops*

Worker 1

Oh, wait, shh. Stop talkin' pizza, I think that's them.

Worker 2

Oh, yeah. Yeah, here they come...

Worker 1

Wazzup, ecologists!

Ecologist 1

Hey, hey, hey. Welcome, we're here from the private sector.

Ecologist 2

Here to make things more efficient.

Ecologist 1

So we heard that, to use a metaphor from the private sector, the profits of your ecological restoration initiative are going down. Shareholders— endangered species and arable land— are angry at you. In the

private, more efficient sort of sector, we don't get to just collect a fat government paycheck. Because, you know, in the private sector, if you don't restore the ecology? Kgghk—

Ecologist 2

You're out of business.

Ecologist 1

—you're cut. You're out of business. I think you all could really learn from that sort of pressure. If you cause a totalizing collapse of all life on earth— kgghk. You're out of business.

Ecologist 2

So one of the ways, in the private sector— I hope we mentioned, that's where we're from— one of the ways that we increase efficiency is through competition between various firms. So, you know, Apple wants to build the newest, best smartphone? Samsung wants to build the newest, best smartphone. But what's this? Oh, whew. Some young upstart company's building an even better smartphone. That's how you've got to think. You've got to think like the young, upstart company. Now there's other regions doing way better than you, nurturing their ecology to a beautiful and fecund place. What you two want to think to yourselves, what you want your team to believe, is that you can do better than them. And god-darnit, you're gonna work night and day until you are better than them, 'til you're the best, until you have the most profits that you're distributing to your shareholders.

Ecologist 1

And of course, "profits" refers to biological diversity, preventing the extinction of species, and maintaining arable farmland that can be used. That brings me to my next point, which is that team-building is super important. So think of it this way. All of the species in your ecological system are your team. And they're endangered, you're not doing good team-building. By nourishing and building this team you're gonna have the innovation and diversity that you need to succeed in a 21st-century environment.

Ecologist 2

I know what you're all thinking, that sounds really, really good.

Ecologist 1

I know I'm thinking that.

Ecologist 2

But we're not just here to be your best friends. We are here to trim the fat a little bit.

Ecologist 1

So if you could imagine big, sharp shears fiercely snipping into human flesh, causing it to be trimmed—

Ecologist 2

So that could be too much of a pollutant that's throwing the environment off balance, that could be an invasive species that's—

Ecologist 1

Trim that invasive species.

Ecologist 2

Or that could even be things in your own organization. Say, like, too many pizza parties.

Ecologist 1

Trim it. Put that money back into ecological restoration. One last point is just don't spend through all of your inheritance. This is Econ 101. This is something in the private sector that is both common sense to us, and music to our ears. The material resources in the jurisdiction that you're in charge of the ecological restoration of are like an inheritance from all of our ancestors. And if you spend through it too quickly, you could go bankrupt. In that case, it means human extinction.

Ecologist 2

Yeah. Obliteration. All right. So that's the first part of our presentation. You guys get to work on that, we're gonna hit lunch. We've got a pizza party to show up to at our company.

Ecologist 1

Yeah. The boss just thought we were really doing an excellent job with these presentations and thought we'd reward— just because we delivered on what— what our job was.

Ecologist 2

Pizza parties come when you're part of a successful organization.

☒ *Cool music ends*

Worker 2

I feel like everything I know about ecological restoration has been completely disrupted. It's, like, ecological restoration 2.0.

Worker 1

Yeah, this was a revolution for me in the way that we're gonna be doing this.

Worker 2

It's worth the 140.

Worker 1

Yeah, oh–

Worker 2

Can I smell their pizza party through the door right now? Yeah.

Worker 1

Yeah.

Worker 2

It smells really good.

Worker 1

Absolutely.

Worker 2

Do I wish that they would share with me in an act of basic human decency, despite the fact that our department is struggling to meet the targets?

Worker 1

And we don't deserve it, and– yeah.

Worker 2

Yeah. Absolutely, yes–

Worker 1

Hey, maybe they'll leave us some scraps.

Worker 2

If I get my hopes up for scraps now, I'm only gonna be disappointed later. So I'm just gonna accept and embrace that even if there are scraps, I won't take them, because I need to learn my lesson.

Worker 1

And all this saliva that it's working up for me, I'm salivating at this, it's really gonna be motivating. Nothing like fear of not getting enough food to make you work on things that are important anyway.

Worker 2

Hopefully my excessive amounts of drool and spit coming out of my mouth don't drip onto my work station, as I just think about all the pizza parties that I can one day earn and deserve if I act more like the private sector.

☒ *Dramatic music*

Narrator

Will they successfully run their ecology like a business? Will they meet their ecological restoration targets in the five-year window outlined from the boys at the top? Will they get their \$140,000 worth of delicious and well-earned pizza? Tune in later in the episode to find out. Well, let's go to Mr. What-Was-Is-and-Ever-Will-Be and just, you know, find out now. Oh, Mr. What-Was-Is-and-Ever-Will-Be, will they eventually get their pizza party and stuff? Like, will they pull it off.

Mr. What-Was-Is-and-Ever-Will-Be

Oh, yes. Absolutely, they do.

☒ *Chipper music*

Narrator

Thank you so much, Mr. What-Is-Was-and-Ever-Will-Be. You can stop listening to the episode now if that was the only thing that you were waiting to hear. For the rest of you, now back to the show.

☒

–[00:34:40]

(Sounds of birds and trees)

Tom

Look, it just– on the other side of these bushes, it clears out a bit.

John

Oh, oh–

Tom

It's gonna bring us right next to the shore. It's absolutely beautiful this time of day.

John

Well, this whole area is beautiful. All the trees, and little mushrooms around here.

Tom

Yeah. I mean, it's no wonder there's evidence saying it's good for people to spend time in nature. It's good for people's mental health.

John

Peaceful out here, just you and me.

Tom

Yeah. (Laughs) I feel a bit guilty we didn't invite Artemis to come with us.

John

Yeah. (Sighs) Yeah, with triplets, it's kind of a package deal, I guess...

Tom

"Tom, John, Artemis, come with us." And it's like, "Yeah, okay, yeah." And I like Artemis, obviously, he's just– he takes–

John

He's just a lot.

Tom

Yeah, he's a lot. He's my triplet, I love him, but it's just, this is–

John

Sometimes, yeah, good–

Tom

–this has been good.

John

–to not have him out. Yeah.

Tom

Yeah.

John

Just dig those moments of silence.

Tom

Yeah. Just, like– just, like, hearing nature, and just being present, and...

John

Yeah.

Tom

But, like, biospheres have all this complementarity. Like, the complexity of an ecosystem makes it more stable. So, like, one of the threats of climate change is that you're simplifying biospheres and you're making them unstable. So there's this sort of, like, naturally developing complexity, this sort of, like, process in nature of this– like, the loss of a species, like, the loss of an evolutionary line, that's got this, like, tragedy to it. And, like, that's part of the reasons that we'd be so– humans are so upset about the massive rate of, like, species loss.

John

Yeah, the mass extinction that we're going through, and causing.

Tom

Yeah, it— shit's a bummer. And it's— like, the one silver lining is that we try to keep a record of the species that exist.

John

That just reminds me, I've been studying the history of libraries, actually, recently.

Tom

Oh, cool! Honestly, I've got this bad habit of buying books.

John

You're building your own personal library.

Tom

In a sense the library, like, that you have at your house represents the sort of, like, trajectory that you're on.

John

Yeah. It's a representation of your journey.

Tom

And especially if you're buying different, like, sorts of political and history texts based on what you're interested in. It's just, like, the library carries this knowledge about who you have seen yourself as over time.

John

One thing that was super fascinating for me to learn, the earlier libraries that we know about come at the very beginning of recorded history. Which, when you think about it, is pretty obvious. Because what is a library but a store of records, of information, and that's what history is.

Tom

Wow, yeah.

John

Another thing that really fascinated me about library history was that the history of libraries is run through the whole time with also the history of library suppression and destruction. And one of the earliest— I'm not actually sure how to say this, I've just been reading it a lot— but the Qin dynasty, the first dynasty of Imperial China, ordered that all historical records from the time before that would be destroyed, and that the librarians and scholars would be killed, so that history would be seen to begin with that dynasty.

Tom

We call your bluff, first imperial dynasty. You're at least the second imperial dynasty, but probably more. They're like, "We don't want to be number seven. Time to kill the librarians." What the fuck's wrong with you? That's psychopa— that's psycho— it is un-ecological.

John

Luckily the next dynastic, the Han dynasty, actually reversed this policy, and much of the history— not all of it— was recovered. And during the Han dynasty and going forward, record-keeping and production of literature in China was encouraged.

Tom

Fuck yeah, Han dynasty. Now that's my dynasty.

John

Han dynasty also introduced one of the earliest classification schemes for information. 'Cause that's crucial to libraries, too, is like, you have all these books— like, what order do you put 'em in? How do you engage with them? If they're just sitting there and you don't know what's in 'em, it's kinda useless, right? And future Chinese dynasties actually prefigured the printing press with the woodblock printing. They would carve the symbols into woodblocks and kind of use them as stamps, and then later arrange stamps in large things, and then put pieces of parchment or papyrus over it and press it against it.

Tom

Whoa, that's really cool. Especially, like, to innovate that. To go from hand-replication of written works to potential mass production of it. Oh, shit, look, a heron. (Sound of heron call)

John

Oh my god, I've never seen one of those before.

Tom

Yeah, I told you. This is, like, the nicest shore in the whole park. It's— it's beautiful. That thing is a beast. Do they usually grow that big?

John

Yeah, I don't know. It does seem big, though.

Tom

Oh— there he goes. Enjoy the fish, buddy. (Chuckles) And then later he'll probably be eaten by some sort of enormous bird, right? Like, in the sky? Hm. Circle of life.

John

So in the West, the rise of libraries kind of began in Ancient Greece in the major philosophical schools. The Peripatetic Libraries formed the foundation for the Library at Alexandria, which had hundreds of thousands of scrolls, and the founders of it, their aim was to collect the whole body of literature in the best available copies, arranged in systematic order, so as to form the basis for publishing commentaries. And then was burned down, famously.

Tom

Yeah. I think the sadness that you feel when you have, like, a really good library that burns down is really similar to the sadness that you feel when you have, like, the extinction of an animal.

John

The tradition of libraries does continue on through Rome. Constantinople has a huge library. But kind of over time, and as the Roman Empire fades out, a lot of this stuff might have been lost if it hadn't been for a rich tradition of philosophy and commentary that arose in the Islamic world at the time. And the Islamic world actually had learned new paper-making techniques from Chinese prisoners of war, which allowed them to massively amplify the amount of books and texts that they were making. And by the 10th century, Baghdad and Cordoba had developed as the world's largest book markets.

And another group of people who kind of carried the torch through this period of fewer libraries existing were Catholic monks. The Benedictine Monastic Order especially emphasized the study and reproduction of texts as an important, almost holy action that the monks would take. They would have these giant rooms in their monasteries called "scriptoria," where they would sit around copying out texts all the time. Like, imagine, people dedicating their lives just to, like, copying out books. I find it hard to read a book. Like, copying out a whole book?

Tom

(Laughs) Wow, yeah. That's intense. Yeah, the printing press must have been, like, a huge step up. Did the 15th century have an Andrew Yang to protect them from automation?

John

No, actually, a lot of these monasteries that, you know, carried the torch of human knowledge for hundreds of years were ransacked, and their libraries destroyed and contents dispersed following the development of the printing press. Because one of the things that happened after the printing press was the Protestant Reformation, and the availability of the Bible to everyday people. And so, that coincided with a rebellion against Catholic clergy. And, as well, the printing press causes the Renaissance, and eventually the Enlightenment to begin.

And also in the Renaissance, strangely— like, in England, Henry VIII and Edward VI declaring their alignment with the new learning of the Humanists, had the universities, churches, schools, and libraries purged of all books that embodied the "old learning" of the Middle Ages. So there was a lot of loss of information there. Kind of seems counter to the spirit of the Renaissance and Enlightenment. And there

is a lot of new work being produced and, like, scholarship being done, and beautiful stuff. But part of it was, like, "Oh, let's destroy this old stuff."

A bit of library history: during the French Revolution, the Bibliothèque nationale de France became one of the world's largest libraries at the time, because during de-Christianization, the collections of all the clergy, as well as just in general, the collections of all the aristocrats in the country were seized and collected at local depots in each city, and then were sent to the central national library of France. And also they created provincial libraries around the country.

Tom

So they redistributed libraries from the rich to the poor during the French Revolution?

John

Apparently they did lose quite a lot of books during this process, but, (laughs) the idea behind it's pretty cool. Like, creating this national library everyone in theory could use.

Tom

See, yeah, I've got this— such, this natural urge, and maybe it's an unnatural or foolish urge to, like, retain every book. Even if a book is incorrect it's still got this, like, historical value to exist. And just to have the history of libraries so mixed up in the loss of knowledge, the permanent loss of knowledge, is so baked into the history of libraries. It's actually really similar to biodiversity. We have this fossil record of immense loss of biodiversity in species in different times in history. You know? Like, I don't think we should naturalize and say, like, "Oh, you know, they go extinct all the time, so it's okay if we make them all extinct all at once." But there is, like, a sort of natural process that happens there.

John

Yeah. Yeah, well— yeah, loss and degradation is part of most systems. Like, you have to actively fight against it. And that's what the history of libraries and, like, information, archivism is. It's, like, fighting to retain something that, without that, would degrade, would dissolve away into chaos, again, as everything does.

Tom

Yeah. It's, like, we still have an ethical responsibility to pursue the largest libraries possible. But we can't change the past, that there has been loss of information, and forces outside of our control will likely take information away from us again. But we can do our best to resolve ourselves against that.

John

Yeah.

Tom

Strengthen our capacity to archive.

John

During this time, the field of library science is developed, because people are realizing that as history moves forward, there's a real problem with maintaining and interacting with these vast stores of information. Because if you're not interacting with it, it can be lost in other ways. Context can be lost. Languages can be lost. Words that things used to mean can be lost. And so, library science as a multidisciplinary field applies the practices, perspectives, and tools of management, information technology, education, and other areas to the collection, organization, preservation, and dissemination of information. But after this, once you're in, like, the 1800s, libraries just really kinda take off, closer to what we think of them today.

Tom

Oh, lending libraries, sweet.

John

Lending libraries. The— the innovation here is they're public libraries funded through government, like, municipal— so it's not just, like, for universities. It's not, like, national libraries. It's, like, this is public-facing and publicly funded. That's what— that's what the point of them is.

Tom

When— when they were first implementing public, municipal libraries, was there sort of, like, an equivalent to the copyright lobby being, like, "This is gonna deprive writers of profits." Like, "You're gonna turn writers into paupers."

John

Some of them even called them hotbeds of crime, because, you know, if you're a bookseller, obviously the libraries are, like, a fundamental threat to your profits. That's kinda how capitalism works sometimes. It's, like, who cares what the good is? It's all about my profits.

Tom

This part of the path ahead, it's really steep. Do you want to, like, take a break and sort of regroup before we hit that thing, 'cause it's, like—

John

Yeah, yeah. I don't even know how you get down there...

Tom

—that trail is, like, fucked up, dude.

John

Now I guess the real change with libraries is that books are going digital. And the idea of a library is no longer just a specific place where works are stored, but there's in a sense a giant online library that is distributed through the computers of all the people on the internet, and it's, in a sense, the greatest library the world has ever known.

Tom

Yeah. Actually, it's sort of weird to think that some of the most extensive public-facing libraries on Earth are pirate, criminal libraries, you know?

John

Mm-hmm, yeah.

Tom

Like, black market, free lending, information sharing. There's something cyberpunk about that. Like, library—

John

Definitely.

Tom

Like, illegal libraries?

John

The music torrenting site What.cd was taken offline a few years ago, but until then it was actually the world's largest and most comprehensive collection of all music that ever existed. It was pretty— like, a really amazing thing, and it was destroyed.

Tom

Damn. In the future people are gonna look back on that the same way that, like, we look on all these times where in library history where you just lose all this information, lose all these old manuscripts.

John

Yeah.

Tom

The loss of the torrent sites in recent history is, like, very much in that same tradition. That's a wild thought.

John

Even, like, with all these online libraries, I still wouldn't count out physical libraries. They've kind of shifted, really taking that role that libraries play of being an interface between the public and knowledge, and expanding that. Richard Reuben, I was reading his book *Foundations of Library and Information Science*— it's a recently-published book— and he, in his preface, said that, "the library is now part of a complex and dynamic educational, recreational, and informational infrastructure." Goes on to talk about access, equity, literacy, information literacy, ability to interact with vast stores of information in

a competent way. And community space becoming kind of central to the projects of modern lending libraries, in addition to their traditional functions of lending out books. So they just really continue to play a really vital role in society and in communities.

Tom

Yeah, libraries are the bomb.

John

Yeah, no, I love libraries. You know, thank you for letting me ramble on about this. Artemis, I'm sure, would have just been talking about, (Chuckles) something Artemis-based by now, for sure.

Tom

Yeah, yeah. Did Artemis see a billboard ad with a pretty girl on it? And it's like, okay, thanks, Artemis. Yeah, good story.

John

Yeah, Artemis is a real library of all the billboards with pretty girls he's ever seen.

Tom

Yeah. (Laughs) Like, if you wanted to build a library of us triplets, you'd definitely include Artemis.

John

Mm, definitely.

Tom

But I think sometimes it makes perfect sense— it's not a contradiction. I was like, "Is this a contradiction?" I started getting worried. I'm like, "Uhh... am I violating my values by excluding Artemis?" But no. This is like if you took us, Tom and John, out of the triplet library—

John

Right. Yeah, you don't need to—

Tom

—and left Artemis in the library. Because that's part of the greatness of the library is choosing which—

John

Yeah, you wouldn't want to borrow all the books, every time.

Tom

It's like if you have two really sleek, to-the-point, and quality Stephen King books, and then you have one sort of infamously long, and sort of—

John

Oh, like *It*?

Tom

—tedious to get through.

John

Yeah.

Tom

You're not a hypocrite for not taking out that Stephen King book on every hiking trip.

John

I actually like thinking of Artemis like the Stephen King book *It*, because, like, it is really good, and Artemis is really good. But it is— Jesus Christ, you could have used an editor. *The Shining*, that's a great-length book.

Tom

Yeah. *Shining* is a perfect length.

John

All right. I think I'm rested. Let's try and get down this steep part. We might have to stop talking for a minute, though.

Tom

Okay.

(Sounds of exertion and footsteps fade)

–[00:49:36]

Shawn

I think probably the first time I contemplated utopia, I think I was, like, a teenager, and I remember having this notebook where I'd write down, like, joke ideas and stuff like that. And I remember writing down, like, "Why don't we aim for utopia?" Why do people talk about politics in a way where, like, utopia is this shameful thing. To be a utopian is to be naïve. But obviously everyone wants to make the world better, so, like, why don't we try to think about what the best world would be, or, like, the best possible world, or the best possible next step for the world to take?

Aaron

Yeah. Like, in Zeitgeist stuff it was always framed as, "We're not utopian. This isn't a utopian vision. This is a realistic vision based on the current science as it exists. And, like, we can do this. It's possible." And, like, that's a good framing. But, like, Episode 10 of this show is called "World Peace", and I just remember you saying extremely early on, like, "Why don't people unironically advocate for world peace anymore?" It's just become this thing that people mock. And it's, like, "Oh, you just want world peace." And it's like, "Well, yeah, of course we want fucking world peace. That's the goal, right? World peace?" And you were like, "Let's do an episode about world peace. And, like, return to it pretty frequently."

Shawn

And it's like, "Oh, well, I'm wise enough to know that it's very, very hard to achieve world peace." And it's like, well, yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yes. Absolutely.

Aaron

We're not playing around here. Yeah, this is, like– (Laughs)

Shawn

Talking about world peace is so naïve and dumb, it's embarrassing to be caught calling for world peace. Like, to call for world peace–

Aaron

It's better to discredit the idea that world peace could ever exist.

Shawn

And it's also– it's really important to describe the outcome that you want when you're advocating for something. I think a sort of basic feature of political organizing is, when we bring in Medicare for All, then you'll have healthcare, you'll be able to go to the doctor. It's, like, oh, I see how the outcome benefits me. So we have to do the important work of theorizing, and taking from what exists, and using creative reinterpretation for the things that are actually already around us to be able to have the capacity to sell a better society. So, it's– I'm a person who came to the conclusion at some point that there needed to be a really, really big change. There wasn't just, like, a bunch of little small problems to tweak. There was, like, some really fundamental issues in society. And it seems like from the people who agree with me, you know, revolutionaries, they're averse to describing an alternative order.

Aaron

Yeah. There'll be, like, some description, but a lot of it happens in the form of negation. "Well, it won't be like this." There's definitely a ton, a ton of development on the theory side of what's wrong with what currently exists, and that's all super important and good. It's, I wouldn't say, necessarily easier to do that, but you have a strong referent. Like, this is what's going on, and we can see that it's causing these bad outcomes. This is awful. We need to end capitalism.

And then, what are we gonna build instead is, like, "Well, you know, socialism. A better society. Communism." Is it gonna look like those other times they tried communism? Well, maybe a little bit, but, like, actually kind of a lot not like that. Library Socialism, using library as the reference, and then talking about how it would work, is something that stands on its own. And it's not a critique of the current society in and of itself. Like, you can infer critiques. But saying, like, "This is how it would work. We would have library distribution points that would have all the things that people in that neighborhood generally take out."

Like, you know, the little library in your neighborhood might have lawnmowers for everyone, because that's the thing that people use around the house. The library near the lake would have boats for people to borrow. It's context-dependent. Things like that. You just can describe how things would actually work, what the society would actually look like, what would it be like to exist in a world like this? And I think the final piece of the puzzle, for me, that really clicked me into loving the idea of calling it Library Socialism is actually fairly recently. This was around the time that we did the "Universal Basic Outcome" Episode—

Shawn

That's 142.

Aaron

We were talking about this criticism people have of Universal Basic Income, or of welfare more generally. "Oh, if you provide people with enough food that they're not starving to death, they'll sit around and be lazy all the time." And, like, one of the major things that came up for me in that was libraries, because I was going to the library a lot at the time to do writing. And it's one of the few places in a city like this where you can just go for free and sit indoors in, like, a nice environment, and exist for free. Or go on the internet, if you don't have a computer yourself.

And I would see all the little fliers up around the library about job fairs or, like, workshops. Even things like movie nights or, like, discussion groups. There's just these little things up for little community events that were taking place at the library. And so, even today, in the society that we exist, and libraries are more just book-sharing depots. They're also these kind of, like, free community spaces where people are sharing other things with each other— space and skills.

And let's just grant that, like, not having enough food is a good motivator to find some way to contribute to society. What kind of cultural institutions do we want to have in place so that people can find things that they want to do, projects to work on in their life? And I was, like, "Oh yeah, libraries." You'd have all of this stuff going on at the library. If you want to learn any skill, you'd go to the library, the community center. If you wanted to just try different things, try out wood shop, car mechanicry. (Laughs) Sewing. You can go to the library. You can learn how to do these things. And it's a major expansion upon those, like, examples I listed of things that already exist. You know, build a resume.

But it's, like— it's the kind of seed of that thing. It's, like, what kinds of things can I do? Like, here, let's help people jumpstart things. It's this place that would be alive with community and with possibility and with learning. And I was like, "Yeah, that— that is kind of part of the library." And it's a part of the library that needs to be expanded on, and would be a core of, like, my utopian society. And so, like, that also came to me through the vector of thinking about libraries.

Shawn

So, elements of capitalism existed under feudalism. And at some point it bubbled up from under the surface. The capitalism sprung forth from feudalism. And so, the next world, which as Žižek reminded us, "they used to call communism, but it doesn't matter," also carries itself within the modern capitalist world, and comes out in different ways. It's— you can see it. You can see it in a soup kitchen. You can see it in a library. You can see it especially in a tool library. You can even see it— and I'll qualify this, don't worry— you can even see it in things like Airbnb, and Uber.

And obviously Airbnb and Uber there's, like, the labor issues there, there's— with Airbnb there's the problem of property-hoarding and basically landlords making a lot of money, taking rental stock off the market. And the problem with Uber, there's, like, the labor violations. They're both pretty bad business models. Lots of good critiques to be had against both of them. But there is, in that bad thing, the revolutionary seed, which is the sharing of the property based on need, within the confines of the capitalist system.

Aaron

Yeah. It's similar to what we talked about in the "People's Republic of Walmart" episode, that obviously Walmart's this horrible thing, but there is this revolutionary seed in there, and that they have cracked the code on global economic planning on a vast scale. Like, Walmart, along with some

other companies, but Walmart primarily, like, figured that out. And, like, got shit done. And likewise, Amazon has figured out how to do massive, like, online global production with distribution and shipping directly to people's houses. It's a planning marvel that is a potential bit of socialism. Like, it's within the confines of capitalism, and in some ways it's these hyper-capitalist elements of it. But there are those glimmers that foreshadow what you'd want a good society to look like.

Shawn

So, elements of the Library Socialist society are already here. But their potentiality is being limited by the system that we live under. Library Socialism changes the relationships fundamentally between human beings. So property relations are relations between human beings. For me to own the pen I'm holding doesn't mean that me and the pen have the relationship. It's, me and everyone else have a relationship about the pen. Pens are inanimate. They can't have relationships. The reason I specify that is that the problem of inequality and property relations is a social problem.

It's the relationship between people. And the transition from this society to the next is primarily a change in the relationship between people. Elements of those types of relationships exist under this world. Like, for example, handing a hammer to someone else on a work site because you're both serving a common end, those types of social relationships, under this society, are not the dominant mode of relations in society. In the society that we're going to be achieving, they will become the dominant.

Aaron

What I think makes the Library Socialist positive platform really click and really meaningful for people is that it plugs into something that we experience already. So you say, "It would be like a library for all these things, different in these specific ways." And people get that immediately. And, like, likewise talking about what types of social relationships we'd like to operate on the basis of primarily being things like handing a hammer over to someone who you're working on a project together, because they need a hammer and it's there, the logic of that is so intuitive. People get it. They've done things like that a million times. That's part of human potential. That's part of human capacity. That's what we can do. And we want to expand that logic out to these other areas of society in this way.

Shawn

Along those lines, another thing that makes this stuff feel a lot realer to participate in, is if you have the opportunity to participate in a direct democracy of some kind— like, my big experience with, like, prefigurative direct democracy was during Occupy— experiencing that, where people are making collective decisions together, people are providing food for others in a group context, you're seeing the generosity of people, made me start to think that really, really different ways of organizing people were possible, despite all the complexities and weird stuff about Occupy camps. There was also some exciting, weird energy to participate in it. The experience of - of direct democracy, it's a powerful thing. It's, like, very, very neat. I feel like by describing this possible good outcome in terms that can be felt, it definitely makes me feel good about engaging with the current state of things to be able to feel like I'm seeing bits of the next world bubble through.

—[01:00:55]

☒ *Music plays*

Shawn

Now, we've been describing one beautiful, perfect utopia.

Aaron

But for some reason, there's still these criticisms floating around out there. People hear us say, "Let's expand the concept of a lending library to all areas of life," and instead of saying, "Wow, that sounds great," they say, "Hold up a minute here."

Shawn

Absolutely confusing, as you express a perfect, good idea that's uncomplicated, and people respond with confusion, even sometimes anger. So we wanted to make our tent big enough for everyone, including them. And—

Aaron

Mm-hmm, yeah, hold some space.

Shawn

—and respond to some of the common criticisms that we get when we bring this idea forward of a global library held in common for the good of all, extending the principal of a lending library to ensure an irreducible minimum, as part of a liberated, complementary society.

Aaron

So what's the first criticism we have here?

☒ *Synth transition*

Shawn

This is one that we got a lot: "People don't want this system. I like owning my own books. I like owning things. You tell everyone out there that you're gonna collectivize all property on Earth, you're gonna have a riot on your hands."

Aaron

Well, first, I think the only people who don't want it are the people who don't understand it. And I think that might include the people asking this question. Saying you like to own things, it's like, what do you love to own that much? Your lamp? You can keep your lamp at home.

Shawn

Mm-hmm. If you like your lamp, you can keep your lamp.

Aaron

But then, like, even if you think about how people who own lamps, what they do with them, you own a lamp for 20 years or something, you keep a lamp. And then eventually you get a new lamp, and you throw that one out, or you give it to someone else for them to use. Take a lamp out for five years. If you want to re-do the décor in your house, you can get a new different lamp, and then return that lamp for other people to use. Nobody's gonna be coming and confiscating your lamps. If you're using it, you can keep it out of the library for years.

Shawn

Yeah. That's, like, the premise of usufruct is, like, use and enjoyment. You get the use and enjoyment of the lamp. You don't have the right to destroy it, to hide it away or bury it underground so no one can use it. As long as you're respecting the principle that it exists for use, it's part of our shared property, then you can keep it for as long as you need it.

Aaron

Another version of this that came up, I saw this guy said, "I just got my daughter her first bike, and she wanted to paint it red with a racing stripe on it. And, you know, if it was a library bike, we couldn't paint it red with a racing stripe on it, because we didn't own it." And I was, like, you're just misunderstanding again. You're not destroying if you're just adding a layer of paint. The kid outgrows the bike in a few years, they return it to the library, some other kid'll see that bike, and they'll love it. They'll want to take it out. That's just uniqueness. That's an interesting item that the library can have to lend out from there on.

Shawn

If someone was systematically taking every bike out, painting all the bikes red, putting a racing stripe on every bike, then yes, of course that could be stopped. There would be limits within the system, reasonable limits, determined based on what the usage ends up being, and what things we need to defend and tweak the system to protect ourselves from. But that process happens, that process of testing the boundaries and improving it happens in the real world. It doesn't happen in the world of ideas. You need to start the program and work out the kinks as it goes along, and find out the exact version that works. But absolutely, we would be concerned about abuse of the shared common property, and we'd work out systems to prevent abuse.

Aaron

You definitely want to prevent abuse. And, like, yeah, I want to lay down the flag, too, that, like, retaining the ability to use things in novel ways— it's kind of like writing in the margins of books. People

say, "I don't like library books because I can't write in the margins of them." Under Library Socialism if you wanted to take a book out during your lifetime and just keep it and write in the margins, you can do that. And then when you return it, that's a unique copy of the book with writing in the margins. It can be noted on the library docket that this is an altered copy, it has extra information in it. Like, we want that in the library. And that information, too, is retained. Your notes.

Shawn

Well, and I think the need to alter books that way can be itself changed by the development of further technology that allows us to store our highlighting on physical books digitally, and carry it with us. Next criticism!

–[01:05:00]

☒ *Synth transition*

Shawn

"While I concede that you could probably have enough of people's basic needs"– well, thank you. That's–

Aaron

That's a good concession.

Shawn

–that's - that's gracious, yeah.

Aaron

Yeah, a lot of people don't even realize that much.

Shawn

"There would still be finite amounts of luxury items. How do you deal with the inherent material scarcity of the world?"

Aaron

You can understand how people in the current society right now, where scarce goods are dispersed based on the semi-random, semi-based on historical privilege and violence, distribution of money– they're saying, if we're not gonna base it on the, (laughs) semi-random, semi-based on the historical distribution of violence thing, money, what are we going to base the distribution of scarce goods on?

Shawn

"Are you gonna–"

Aaron

Who gets the beach-front property?

Shawn

"Wrong Boys, are you gonna make us wait in boat lines, just to go out on a fishing rig?"

Aaron

(Laughs) If everybody wants that bike with the racing stripe on it, who gets it?

Shawn

Well, I think you'd have to do a detailed and thoughtful analysis of what people's needs are, and what the material costs of producing something is. Obviously we're not gonna be providing, you know, dozens of Large Hadron Colliders or other multibillion-dollar scientific equipment to the general public.

Aaron

Yeah. The kind of thing that it is will determine the ways in which people can use it, and– and profit from the fruits of it. You're only gonna have one, maybe two, three, Large Hadron Colliders. People can book time. And lots of things can, like, determine how much time you're gonna book. Do a lot of people want to know the results of your particular study that you're doing? Do you use a lot of time at other sort of scarce resources like this, and not produce very much? Maybe your ability to use things would go down. I think that there's a ton of different factors that would have to go into decisions like this. And I think reasonable answers for these kinds of things are possible.

But also, I want to emphasize that a lot of the time, questions like this are coming from a perspective. Like, sort of imagining that people are gonna have the same desire to, you know, have the biggest

diamonds or something that people have. These weird sort of displays of status that really are relics of the current capitalist economic system that we live in, and what if there's a scarcity of giant diamond necklaces— diamond's a bad example, because it's not actually a scarce resource. Everybody probably could have a giant diamond necklace, if we wanted to.

Shawn

The question would just be, like, what's the ecological cost, what's the benefit of it, and is it needed? Like, if there's stuff that's not needed, but has— like, you might increase these supply of big diamonds if there was an increased demand for it. Or you might shorten the loaning window for it. Might create waiting lists for diamonds and stuff. But I think if that's as dystopian as this proposed utopia's gonna get, is that you have a waiting to use a speed boat or wear a diamond necklace? That's a pretty functional society there.

Aaron

Yeah. And, like, waiting lists sound dystopian, but I think you can really make it a fair system that people would appreciate engaging with, in a way that using the historical distribution of wealth they don't appreciate.

Shawn

Yeah. I mean, I think things should be judged on their own. Like, we can't just be, like, "Well, look at the alternative system, where the historical violence distributes power in this totally uneven way, and that's what determines access to big diamonds and speedboats instead of waiting lists. Isn't that a dystopia compared to our proposal?" Like, it's tempting to do that. But we should also defend it in its own terms and say that actually, a waiting list isn't bad. Like, in itself. Like, waiting lists are actually sort of part of a smoothly working society.

Aaron

Yeah. You don't want waiting—

Shawn

Having to book a massage ahead isn't dystopian. I'm gonna book a speedboat. Oh, there's only one speedboat available for the next three months, and it's during a work day at this, like, hard-to-use time or whatever. You know, that's just efficiency. That's what efficiency looks like.

Aaron

Yeah. I mean, if it's, like, in the current society where you have a waiting list for a homelessness shelter? Like, you don't want a waiting list for food. Like, "Oh yeah, you'll get food in three months." Like, no, you need food now.

Shawn

That's why an analysis of need is needed for the true usufruct—

Aaron

Yeah, or needed for what, and in what concept— like, maybe I need to use the Large Hadron Collider to finish my life's work, and that's important to me, it'll bring me fulfillment. I need it for that. But you don't need it in the sense of, if I don't get there today, I'll literally die like if I don't get any water, or oxygen. So there's different levels of need, and need for different things.

Shawn

Next criticism!

—[01:09:34]

☒ *Synth transition*

Aaron

See, look, we're knockin' it out of the park on these criticisms.

Shawn

"Who administers this system? And who gave them the power to enslave us into doing this?"

Aaron

Well, that's a loaded question.

Shawn

Yeah, it's a sharp question, but appreciate it. You've got us on the ropes, let's see if we can pow-pow, fight our way back, prove that we're not proposing a new class of slaveowners.

Aaron

So, number one, who runs it? Answer: there's a couple ways to think about the answer. One of them is, everybody runs it, because it is a democratic society, which means that everybody ultimately has a say in the decisions that society makes.

Shawn

Mm-hmm. And using a process of experimentation, theory, trying stuff out in practice, you're gonna build a better and better idea of what an effective democratic system looks like. Trying out different things, and pushing the frontiers of democracy to their greatest ideal form. The democratic systems that we use in our current society obviously have flaws, but are also clearly better than the alternative of, say, like, a violently repressive dictatorship.

Aaron

So, yeah, if you are choosing to force our society into the framework of slavery and to compare it to that, then everybody would be the slaves, and also everybody would be the slaveowners at the same time. It kinda doesn't work, so that's why I wouldn't use your framework.

Shawn

It's— it's insensitive. Like, there's real slaves.

Aaron

Yeah.

Shawn

When you throw out these sort of, like, libertarian, like, "taxation is slavery" sort of, like, not really slavery stuff, calling it slavery to make it a rhetorical point, you are sort of, like, moving the spotlight off existing 2019 slavery that no one talks about, to talk about how it's inconvenient for you to pay five cents on the dollar.

Aaron

But I already hear your objection to our answer about democracy, which is that, "Oh, come on, that's a cop-out. Somebody's gonna have to actually run these systems." And you're right. If there's, say, an online democracy system, or online waiting list system, or online library system, you're gonna need engineers building those online systems. You're gonna need people administering the systems. There's going to be people engaged in civic life in that way. And how are they chosen?

Shawn

Well, I think if you're a neutral body administering the democratic procedures as a facilitator, then you'd want to have a sort of meritocratic public-facing process for that. But on the political side, you know, there's gonna be, sort of, organically different political tendencies within a broader democratic system. And within that, some people organically will be leaders, and that they're followed. You can even incorporate the anarchist critique of hierarchy. You can design the system so the leaders don't get to tell people what to do, but people can decide to follow them. There's an important distinction there. Like, the principle of liquid democracy, where you have delegated voting, where you can vote for someone to vote on your behalf, either broadly or on a specific issue, or on a specific vote. Which is partially how democracy already works anyways, is, like, people within social groups turn to each other for feedback on who the best choice is to vote in this election and why, and—

Aaron

Yeah. "I'm not paying that much attention, can you tell me?"

Shawn

There's always gonna be a large portion of people that don't actively participate in the political process every single day. But— and part of politics is leaders being followed, or people putting trust in them. So I think that's how I'm thinking of structuring it at this point. But I'm also open to other ways of incorporating, sort of, expertise into the process, and different modes of voting. Like, I think an experimental outlook is really the way to go.

Aaron

Like, yeah. The political decisions are gonna proceed basically like you said, whereas more procedural, administrative decisions, if you're concerned about those, are probably going to just be made by people who have the necessary skills and are hired, or you know, however that's thought about in the future. And then if they cause poor outcomes, then the democratic process, again, can intervene in that by creating new guidelines or however that works. So it would all be ultimately accountable to that democratic process. So, that's who's gonna run things.

Shawn

Oh— and it won't be slavery in any sense. It'll always be voluntary. This might sound a little weird but, like, people will really like it once they experience the effect of having access to abundance in a way that they never have before, a more healthy idea of abundance.

—[01:13:54]

☒ *Synth transition*

Shawn

But, yeah, this next— this next criticism sort of gets in on this sort of thing, too, is— how do you plan on getting to this utopia? Will that take violence? And some of these comments are, "You're advocating for violence. You guys are violent idealogues. It's dangerous to listen to your beautiful ideas about Library Socialism, no matter how many beautiful they are." And a lot of the comments mention these are beautiful ideas, it seems perfect in many ways, and concede that.

Aaron

And some of 'em even say that it's worse because they're so beautiful.

Shawn

Exactly.

Aaron

They'll be more motivating for the— yeah.

Shawn

Exactly. It's dangerous how beautiful and perfect these ideas are, yet they're so dangerous. And we appreciate these types of comments, to give them space, and then be able to respond to them. Do you advocate for violence to transition to the Library Socialist society?

Aaron

No, I don't.

Shawn

Yeah, the answer is absolutely not.

Aaron

A plan that has violence as the primary tactic is not something we're interested in, and not something that we think would really get to the society we're describing.

Shawn

I think what the real violence is, is the withholding of records and information from the public. It's paywalls. It's paywalls for - for scientific papers. It's libraries that don't have enough copies of the books that people want to read.

Aaron

Paywalls for other things— like, paywalls for food and bread. You go to the grocery store, there's a paywall behind all that food. And that literally kills people.

Shawn

That's violence, man. We're not talking about violence here. We're talking about building utopia through a combination of a prefigurative, entryist, and public relations strategy to actualize a real utopia to take care of everyone. We're not talking about picking a fight with anyone. They're all invited to be onboard. But know what the real violence is, man? The real violence is taking down the largest collection of music in history instead of making sure that everyone was able to tap into that.

Aaron

Yeah. It is— it is really messed up for people to throw these accusations of violence out at us, when they're tacitly, or in most cases explicitly supporting the violence of a locked deadbolt on an empty home while people freeze to death in the cold.

Shawn

So to ultimately answer your question, "How do we get there?"— it starts with beefing up libraries, beefing up democracy, trying to actualize the principles that we want to see in the new world, bring them to reality, to the highest degree possible within this realm, and while building up public support for a full-on transition. But the first task is to try to convince absolutely everyone. That's Plan A.

Aaron

Yeah, absolutely everyone. And you just— you know, you start with the influencers. You convince as many influencers as you can. Anyway. That's maybe getting a bit granular in strategy, but.

Shawn

We have the documents.

Aaron

Yeah. That's, like, Plan A, part i. You know, you the little lowercase "i".

Shawn

So this is a beautiful world that we can actualize and bring about, believe it or not, completely above board. No need for weird police stuff. No need for, like, all getting armed. I mean, do what you want, but I'm saying, we can pull this off above board. The ideas are good enough. It just needs to be articulated in ways that people can understand.

Aaron

But, yes, to throw a bone to the other people who are screaming right now with their own objections that I won't name, if you get attacked you can defend yourself.

Shawn

You're absolutely right. As Malcolm X said, "Be peaceful, be courteous, obey the law, respect everyone, but if someone puts his hand on you, send him to the cemetery."

☒ *Jaunty music fades in*

Aaron

So is that it? Is that all the criticisms?

Shawn

Yeah, I mean, the rest were mostly incoherent.

Aaron

Yeah. You did get a lot of incoherent criticism. So, well, I guess the end of that segment. Time for the next segment.

☒ *Music ends*

—[01:17:23]

Shawn

So we're approaching a crisis point with a number of interlocked crises. In Vancouver we feel it very deeply with the housing crisis. The cost of living here is insane. I know there's a lot of places, major cities, that are experiencing this. Homelessness, the problem of inequality. There's massive amounts of environmental damage done by the production of electronics, including and especially smartphones. The world's data centers and their air conditioning uses a lot of energy, it releases a lot of carbon into the atmosphere.

We're all essentially connected into a worldwide surveillance network which is not fully understood by anyone. It's non-simultaneously apprehended. We know that mass data retention does happen. But we don't have a comprehensive list of everyone who does mass data retention, how they do it, and why. But it's a system that's vulnerable to mass data interception. There's a lot of, like, reasons to be really concerned about this dystopian world bubbling under the surface, also. And we're in this, like, pincer where you can either have ecology or oblivion. You can either have socialism or barbarism.

Aaron

Yeah. Like, stuff is changing. The material conditions of society, the productive forces in society are changing are extremely, extremely rapidly. And, like, if we were good Marxists we might say, "Socialism will burst forth from that necessarily," though not all Marxists think that.

Shawn

I think most Marxists admit that it's a struggle that you might not win. That sorta seems part of their whole kit and caboodle.

Aaron

(Laughs) Yeah. I think I do that because I'm kind of attracted to the idea that it's— it will inevitably burst forth. It's a comforting idea. And so I want to think that somebody thinks it. (Laughs)

Shawn

That is a comforting, bourgeois liberal deviation. You're saying the global proletariat can sit on their hands, comrade? No! You have to stand and fight.

Aaron

I'm saying they inevitably will stand and fight. (Laughter) It's the course of history.

Shawn

The threat of ecofascism, I think, is really real. Because the threat of an outside force has been used historically, and can be used again, to get people to rally behind a strongman who promises to deliver them from the terror that they face. And when it comes to the choice between radical redistribution and the maintenance of unequal property relations, there's many powerful people whose incentives, regardless of their intentions, their incentives are lined up with backing a strongman who maintains the current property relations, rather than a deeply revolutionary model.

So there's this, like, real possibility and threat, I think, of seeing ecofascism rising in our lifetimes. It's already happening with fascist groups appropriating ecological rhetoric, as the imminent impacts of climate change are becoming more and more apparent, and more and more people are seeing footage of the flooded streets, burning buildings being carried away by floods, and the migration crisis that is caused by droughts and people fleeing for safer borders. That's my sad news, friends.

The important thing about when we're talking about the move from one type of society to the next is to recognize that the future is not written. There's a lot of different potential futures. And futures are created partially by the futures that we write and project on them. Dystopianism has a purpose, but we shouldn't get caught up in sort of a nihilistic, misanthropic dystopianism, which I think is the sort of prominent narrative of the future of the current moment.

People have said it's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. And our role, as good utopians, is to say, "Nuh-uh. I can imagine the end of capitalism." (Laughter) "Lemme tell you about it." Because we're in a fight between the end of the world and the end of capitalism. And the end of the world people, if it's purely just, like, putting weights on either side of a scale any time it's described, the "end of the world" is getting a lot of fuckin' ink these days. It's gettin' a lot of love from people on all sides of the political spectrum describing the end of the world. But I did ask my psychic about the end of capitalism.

Aaron

(Laughs) Oh, yeah? What did she say?

Shawn

2119. A hundred years from now.

Aaron

Oh, yeah. That's the same time borders are gonna be over with, if I remember right.

Shawn

I asked a follow-up question, I said, "Are things gonna get worse before then? Or are they gonna get better?" And she said, "The things that are unstoppable will get worse. But a lot of other things will get better. If things didn't get better, we wouldn't make it."

Aaron

That is soothing.

Shawn

She's— she's great. And—

Aaron

She is great, yeah.

Shawn

—if you're listening, I know I'm a little bit behind on payments for the psychic readings. But I'm good for it. (Laughter) Hey, I think there's a new episode of *Wrongtopia History* that's about to start.

Aaron

Awesome. I love the history of that place.

Shawn

Here, let's just point the satellite dish. (Buzzing) Turn on the control panel... (Beeps and boops) Here's your remote. I think this is the right remote. I've got, like, three or four remotes around here. No, this is the—

Aaron

Yeah, no, it's that squarish one.

Shawn

Just make sure to hit the satellite dish button— there we go. (Beeps and boops rise) And here it is. Let's give it a watch. (Selection beeps)

—[01:22:12]

☑ *Smooth jazz*

Wrong Shawn

Today's episode: "The History of Wrongtopia's Library System."

Wrong Aaron

Oh, I love this topic. Wrongtopia's library system? Rich in storied history.

Wrong Shawn

Can I interest you in some wine, good sir?

Wrong Aaron

Please. I heard a glass a day or two is actually good for you.

Wrong Shawn

(Chuckles) You'd like to think that, but alcohol causes cancer at a similar rate to cigarettes. I heard, anyways.

(Cork pops, wine pours, glasses clink)

Wrong Shawn

Mm— oh, that is delightful. A sparkling white. It's the white wine, for me.

Wrong Aaron

I just like the sparkling. If it's white, I mean, that's what most sparkling wines are. But if someone made a red sparkling wine, I'd drink that, too.

Wrong Shawn

Recently I had too much red wine. I'll spare you the gory details, but let's just say it's gonna be a little while before I can return to the reds, although there's a special place in my heart for them. So, Wrongtopia's Library System. So, now, Wrongtopia is a borderless planet. It's a world that is populated by 12 billion people.

Wrong Aaron

Five primary groups of nomads, everyone knows that...

Wrong Shawn

Oh, yeah, there's five groups of nomads. There's also the stationary class that are not always but often wealthier than the nomads. And they often run the infrastructure of different physical locations. The nomads mostly are employed in these locations through job-finding apps.

Wrong Aaron

One of the major groups of nomads most relevant to libraries is actually the TechnoNomads. Your real engineering types. People who know a lot about computers and technology, and they're on the road about it.

Wrong Shawn

You know, you'll have your computer scientists, your robot repair people. You're obviously gonna have musicians and artists commonly in this group, although they have some basic tech skills, also. The TechnoNomads are a diverse group. They tend to have tattoos at a higher rate than the other nomad groups.

Wrong Aaron

And many of them are ephemeralists. They believe that things shouldn't last forever. Now, again, not all TechnoNomads are like this, but many of them are. They think there's a certain value to things disappearing and going away. And so, they have an ideological opposition to the massive library system that the world of Wrontopia has implemented and matured over time.

Wrong Shawn

Within the Wrontopia ethical code it's sort of considered that you would have to grow the library, and have the library never shrink. So the ephemeralist school of thought born out of the TechnoNomads, they posed this challenge to it and said, "Perhaps libraries shouldn't be retained indefinitely, because history needs to be engaged with in order to maintain contemporary use." If you, for example, forget what words used to mean and you read them in new contexts, the knowledge is decaying there. So they would argue, you know, this isn't about getting rid of old information. This is about making sure that information is engaged with enough that it retains its relevancy. The stale collection of information has the cold stench of death on it. The reengagement and churning of old information is what's vibrant and lifeful.

Wrong Aaron

Absolutely, yeah. It's a very small subsection that actively wants to destroy as much information as possible. Most of the ephemeralists see them as kind of not really part of the organization, though most others do group them in within them. But they kinda see it as, like, you're prisoners of the past, and the more information you have, the more you're locked down by that in some way. They want to be totally spontaneous, born of nothing— it's kind of a fanciful notion, that they want to reinvent everything in every moment.

Wrong Shawn

There is a small group of anti-library extremists, and their ideology is nothing short than a total churn, as you're saying. While we engage critically with ephemeralism and what it means for the library science of Wrontopia, we really have to put a firm line there and say, like, "No, we're not gonna give into these— these radical anti-library extremist demands."

Wrong Aaron

Yeah. "Burn all the libraries every two years. A two year churn cycle." That's—

Wrong Shawn

And prisoner librarians, train them into other things. It's just extreme. And actually, interestingly, there's been a tension between these regional groups, these wealthier stationaries, that have run public campaigns advocating for the usufruct libraries at the center of the city-states to be distributed to the local people there, rather than have these nomads coming through using all of our speedboats, increasing the wait list, all this stuff like that. Our city-state needs our library for us, not for everyone coming through the town.

And some of these anti-library extremists at one point even teamed up with these stationary redistributivists on a campaign, because they're so fundamentally against the idea of a library. And they attribute all this stuff to— and there's some validity to it, and it's— you know, you need to pick apart the truth and false here— but they identify Library Socialism and the usufruct city-state system as the source of inequality and climate change. And I don't think that we can completely brush that off.

I mean, these library systems are some of the largest users of resources in Wrongtopia, and it's a finite planet the people of Wrongtopia haven't been stewarding responsibly. So there's an argument there. But the tactics they take are so extreme, and they don't seem to make the problem any better.

Wrong Aaron

Yeah, no, I think the less extreme view on that issue, which I believe is more credible, is that, yes, libraries as they currently exist in Wrongtopia, the sort of usufruct libraries of things are currently being operated in an unsustainable way. But that doesn't mean that they could never be operated in a sustainable way, and that it's a failure of imagination to say that because they're causing climate change we must destroy them or completely get rid of the system, rather than altering the system to, say, only produce as many speedboats as is sustainable.

Wrong Shawn

Mm-hmm. And I've got a bit of a cultural retention bias, I'll grant you that. But shouldn't we retain the libraries in the transition to a much better society, where we tackle these pressing issues of climate change and inequality that exist even in our idyllic utopia, Wrongtopia? I think so. But these extremists, they say they want total freedom from the past. Not even to engage the past, but to completely abolish it. It's disturbing.

Wrong Aaron

Maybe we'll just take a quick moment to thank the Wrongtopia Central Library. Of course, that's where we're broadcasting this from. They've provided all the resources for us to learn about this history and present it to you, and broadcast it. They also got me interested in broadcasting in the first place, when I kinda came here and saw others doing it. Like, "Wow, that looks cool, I want to try it." That all happened here at this library for me.

Wrong Shawn

Yeah. And, like, the library is such an incredible social space where people can sort of self-actualize, connect with history, and then it's just, anti-library extremists, you know, I hate to say it, but I'm just not sure their ideas should be retained.

Wrong Aaron

Now that's extreme. They should be retained, but always in the context of a mistake we want to avoid in the future.

Wrong Shawn

No, I'm— they're pushin' us, man. I think we've got to draw the line. If you act this way about ideas, like, we're not gonna retain your ideas. We're gonna stack you up—

Wrong Aaron

Yeah, but that's just giving into them. Then you're becoming what you hate in order to fight what you hate.

Wrong Shawn

(Sniffs) Do you— do you smell something burning...?

Wrong Aaron

Oh yeah, what is that? I do smell something burning... (Alarm goes off) Oh, god!

Wrong Shawn

Oh—

Wrong Aaron

Oh, that's the fire alarm. Okay. (Coughing) That's a lot of smoke. Is this— is the library burning down?

Wrong Shawn

They—

Wrong Aaron

No...

Wrong Shawn

—they set fire to it, man!

Wrong Aaron

No, they couldn't.

Wrong Shawn

I warned you. I was just saying. I was just saying. (Coughs)

Wrong Aaron

But there's so many precious, irreplaceable texts in this building.

Wrong Shawn

(Coughs) We've gotta get out. I want to grab a— one of these priceless texts, but—

Wrong Aaron

No, no, you're priceless, too, you know? Save yourself.

(Alarm continues)

Wrong Shawn

Oh, thanks. You're priceless. Doing this show, it's been an honor, friend—

☒ *Muzak plays*

Narrator

Feed connection lost. Sorry for the inconvenience. The feed should return soon. Feed connection lost.

Sorry for the inconvenience. The feed should return soo— (Selection beeps)

Aaron

I guess that's the episode. It was cut short. I mean, I guess it makes sense why. That was—

Shawn

The library's burning down.

Aaron

Yeah.

Shawn

That is a good episode of *Wrongtopia History*.

Aaron

Yeah. Yeah, it was really good. (Laughter)

Shawn

You're, like, come for— you're like, "I want the history," and then it's like, boom, history's actually happening, like, before your very eyes.

Aaron

Yeah. And, like— and I don't even want to knock the first part. Because just telling the hi— that was really great, too. But then also to see it come alive, it was, like—

Shawn

Yeah, to have it come alive that that?

Aaron

—just compounding.

Shawn

Wow.

Aaron

Yeah.

Shawn

Incredible.

Aaron

You know, I bet this episode of *Wrongtopia History* is gonna go down in Wrongtopia history.

Shawn

Oh, yeah.

Aaron

Like, in the future, they're gonna reference this episode—

Shawn

They could even do it next week.

–[01:30:21]

Shawn

So there's, like, a real mourning that comes from contemplating the burning of the Library of Alexandria. The thought about having, like, a debt of mourning– because of the loss of biodiversity, because of the loss of the Library of Alexandria and countless other libraries through history, because of all these profound, unimaginable, cumulative losses– I'm not advocating that people just suddenly get very sad for a long time to make up for it.

Aaron

(Laughs) Right, to, like, pay it back... (Laughs) The thing I feel when I think about the Library of Alexandria burning, it reminds me of death. Because it's, like, when I think about myself dying in the future, the thing that, like– I wouldn't even say scares me about that, but the feeling of, like, emptiness, or like, the fear of oblivion, or just that sense of gone-ness, disintegration, the existing-no-longer. And when I think about works of literature existing no longer, when I think about unique species existing no longer, it connects to the same sort of internal emotional pathways as, like, contemplating my own mortality.

Shawn

That's interesting, yeah, the connection to the complexity of a full library having some sort of overlap with, like, life and the experience of life. And, like, I think a big part of what's sad about when a person dies is, like, the permanent loss of something. The spark of an individual human. Like, their vibrancy, like, what makes them who they are and the relationships to the people around them, and there's a loss–

Aaron

Yeah, their uniqueness, and their quirks, and...

Shawn

–and all the potentiality that they carried, all the input that they could have into the world and society and other people's lives being ended is very similar to the loss of historical texts. Or the loss of languages. Like, languages that no one speaks anymore. Like, there's a profound sadness there, this, like, palpable death to it, because we're losing ways to understand ourselves. And losing ways to understand ourselves is as bad as the loss of animal life, it's as bad as the loss of individuals, it's all this same sort of thing. It's all the same sort of creeping death. And it'd be a villain who would want to actualize the burning of libraries.

Aaron

Yeah. Yeah, it's– let me think how to word this. It's like ceding something to the inevitable– like, the heat death of the universe, like, the end of all things. It's, like– yeah. And so, like, when I think about the idea of wanting to retain information, wanting to retain the uniqueness of individuals for as long as possible– life extension technologies. When I think about wanting to retain biodiversity and the different kinds of species on the planet, it's like little victories against the inevitable heat death of the universe. It's little stays. Stays of execution.

Shawn

Biodiversity is always gonna fluctuate, and we're always going to sometimes lose texts. But we can do our best to push against those sort of forces. I almost want to call it, like, a type of progress, when you compare a small library to a big and more extensive library that contains more information, especially usable information, about the human condition. The second library, the larger one, the more useful library, the more complete library, that increase in complexity and retention of experience and share experience and communication from the past to the future is so profound. You know, that same sort of information exists in the biosphere, where there's so much detail to analyze, there's so much to understand about the world that we live on, and where we come from.

Aaron

Yeah, no, too, and like, I think about technology, as well, and how that's similar. It's this collective history we have of applied human innovation. And these things like our knowledge and information stores, kind of, it builds and complexifies, and you can see that happening with, first, really crude, rudimentary tools to, like, more formalized tools, mechanization, and, like, information technologies, computers, that kind of stuff. It's, like, building on top of itself and complexifying, and it requires the retention of all the layers below it to sustain this complexity, and this— this beauty, this edifice and thing that you have, requires the retention of everything that came before it. Like, if we were to lose the ability to make engines right now, like, everyone forgot, it would be a real loss. It would be a loss of a way of humans interacting with the world. It would blunt the ways that humans can interact with the world.

Shawn

Another thing we can think of as related to libraries, research libraries, and lending libraries as embodiments of social progress is this sort of concept of expanding to include our conception of our history to reflect a wide base of social movements. Like, as we seek to actualize Library Socialism, that we see Library Socialism as part of the same tradition which has been this sort of, like, struggling of people against hierarchy and oppression, unbearable inhuman conditions imposed on them by other people, and imposed on them by chance and environment, cashing the check that's been written by all these different moments in history, all these different movements and sub-ideologies that were all based around the concept of universal human emancipation, and then creating the context where the time is right to actualize human emancipation according to a well-developed theory of what universal human emancipation would actually look like, so when the transition is happening, we know exactly what we're aiming for and we have experimental evidence to show that it works. That, to me, is connected with this idea of retention. It's the opposite of the loss of the Library of Alexandria. It uses all the same principles that make that so horrible, except inverted.

Aaron

I love that idea of the trajectory there, and of expanding to include things from the past, like keeping elements of all these different ideologies and bringing them together, like, culminating them in the realization of something that includes all of it. And it makes me think about the way this episode came out, and how we talked about our trajectories politically. Like, going through various stages of our life and arriving at this. And the framings and ideas we have now are all related to our past, and the ways we're talking about things now have expanded to include both all of what we were, as well as the new influences— in the similar way we each are these sort of, like, complexifying records of our history that culminate in what we are now.

Shawn

We have a desire to not acknowledge the developmental trajectory of our political opinions. Like, there's this sort of political culture a lot of the time of acting like you came forward with fully-formed ideas. And I definitely get the urge to, like, not share embarrassing things about your political trajectory, and also the urge to be embarrassed by a disproportionate amount of things. I feel like I haven't really shared anything super embarrassing about my past this episode. But part of what makes me who I am today— and this would be embarrassing if it wasn't so long ago— was, like, a really, really pointed 13-year-old atheism. Completely web-enabled, and then brought into real life, brought to church.

Aaron

I was a, like, super pointed atheist in my early twenties. So if you're 13, I'd— you know, it's less than embarrassing than me.

Shawn

Yeah. If it was more recent I probably wouldn't have evoked it so easily. But in any case, this— this history is what makes us who we are in the present. We can acknowledge that we are developing, we have the capacity to be wrong, and so on. Obviously, it's not something you want to start every conversation with. "Hey, just so you know, I'm developing—"

Aaron

"Developing, and have the capacity to be wrong." (Laughter)

Shawn

"These aren't fully finished ideas. I haven't known them since I was born. I learned them from other people. I might misremember something here and there. I'm totally willing to receive negative feedback if it's done in a friendly way." No, you don't want to start every conversation like that. But how do you embody that, and also sort of acknowledge and pull on your own history? Cash the metaphorical checks of the promise of liberation within your own life? How do you do that?

Aaron

Oh, yeah, that's a big topic. That's, like, honestly, but—

Shawn

Absolutely. Yeah. And this check metaphor, I don't know, I think Walter Benjamin said it, but this financial metaphor— it's, like, investing— "invest in your future."

Aaron

"Cashing the check"— yeah, no, like, uhh— maybe bearing the fruit? Eating the fruit?

Shawn

Bear the fruit? Yeah. Harvest the fruit? "We need to harvest the fruit of the patch that our ancestors have been tending for generations."

Aaron

Yeah, that's such a better metaphor, too. Because checks, you cash 'em once, and then you cashed it, that's it. But fruit is perennial. Like, it keeps coming. I guess checks could be perennial, too, if they kept coming.

Shawn

Yeah, I don't know, these super pernicious and ever-present hyper-financial metaphors are probably part of the ideological fishbowl of neoliberal capitalism that we're swimming in, and if we can replace them with ecological, or farming, or anthropological metaphors, it's probably preferable.

Aaron

Yeah, especially now. It's pointed, in the process of the cha— I think ultimately we could expand to include all kinds of metaphors. But rather than being all-pervasive financial metaphors which carry a specific connotation of, you're invoking lack, and scarcity, and, like, all the things that we see as pervasive in our current society wouldn't be pervasive, so they'd be more useful as metaphors in that limited context in the future.

Shawn

So, friends, it's time to harvest the fruit that was planted during the French Revolution, to harvest the fruit that was planted in Haiti, in Cuba, in Soviet Russia; the fruit that was planted in the Winnipeg general strike; the fruit that was planted in every strike, in every workplace organizing, in every tenants union; the fruit that's planted when people speak up against cruelty and abuse, the fruit that was planted by our ancestors that struggled and toiled to bring us the world that we have today, we should actualize and— and harvest that fruit they worked so hard to bring us. We have a responsibility to actualize the planted fruit.

Aaron

Actualize the planted fruit. Yeah, that's great. That's a catchy slogan.

Shawn

Yeah, I think it's a pretty catchy slogan.

☒ *Farm music fades in*

Aaron

Do you want to— I'll put on some nice boots, get a hat— it's sunny out there, I don't want to get heat stroke— and we'll go harvest fruit, actualize some fruit? (Laughs)

Shawn

Yeah, let's actualize some fruit. This has been the *SRSLY WRONG Podcast*. Great to talk to you. Great to— hope to hear from you soon.

Aaron

Yeah. We're gonna be picking fruit here for the next little bit. But we will be back with another episode in about a week, a little more.

Shawn

Big thanks to everyone who is donating to us on PayPal and Patreon. It keeps the show going. We've got a very special Patrons-only series on revolution. The reason the show exists is the generosity of people who chip in. It's massively appreciated, can't say that enough, and thank you everyone who's already doing that.

Aaron

We just had Breht, the host of *Revolutionary Left Radio* and *Red Menace* on there to give us the lowdown on Marxism-Leninism, and we really drill into some of those strategies, and we talk a lot about the ethics of revolutionary violence. Check it out, it's a great episode.

Shawn

As always, you can use the contact form on our website to give us feedback, and please leave reviews across the internet, and tell people we exist, and tweet about us and stuff. It's super helpful, and we love you, and—

Aaron

Have a great week.

Shawn

—I would check you out from the library.

☒ *Closing Theme Music by Hunt Hunt Hunt Camp*

—[01:42:06]

Narrator

Next time on *SRSLY WRONG*, what became of Wrongtopia's Library Socialism and the threat of the TechnoNomad anti-library extremists?

(News bulletin)

Reporter 1

This just in: Wrongtopia News Report. The President of Wrongtopia has given in to the extremist ephemeralist TechnoNomad demands in exchange for their agreeing to no longer continue their campaign of blowing up and burning down central libraries across Wrongtopia. They have instituted a legal 50-year churn, where any literature or text or information that are not actively engaged with and republished in the span of 50 years will be destroyed.

Reporter 2

The implementation of the 50-year churn is just one of a multi-tier package of concessions to the anti-library extremists. As part of the settlement, the President also appeared on television to say that libraries are bad, and that they should all be taken down, and said that the arc of history bends towards libraries ceasing to exist. Analysts are saying this was a brilliant 3-D chess move taking the wind out of his opponents sails by reinforcing their key messages but taking ownership of them. We actually, in the studio, have an expert who is saying that this is perfect 3-D chess, and the 50-year, in practice, is not actually going to be a 50-year churn, and the extremists have been played. Dr. Davis, can you expand on this?

Dr. Davis, Expert

Well, first of all, I just want to reiterate how great of a strategy it always is to just kind of take on your opponents' goals and messaging and claim them as your own. It's, like, you totally win that way. But more than that, the people who are worrying about works older than 50 years actually being destroyed I think can take heart in the fact that the massive archivist community on Wrongtopia is now organizing the most expansive collaborative effort to continuously engage with all texts that has ever been conceived of or attempted to be implemented.

Now, as you know, there are billions, approaching trillions, of texts in the Wrongtopia digital expansive library. And to keep all of these texts from being churned every 50 years they will need to be

engaged with, republished with new introductions, new analysis, at least once every 50 years. This is a massive undertaking. It's going to take the work of millions, if not billions of scholars dedicating their life. Let's not forget, after they've been engaged with and republished with new introductions and stuff, that technically counts in some senses as a new version of the text that then needs to be engaged with again, and it cumulatively builds like that.

It's a massive and ever-expanding undertaking that I think the people of Wrongtopia are up to. And I think ultimately the implementation of this technical 50-year churn is going to introduce a vibrancy to Wrongtopia's intellectual life that honestly was lacking when books were allowed to just sit on a shelf and exist, but not come alive.

(News stinger)

Reporter 2

So there you have it. What seemed like a bitter concession to one's enemies was actually an extreme 4-D chess move that defeats the enemies by fulfilling their goals. Oh— we've just gotten word that the President of Wrongtopia has given his political enemies a \$10 million grant to pursue their political objectives. Another part of the puzzle falls into place. But you don't have to worry about the anti-library extremists anymore, they've been pacified with the concession.

Aaron

That's the end of the news. (Laughs) News over.

Shawn

Yeah. Roll the news credits. You know, the people on the news don't get enough credit. Being behind the scenes on the news.

Aaron

Oh, yeah. People reading the news— depends on who they are. Local affiliates? Meh. National? Oh yeah. Love those news-givers. (Laughs)

We'd like to continue providing show transcripts on an ongoing basis. Donate to the Transcription fund to help us hire skilled transcribers, or consider signing up for the SRSLY WRONG Patreon.

Join the Library Socialism forum here:

Usufruct Commons (librarysocialism.com)

The Library of Unconventional Lives

Library Socialism & Usufruct - SRSLY WRONG Episode 189

[<youtube.com/watch?v=bFDCa5mq5Jo>](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFDCa5mq5Jo)

thelul.org